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Acts 13:44-52

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Alright, turn to Acts 13 and we are going to dig in and study God’s Word. I have a couple of thoughts by way of announcements before we dig in. The first one is that the Bond family has expanded and the Glenns are with us. It’s good to have yall, welcome. Make sure you hug their necks. Many people saw the picture of Aaron squalling and slobbering and Barbara squalling and slobbering. I thought how I dread when that happens. So, anyway, we are happy for them and excited for what God is doing in their family. Also, young people, school starts back tomorrow. Congratulations. Your sanctification will, once again, resume. The holidays are over. But I was thinking about the New Year and I don’t remember where I heard this, but one guy asked another guy what his New Year resolutions were and he said, “To do all the things I said I was going to do in 2018 because I didn’t do any of them.” Hopefully, it will be a good New Year for us as a church. We saw a lot of cool things happen in 2017 and saw more good things happen in 2018 and the Lord seems to have over the last couple of years had us on this trajectory so I’m excited about that.

Also, I wanted to tell you personally thank you. We’ve had a whirlwind of ministry over the last couple of weeks. Many of us have been involved in ministry fulltime for about the last eleven days, I think, on the student ministry side with conferences and winter events. I had a lot of people text me saying you were praying for me last Monday night, which was New Year’s Eve. Glendon, do we have a picture? I wanted to show y’all. Just so you know, when we are on the road preaching these are the doors the Lord is opening to us. There are 7000 teenagers right there that got to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is unbelievable—and 161 of them made professions of faith. 161 young people who went from death to life and there were about 600 more who made some sort of a commitment. In that service, when we were done, there was a steady flow of students coming down to say, “I want to go on mission,” and we gave them resources. We put a book that we have written, a 90-day devotional, in their hands along with some really simple helps for sharing your faith in the school and in the community. But I want you to know that when you are praying for us when we are on the road, and we are on the road a lot in the winter, that God is doing great things and opening a lot of doors for us. I just wanted you to have a visual and then to tell you thank you. I got a ton of texts from people saying, “I’m praying for you,” when we were able to preach at 10 o’clock on Monday night. So, thanks for that.

Acts 13:44. We are going to pick up where we left off last week. Before we dive into it, in verse 44 it says, “The next Sabbath.” So we are jumping forward a week. A lot of times in the Bible you will have these time lapses. So, we are jumping forward a week. If you remember, last week what we heard was Paul’s first sermon. We walked through Paul’s first sermon, and all the components of that sermon, and what the Lord was doing in that city as Paul was preaching. I was trying to think this week about my first sermon. I remember sharing my testimony with a group of people because I was asked to do that and put on the spot. It was really scary and I was probably about twenty-five or twenty-six years old. But the first time I preached, where I actually stood, opened the Scripture, and preached, I was just shy of thirty. I think I was twenty-nine years old. I remember that what I did was that I thought, “I don’t know how to preach. I’m not a preacher and I haven’t been to seminary school, or training, or anything like that, so I know what I’ll do, I’ll come up with some really cool stories and some life lessons and then find some Scripture to put on that.” That’s kind of like building a house by building the roof and then trying to jack walls up under the roof. Then, there’s no foundation so you put a foundation down. So, I preached exactly backwards and exactly unbiblical, but you know what? The Lord was really gracious and I think He just plugged people’s ears when they needed to be plugged and just let some truth come out. I think the only thing people heard in that sermon was the part when I was actually reading the Bible, and I think the rest of the time the Holy Spirit just plugged people’s ears because it was bad. In one way, I was thinking that I’m thankful that I don’t have a recording of that but on the other hand I wish I did. I’d like to go back and watch it.

So, before we drill into the text tonight, I wanted to give you five thoughts on biblical preaching. This comes from a book that Rob has just lectured through with our Institute students. This is a book by Brian Chapell on faithful preaching. So, when you are not at Red Oak, or you are at another church, or you’re in another town, or you are watching a TV preacher—boy, you get into some murky waters with those TV preachers. Be careful what you watch on TV that is considered ‘church,’ okay? So, here are five thoughts on biblical preaching by Brian Chapell.

The first one is, it’s always critical that we understand the importance and emphasis of expositional preaching. You will hear this talked about a lot here. All that means is that when a preacher is standing in front of you and he’s going to give you a sermon, the main point of the scriptural text should be the main point of the sermon. Prophets in the old days, what they did is they stood before the people and they said, “Thus saith the Lord” and once they said that everything else was in quotes. “This isn’t my authority, this isn’t my message, this is what God said.” A false prophet would be identified by the fact that he would say something that wouldn’t actually be from the Lord and he might die, or get eaten by lions, or lit on fire, or the Lord would consume him in His wrath. You don’t put words in God’s mouth. So, by having the Scripture, what we have is God’s revelation to us. So, the job of the preacher is to just take the text and say what it’s saying and no more. Now, there’s going to be some personalities. My favorite book on preaching of all time is by Martyn Lloyd-Jones and it’s called *Preaching and Preachers*. One of the things he talks about is that a pastor’s or preacher’s personality is going to come through. Just like when you read Paul, his personality comes through. When you read Moses his personality comes through. Any book of the Bible you read, there’s an author whose personality comes through but it’s the Holy Spirit writing that. Preaching is going to be like that but ultimately any preacher, in any venue, on any stage, behind any pulpit needs to say simply what the Scripture is saying and no more. Then, giving practical applications for life, which rolls us into the next thought on biblical preaching, which is this.

Second, this is what Chapell calls the fallen condition focus. If you watch a movie or if you watch television programs, every episode of that television program there is going to be a hero or a protagonist. There is going to be an anti-hero or an antagonist. There is going to be a good guy and a bad guy as the kids call them. There is going to be a moments when it seems like the chips are down and you feel desperate as a viewer, like, “Oh, my goodness. What’s going to happen right here?” This even happens sometimes in comedic films, where there’s a moment where we need a rescue or a rescuer. We need to see some hope and then hope arrives or the hero arrives. In the end, hopefully, with the climactic buildup of the movie, the good guys win in the end. In Scripture, the idea of a fallen condition focus means that every passage that we are going to preach is going to be revealing some particular aspect of human need due to the Fall. This is why when you come to Red Oak you will hear words like addiction, pornography, adultery, fornication, and subjects that other churches may or may not touch. I don’t know because I don’t go to another church on Sunday. But we as a church are committed to addressing these subjects because the nature of man is that we are fallen. Humanity is fallen. The depraved state of the world is evident when you just look around. I’ve taken to not reading the news. I’ve literally, for the last three months, quit reading the news. I’ve quit. You’re like, “You can’t put your head in the sand.” I’m going to do that for a little while. I’d rather breathe dirt right now than read the news. I’m going to stick my head in the sand. Haven’t you ever felt that the depravity and fallenness of humanity is coming at you so fast that you are like, “I just need a break from this?” Because you have your own junk and I have my own junk in my life. You have your own marital strife. You have your own addiction or you have your own money issues. You have your own job issues and you have your own drama. In youth, on Wednesday nights, right now, we just started this past Wednesday night doing a series on drama. We started a series on drama and we are looking at stories where you see the drama of it all. That’s life. So, in the fallen condition focus we see in a text or passage of Scripture some evidence of the brokenness and fallenness of man. This could be the effect of temptation, trial, evil, difficult circumstances, sin, sickness, tragedy, and so on. In my quiet time this morning I read through the story of Judah and Tamar and most of the story of Joseph’s life. It was loaded with tragedy and loaded with circumstance. So, biblical preaching is going to show us in the text this desperate moment. In tonight’s text, what we are going to see as a desperate moment is rejection of the Gospel. There is no more desperate thing that can happen. There is no sadder, darker moment than when people reject the Gospel. We saw that in Paul’s sermon last week that Zach walked us through. You see the death of Jesus; the fallenness of man laid on the shoulders of Christ.

Number three is important because identifying the fallen condition focus will help us see how the passage is revealing God’s grace in the hope of the Gospel. This is what Chapell calls the redemptive focus. So, because things are so bad now we are in a position to receive hope, Gospel, glory, and redemption. What is redemption? It’s rescue from sin and then value that comes out of it. So, I get value out of what looks like brokenness. Have you ever had that happen in your life? Have you ever had something in your life where you look back and you go, “That was a bad situation and somehow God brought value out of it”? So, in Paul’s sermon last week we saw that. We should see that in every text and we should see that in every sermon—that there is value in the fallenness and the brokenness of the world. It’s really important that we understand that.

Number four. Seeing this will bring into focus the big idea of the passage that will then shape the sermon. So, now we are starting to shape the sermon. This is the big idea. There will always be more in a passage than we can preach on in one sermon so we look for the main point and we emphasize it. This is where you could preach one verse ten weeks in a row or you could preach one sermon and cover an entire book of the Bible. It’s what is the main point of any given portion of Scripture that’s going to be the main point of the sermon. There are layers and depths. This is why you will sometimes hear teachers say, “Oh, my goodness. There’s so much here.” A lot of times one of the pastors will get up here and say, “Man, I’ve been given this text tonight and there’s so much here I don’t know how we are going to do it all in one message.” Why? The complexity, the depth, and the layering—it’s really hard sometimes to just bring out one point. That’s why preachers get a bad rap for being longwinded and wanting more airtime. When you start digging and mining out, “Oh the depth of the riches and knowledge of God—it’s unsearchable.” So, you’ve got a main point that’s the big idea. A book is going to have a main point and then a passage is going to have a main point that’s going to tie into the main point of the book, so we are bringing the main point.

Number five. The sermon should show enough of your exegesis, which is your work of studying in the Scripture to bring out that main point, faithfully studying thus saith the Lord, so that the audience can see from the text where your points are coming from. So, you’re not going, “How did that guy get that point?” and you’re not going home asking, “Now, what was he talking about? I didn’t see that in the Scripture.” It should be evident from the Scripture when you go home, “That was cool. The text sort of came to life for me tonight.” Make sense? That should happen. But we shouldn’t drill so deep, like I shouldn’t show you so much of my work tonight, that you get bogged down and bored with it. If I did fifteen hours of sermon prep and we are going to put that into thirty-five minutes, we need to be careful that we don’t go too deep with that.

So, those are thoughts on biblical preaching. We will make this available to you on Facebook, or we can email it to you, or you can have a hard copy of these notes. I can send them to you or whatever. So, in looking at the sermon that we walked through last week we are going to see these applications of biblical preaching and you are going to see them in every sermon from here on out. You are going to see Paul preach that way all the way through.

Let’s keep going. We get to verse 44,

The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

So, the people are like, “You should come back and preach some more. That was a really good sermon.” So, Paul comes back and everybody comes back to hear him.

A lot of times you will hear about people going into third world countries or foreign places and there will be big crowds that will come out to hear the Gospel because they don’t have anything else to do. They don’t have phones or TV. In North America, if we said, “Hey, we are going to go over to Andrews High School and hold a Gospel crusade, and the next week we’re going to Murphy High School and do it, and then we are going to go to Robbinsville High School,” and we were going to go around the area and do crusades, we would have y’all and a few of your friends there, maybe, and some of y’all wouldn’t come. I already know that. We live a busy life. But when you are in a world where there is not a lot of extracurricular activity a lot of people start showing up because there’s a new show in town. This guy is preaching with authority and people are repenting and turning to Jesus for salvation. So, some people come who are not true seekers; they are just spectators. Do you follow that? Everybody starts coming out to hear what’s going on. It think it was Billy Graham, who was the greatest crusade preacher in modern history, who said that about eighty percent of the people who come, and hear, and make decisions, go unchanged.

They were spectators who were just there to check it out. So, you have a big crowd of people who show up to hear Paul. Now, they’ve asked him to come back and there’s a huge turnout that next week. By the way, back in verse 44, where we see that everybody turns out, we need to be careful that we never become a numbers church. We don’t even head count here. I did head count one night. Somebody asked me, “How many people come to your church?” and I said, “All of them. Every one of them comes. This Sunday, every one of those people that’s there—they are there. It’s more than ten, I know that, and less than a thousand.” If we were really good Baptists we would just round that up to a thousand. So, I got up in the little booth up there and I counted and it was about 175 people. I thought, “That’s a lot of people, man,” because I counted the kids, too. Someone asked me, “Do you count the kids?” I was like, “If they are humans and they are at church they’re counted.” It’s not like we only count people as human after age eighteen. No, not ever. So, there were about 175 people here. We are not a big church. You know what? We are probably never going to be a big church. We don’t live in a big area. Maybe if we lived in a big area we would never become a big church but hopefully there will be healthy growth. The Gospel is proclaimed and people come to faith in Jesus. The centrality of preaching is critical, the outworking of evangelism—if everybody in here would get serious about sharing the Gospel a lot of your real life problems would go away. We get so eaten up in our own stuff. It’s “Me, me, me, my, my, my, my problem, my issue, my this, my that…” Just start looking outwardly and saying, “I’ve got to give people Jesus.” That will burn up so much of your energy you won’t have time for a lot of the things that might get you in trouble on a weekly basis.

So, the church is growing but it’s healthy growth. I don’t know how many times I’ve heard it said, “God must be moving in this church because it’s growing exponentially.” Listen, there are churches in this country that are at 4000 and rocking but that are preaching heresy every week. At the same time, I don’t ever want to throw off on a big church and have a small church complex where I’m like, “They’re a big church—they must be speaking heresy.” Do you know what I’m saying? There are good, solid churches that are booming at 2000, 3000, next year 4000, and the next year they hit 5000. They are just rolling and they are preaching the Gospel faithfully every single week. So, it’s not about numbers. God is doing a work in the local church and we are seeing it happen right here through the ministry of Paul.

Now, keep going. Verse 45,

But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.

So, you have some jealousy. The religious Jews are jealous and start saying negative things. That’s what jealous people do. You have to get to where you have selective hearing when you are around people who are nags, who are jealous, who are gossips, and slanderers, who speak negatively. First off, don’t be that person. Second off, don’t listen to that person. Don’t let another human by their words control your joy. What do these dudes do? They keep preaching. They are dealing with conflict but their focus is on the mission that God has called them to.

Going back three weeks ago, the mission was laid out for them and they were sent out to go into these cities, preach the Gospel, make disciples, establish the Church, train elders, and then go to the next city and do it again. Along the way they were promised that there would be conflict. And I will promise you, Red Oak, along the way in your life, in your marriage, in your work, in your church, and in your community interaction there is going to be conflict. Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. We need to be ready. There should never be a moment where you are like, “Oh, my goodness. Where is this conflict coming from? I thought when I started following Jesus that it would be cool and easy, and I would get rich, and never get sick.” Just read the Bible and it will blow all of those lies right out of your mind. What God is doing through the Gospel in a Christian’s life is preparing to make us more like Jesus so that when we go trial, when we go through tribulation, when we go through financial struggle, we don’t manage and handle that the same way the world does. In fact, Scripture says that we don’t do it as those who have no hope. Peter writes that other people should look at the way you go through it and go, “There is some kind of hope in them. I don’t know what it is but I’m very curious.” They should be interested in the way that you deal with conflict.

So, there’s conflict and it rears its head in the form of jealousy. In verses 46-50, then, Paul and Barnabas speak out boldly. They say,

It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves…

What’s going on? They are jealous. They are jealous and they are speaking against what Paul and Barnabas are saying.

I remember Adam Bradley telling me one time when he had gone into a church to preach locally and a dude stood up in church and contradicted him. Y’all know I am not holy enough to deal with that. Adam is a man of patience. If you know Adam, he is a soft-spoken man of patience and firm resolve, unwavering in his commitment, and more mature than me. I’d have practiced my WWE move from right here. That takes a lot of grace. It doesn’t even phase these guys, “Hey, hey, what you’re saying is wrong! Here’s why…boom, boom, boom, boom.” These men started feeding this crowd something that contradicted the message of the Gospel.

Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly. Go do a word study on boldly. These guys didn’t back down.

It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

So, he says to these Jewish people, “Hey, guys, you had your turn. Be quiet now. The Gentiles get to receive the Gospel. This is part of God’s fulfillment of the big picture and the big plan.”

For so the Lord has commanded us, saying,

“I have made you a light for the Gentiles,

that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

Young people, Gentiles are all of humanity that are non-Israelites, non-Jews. You have Jewish people and then non-Jews. So, Gentiles are non-Jews.

Verse 48,

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. 51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

So, in verses 45-50, amid conflict and jealousy there are two different responses. So, the men stand and preach the Gospel, which is what they’ve been sent there to do and what their ministry is all about. And you get two responses when you preach the Gospel—submission and receptivity where I receive it and submit to it, or a rejection of it. That rejection can come in a bunch of different packages. There can be a false sense of receiving it, which happens sometimes, where people are like, “Yeah, this seems like a good idea in the moment,” but there is not a submission of the will. There’s maybe a momentary submission of the emotion. You see this happen a lot in Gospel ministry, where someone will submit emotionally to the moment but they don’t surrender their will to the Lord. For some of you that might be your testimony, where for years you walked sort of lost but thinking you were saved or trying to determine whether you were really a Christian. “I grew up in church and I’m a good moral person but it doesn’t feel deeply satisfying.” Maybe there was an emotional surrender. This is the idea of the Jewish carpenter who healed the blind, and cleansed the leper, and spoke with words of fire but words of grace, and loved the child –and everything about Jesus seems so powerful but there is not a surrender of your will to God. The Gospel demands surrender of its adherents. If you are going to go from death to life, go from darkness to light, go from blindness to sight, then there has to be a submission and a surrender of your will.

So, some of these people—they do that. And that doesn’t always look the same. Some people, when they come to faith in Jesus, they are squalling, and snotting, and crying, and they are just an absolute wreck. Then, there are people who when they receive the Gospel they, and I think this is my story, over a period of time the Lord began to draw me, shape the way I saw the world, shape the way I saw the Gospel, and then there was a point where I realized, “I’m standing in the light. How did I get here?” It was a process God brought me through but in that process there are some things that are going to happen, namely, you’re going to confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, surrender your will to God, and the Bible says, “All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. And as many as received Him to them He gave the power to be called the sons of God.” And here’s the thing, having a Christian mama will not do that for you any more than I am a dude and I had a mama and I can’t say, “I’m a girl because my mom is a girl.” What? That doesn’t even make sense. “But I have a mama and she’s a girl.” What are you talking about? It’s the same thing as when somebody says, “My mama was a Christian so I’ve been a Christian.” That doesn’t have anything to do with you being a Christian. It’s not like the Muslim faith or the Hindu faith where you are born into it and it’s thrust upon you and you come up in it. There is a necessary moment in every human’s life where they have to hear the Gospel and come to terms with, “Am I going to submit to this or am I going to reject it?” There is no in between. There is no middle ground with the Gospel.

So, some of these people received it and some rejected it. I’m sure some of them were emotionally overcome, some of them fell out in tears, and weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and probably some of them were like, “You know what? I’m going to be on that guy’s team. I accept it.” You accept what? “I accept everything he said. About the sermon we heard last week, that Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy, and He died, and He was buried, and He resurrected. He’s God in the flesh. I accept it.” That’s it? “That’s it. What do I need to do next?” Get baptized. “Okay, let’s do it.” For some people it’s matter of fact and let’s roll but for other people they cry for the next six years. Every time you talk to them they are slobbering, weeping, and bawling. It doesn’t affect everybody the exact same way in their outward, emotional reflection, but a submission of the will is necessary and some of these people did that. They called on the name of the Lord and they were saved. Others did not and many rejected it. They rejected it. That’s always going to be the two responses that you get.

Now, I want to look at verse 48. This is a controversial verse and I don’t know why. I don’t know why. It says,

…as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

Those who were appointed to salvation were saved. This is the doctrine of election and the doctrine of election teaches and supposes, from Scripture, that God, before the foundations of the world, was choosing to save people who were not yet born. But He was not doing it in response to His foreknowledge of how they were to determine to receive Him or not. So, some people will say, “Yeah, before the foundation of the world God chose me but it was because He knew I was going to accept or reject Him.” The Bible never says that and the words never mean that in Scripture. There is never a place in Scripture where it is like God is responding to my sovereign plan and purpose for my life. God is always acting in accordance with His purpose, and will, and foreknowledge, and His sovereignty; sovereignty meaning that He has the power to do whatever He pleases and whatever He does is right. Whatever He thinks is right. Whatever He says is right. However He acts it’s just.

I want to give you a couple of passages of Scripture to kind of help you process this. The first one is Ephesians 1. If this is one of those doctrines that is hard for you to wrap your brain around and it’s like, “This sounds like Calvinism,” this is not Calvinism, it’s the Bible. John Calvin was born around 1500 years after Jesus. He didn’t write anything in this Book. We are not going to label ourselves with men’s names. We’re just not going to do that. John Calvin was a paedo-Baptist and we don’t baptize our babies here. There you go. We don’t agree. Alright? Ephesians 1.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ.

Go to verse 11.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.

Y’all, don’t wrack your brains trying to figure this out. Just submit to the authority of Scripture and believe what the Bible says. We don’t have to debate and argue it. It’s not complicated to just receive what God is saying in Scripture. As many people, that day, as God had appointed unto eternal life by His sovereign, electing power—He chose to save some folks that day. He did it and we don’t question it. He saved you and you weren’t worth saving and He saved me and I was a piece of garbage. Filthy rags, that’s what my righteousness was. The Bible says in Romans 3:1o that everybody is born without goodness and without righteousness. No one is born righteous and no one is born good. We were born locked up under sin and enslaved to the dominion and darkness of sin. And the Bible tells us in the next chapter of Ephesians, “but God” reaches into our deadness and brings us to life. The Scripture teaches we were dead in sin and made alive together with Christ. We were blinded by sin and given sight and able to walk in newness of life. That’s what the Bible teaches. Praise Jesus for that. And if we want to question that, it’s addressed in Romans 9—the questioning of that doctrine or that teaching. Beginning in verse 14 we will read through verse 24. Romans 9:14,

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part?

That He chose to save some folks that day? Was that unjust?

By no means! 15 For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” 16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” 18 So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

19 You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” 20 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” 21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? 22 What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— 24 even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

What’s He saying? What does this say? It’s saying to trust God with your salvation. He saved you so don’t question that. He didn’t ask your permission to save you. He didn’t need a court order to resuscitate your spiritually dead life. He did it according to His sovereignty. And it is a much safer place to lean into the sovereignty of God than to lean into the power and the will of man. Either you got yourself saved by pulling yourself up by your spiritual bootstraps and waddling yourself up to God and saying, “I think I’ll be saved now,” or He took your lifeless, spiritually dead self and raised you just as He called Lazarus out of the grave after his corpse was rotting behind a stone for four days. That’s how you got saved. So, as many that day as were appointed got saved, and somewhere about 1992 I got appointed and I’m real thankful about that.

So, we keep going. Verse 51. In the end, it says, in an act that Jesus had instituted, that the men leave the city and shake the dust off of their sandals. Jesus had told them to do that. They shake the dust off their sandals, leave the city, and move on to the next place. The Spirit of God leads them to the next place, which is Iconium. They move joyfully, knowing that the presence and power of the Holy Spirit goes ahead of them and accompanies them.

Right now, at this point, we are getting ready to land it, okay? We are almost done here. Here’s the hope that we have as a church when we proclaim the Gospel and we trust that God is doing the work of saving people. So, you know that you can bring your friends and family to Red Oak and they are going to hear the Gospel. You know you can go into work or the next holiday—a lot of you are just wrung out right now because you spent the holidays with crazy people. You are like, “Thank you, God, that is over and that it’s a new year and a new day.” Whoo! I heard some stuff. We’ve got cousins by the dozens and me and Zach heard some stuff over the holidays. But we are to go on mission. We have been given the Gospel that saves that is authored by a God who saves.

Think about this for a minute. We serve the King of Kings who doesn’t need anyone’s permission or approval to do anything He does. He doesn’t need an executive order. He doesn’t need a majority vote. Anything He does is right, and good, and just, and true. When it comes to us, as Christians, and it comes to the fallenness of the world, and the problem of evil, and where is God?—People ask the question, “Where is God when the world is so broken, and fallen, and everything is so screwed up? If God is so good, why doesn’t He stop it? If God is so powerful why doesn’t He stop it? How can He be both good and powerful?” The reality of the Gospel is that God entered into that brokenness, was untainted and unstained by it, so that He might redeem and ransom slaves from that brokenness, and bring them out of it, and make a kingdom of priests that would be a nation of His own people who will reign with Him eternally. That’s a pretty good deal. That’s what He’s doing. Where is God in the fallenness of the world? Right all up in the middle of it. That’s where He’s at. And one day He’s going to make all things new. Revelation 21:1-5 says that there is going to be a day and a point where He’s going to wipe away tears and make everything new. So, we get to lean on the sovereignty of God joyfully and thankfully, not dreadfully or begrudgingly. That’s our hope, man. There is not a moment in history where God is wringing His hands and pacing back and forth, and thinking, “What am I going to do with that wayward son? What am I going to do with that person who keeps falling back into their old sin and their old ways? I thought I saved him; apparently I didn’t.” God knows He saved him. God knows He is sanctifying him. God has a plan and one day we are all going to look back with perfect knowledge and go, “Oh, that’s what He was doing.”

This week, I got a text from my sister-in-law and she said, “Please pray. Please pray. Please pray.” She’s a labor and delivery nurse at Mission Hospital in Asheville. They live in Clyde but she commutes to Asheville. She’s a labor and delivery nurse and she said, “Please pray. There’s a mama we’ve been working with here who is fifteen years old. She is so close and it is the midnight hour for a legal abortion and she’s headed to the abortion clinic right now. I’ve pleaded with her that me and your brother will adopt this baby so please bring this child into the world.” We started praying and praying hard. I started pacing and walking. I just went for a walk and started praying. This was on Friday. I got a text two hours later and she said, “It’s too late. My heart is broken. The child is dead. Just pray.” All I could think of is, and I texted something like this back to my sister-in-law, “God is making all things new.” The Bible tells us that. That child is beholding the glorious face of Christ in unveiled glory. I don’t understand the depravity of a society that will kill its own babies but I know that baby—my theology—not my emotions, not my sentiment, not my feelings—my theology tells me that baby is in the presence of God beholding, with unveiled face, His glory. That kid is alright. Let’s pray for the salvation of that mother when she begins at age 17, or 18, or 20, or 25, or 30, to cope with the consequences of her actions. Let’s pray that somebody is there to rescue her with the proclamation of the Gospel. Because God has a plan for the brokenness of humanity. It’s Jesus. That’s the plan. And I would rather lean on the hope of a sovereign God than to cross my fingers and just hope that it all works out in the end. Because the people who question the fallenness of humanity and say, “Where’s God? If He’s so good…?” What’s their answer for the fallenness of humanity? The Darwinian evolutionist has to come up with answers, too. The new atheist has to answer the same questions they are demanding from us. The reality is in front of all of us—the world is fallen. But we serve a sovereign God who is redeeming, and saving, and healing, and one day all things will be made new and evil will be put to death forever, and we will reign with Christ. That’s the hope we have. That’s why we proclaim the Gospel. That’s why we can sleep at night. That’s why we keep fighting. And when you fall down this week and your sin kicks you in the gut and you end up on your face, just chew that mud as long as you can, spit it out, get up, crawl, run, sprint, fight, box, bite, chew, grab the enemy by the ear and gnaw it off if you have to, but keep fighting and moving forward. As long as there is breath in your physical lungs there is breath in your spiritual lungs. There is a fight to be had and there is a life to be lived because we serve a sovereign God who didn’t save us to sit on the bench and practice consumerism Christianity. The sovereignty of God doesn’t give us an excuse to do nothing. It empowers us to do everything He has called us to do. That’s why we serve God. That’s why we serve Jesus—because He’s called us to it, and He’s commissioned us to it, and we are on mission. We are on mission.

So, the hope of the text is the hope of humanity, that folks are going to get saved more, and more, and more, and more. As the world spirals downward the Gospel is going to bring more and more out of the downward spiral and into the kingdom of His beloved Son and the domain of light and life. That’s the hope of the Gospel. I hope this week that will bring you hope. I hope you will go chew on these Scripture verses and wrestle with that. Wrestle with your theology if you have to. Go to Romans 9 and Ephesians 1 and 2 and wrestle with your theology, and come out of it scathed but gloriously scathed, and beat up, and battered, and bruised, knowing and recognizing that God is the Author of my faith and therefore He is the Finisher and the Perfecter of my faith. He who has begun a good work in me, He began that good work in me and He will be faithful to complete it. So, let’s live like that this week and let’s trust the Lord.

If you are here tonight and you don’t know Jesus, when we sing these last couple of songs you just roll on down here and me or Rob will talk to you. Anybody in this church will talk to you and help you understand the Gospel. The bottom line is just call on the name of the Lord and be saved. That’s it. We will pray with you and help you start those first steps of the Christian faith. So, let’s pray together and we will sing in reflection and worship.

Lord, I thank you for this Gospel that is powerful and this Word of God that is sharper than a double-edged sword. God, I thank you that in Antioch, and in Iconium, and in Lystra, and in Derbe that you appointed many to eternal life. And I thank you that in Robbinsville, and Andrews, and Murphy, and Bryson City, and the surrounding area, Hayesville, that you have appointed many to eternal life and it is because you are the Author of our faith that you are going to perfect it. For those this week who are struggling and who have come in here and are not doing well in their own walk, I pray that you would invigorate them with the truth of this theological doctrine. I pray for those who need an example, this is a heavy, heavy text tonight. This weighs a lot on our shoulders but it is the good kind of heavy. It’s the kind that when we are done bearing the burden of hearing this that we get to sit down and rest in the truth of it. I pray that we would lean hard into your sovereignty and trust you, not mistrust you, and have confidence in you, not reject you. I pray that if there is anybody here tonight who doesn’t know you that they would come to faith in Jesus tonight. I pray that if there is anybody here who is struggling to live the victorious Christian life, meaning that they are struggling to live in battle and victory over sin, that you would fire them up tonight and give them what they need. I pray that we would go out of here understanding that you are the author of salvation and that the centrality of Gospel preaching is what is critical to the legacy and life of this church. We give you thanks for letting us be in your house with your people tonight. In Jesus’ name, Amen.