

## **Acts (Part 11) – Governors, Kings, Caesar, and Glory**

Matt Chandler – May 4, 2014

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[Video]

In Jerusalem, AD 30, Jesus died on the cross, resurrected on the third day, and then ascended into heaven. Fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, the Holy Spirit fell on the apostles, giving them power, purpose, and a plan. Out of joy, the church was born. Empowered by the Spirit, Peter gave his first sermon, and 3,000 hearts were transformed. Hearing, receiving, and repenting, the young church walked in unity and garnered praise. Out of joy, the gospel creates community.

Peter and John then continued to spread the gospel through preaching and miracles, and the church grew by 5,000. In AD 31, Stephen gave a powerful sermon, and the enraged crowd stoned him, making him the first Christian martyr. Around AD 34, on the road to Damascus, the Lord transformed the heart of Saul, a man who persecuted countless Christians, and Saul became Paul. After this conversion, the gospel continued to spread through the ministries of Paul and Peter. God gave Peter a vision and used him to first reach the Gentiles.

In AD 44, King Herod Agrippa the First executed the apostle James and had Peter arrested, but an angel rescued Peter, leading him out of the prison. As the believers were scattered because of persecution, the center of operations for Christianity then turned from Jerusalem to Antioch, where Paul and Barnabas were sent out on their first missionary journey.

In AD 49, after an argument arose over circumcision, the Jerusalem Council sent a letter to the Gentiles affirming it was not a requirement for salvation. Meanwhile, during a missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas disagreed over John Mark traveling with them, and they separated. Timothy then joined Paul as they spread the gospel throughout Asia Minor and Greece.

Paul spent three months in Greece before traveling to Jerusalem where he was arrested. Just as the church multiplied then, we must continue to multiply today. We must fuel the fire of multiplication

as instruments of transformation both locally and globally, because the mission doesn't stop. Out of joy, the church multiplies.

[End of video]

If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. Let's go to Acts, chapter 26. If you don't have a Bible with you, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you. If you don't own one, that's our gift to you. Has May shocked anyone else? Like when did *that* happen? Maybe it is where I am in life. I don't know. You only are where you are. It seems like my days are long and my years have gotten really, really fast.

It's hard for me to get my head around the fact that 13 weeks ago we started this series and next week we end it. It has just gone by very quickly. Thirteen weeks ago we started looking at this book of the history of the spread of the early Christian church. Christianity was 120 men and women speaking face to face with a resurrected Jesus Christ in Jerusalem. We'll finish the texts of the book today. Next week we'll finish the series.

We'll finish today with the apostle Paul in Rome, which is 2,997.4 miles away from Jerusalem, an 8-hour flight away, with thousands upon thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of believers in Christ. So in the span of 35 to 40 years, we've gone from 120 men and women in Jerusalem speaking with the resurrected Jesus Christ to an 8-hour plane ride away where there *are* no planes with an empire that's beginning to be transformed by the gospel message.

The profound nature of the spread of the gospel was the lines it crossed. Not just the speed at which it flew, but really the lines it crossed. It was unprecedented in human history until the first century that a religion could cross both socioeconomic lines as well as ethnic lines. In the first century, nation states had their own deities. Rome had its gods, and Asia had its gods, whether that was Artemis or Zeus or whatever. Where you lived determined who your god was.

Here came Christianity, and as Christianity spread, it started crossing those lines, so that whether you were Jew or Greek, whether you were in Asia or in Caesarea, the Christian church was growing. It not only crossed ethnic lines, but it also crossed socioeconomic lines. The haves and have nots are far less divided today than they were in the first century. That division began to break down as the gospel spread.

In fact, so thoroughly was the gospel spreading through the ancient world in the first century the physician and historian Luke said all of Asia heard the word of the Lord. Now this doesn't mean everyone in ancient Rome *believed* the gospel, just that they knew what it was. Think about how incredible that is, that we have gone from 120 men and women in Jerusalem to not but a few decades later it being said of the Christian faith that all of Asia had heard.

Again, they didn't all believe. In fact, we know some of them were quite violent against, but everybody knew what it was, and they didn't find out via Twitter or Facebook or a news loop. All of this starts back in Jerusalem when the resurrected Jesus Christ says to this group of 120 men and women, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

This is a great text, and I'll try to explain how. Sometimes God is seeing farther than we're seeing. To those men and women, the end of the earth was Rome. They have no concept of North America or South America. They don't know how far south Africa goes. They don't know these land masses are out there. God is saying, "To the ends of the earth I'm going." They're thinking, "We're going to Rome," yet God's picture was past Rome and to you and me plus some.

The spread of this thing, historically speaking, was unprecedented in human history. It happened because... I know the right spiritual answer: the power of the Holy Spirit doing the work of illumination. I know that, but that illuminating work of the Holy Spirit took place through the churches Paul planted and the men and women who made up those churches grabbing hold, or seizing, every opportunity imaginable to make much of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

What we see in the apostle Paul and in the early church is any and every opportunity that presented itself was seized and Christ was made much of. What they proclaimed was the gospel, the *euaggelion*, the good news. What was spreading across the ancient world was good news. Now here's a quick sidebar. If you're not a believer in here and not quite sure what to make of this, let me just assure you of this: From the beginning up until this day, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is good news for all.

If you've somehow construed, because of some conversation you had or something you've seen, that what God has done in Christ is not good news for you, then you need to hear the whole story. We proclaim not that you're going to hell, but that if you want to get there, you're going to have to step across a way out. We've come to proclaim not that you should be ashamed of yourself, but that

God has made a way out of shame. We haven't come to do a drive-by guilt; we've come to say there's one who can eradicate guilt.

It's the good news that turned Rome on its head. It's the good news that has led to the gospel flourishing in every part of the world. "Not every part." Every part. "Well, what about Iran?" Well, let's talk about Iran. How many pastors have you heard getting arrested this year? Doesn't it seem like every other week a new Iranian pastor is arrested? The church seems to be growing in Iran, or something. History tells us you try to crush it and it just grows.

I want to watch Paul as we start landing the plane on this series. I want to watch the apostle Paul seize opportunities, and I think there are some things we can learn as we watch him do it. Before that, let me catch you up on the historic timeline. You should be in Acts, chapter 26. We'll pick it up here in a second.

We know the apostle Paul is heading toward Jerusalem. He feels compelled by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem. On the way, everyone is telling him by the Spirit, "If you go to Jerusalem, what awaits you there is affliction and imprisonment." Paul, unwavering, continues on in Jerusalem, gets to Jerusalem, and in Jerusalem goes to the temple and is arrested in the temple.

A group of Jews from Asia whip a mob into a frenzy, and they seize Paul. The accusation is that he has defiled the temple and preached against the Law of Moses. The mob starts really working over Paul. He's being beaten. It's such a confused state of mania there in Jerusalem that Lysias, the proconsul, has the gates of the city shut, and he sends soldiers, according to the Bible, running down to the temple to see what in the world is going on.

When they get there, what they find is this mob has set up a kind of borderline illegal tribunal to try the apostle Paul, but while they're trying him, they're also beating the mess out of him. So the soldiers intervene. They grab Paul. They're dragging him out. Paul, before he gets to the barracks for his own safety, asks, "Can I address the crowd? Do you mind if I address the crowd?"

They let him, so he turns around and starts to speak in Hebrew, and when he speaks in Hebrew, the crowd that is made up almost entirely of Hebrews hushes. He walks through the narrative of his own conversion. "You yourselves know I was educated under Gamaliel. You know I persecuted the church. When I was on the road to Damascus, Jesus appeared to me. Then he sent me first to the

Jews, and because you're hard-hearted you rejected him. I went to the Gentiles, and there has been a great harvest among the Gentiles."

As you can imagine, the mob that was already quite incensed didn't like that sermon. They freak out even more. Lysias doesn't know what to do with this, so he orders Paul bound and flogged. He said, "We'll get to the bottom of this. Bind him, flog him, and we'll see what this uproar is all about." As they bind him and prepare to flog him, Paul throws out the ace of spades. "Will you flog a Roman citizen?"

The centurion who was about to flog him wiggled out a little bit. He ran back to Lysias and said, "Do you know what you've done? We've not only bound but we almost flogged a Roman citizen." That freaked out Lysias, so he came and asked Paul, "Are you a Roman citizen?"

"I am a Roman citizen."

"Did you buy this citizenship? Surely it was expensive."

"I didn't. I was born a Roman."

Then the Bible tells us fear befell all of them, because it was a pretty deadly game to flog a Roman citizen who was not under capital punishment. They quasi released Paul, kept him under house arrest, and then started trying to work with the crowd, the mob. Now 40 men in Jerusalem made an oath that they would not eat or drink until they murdered Paul.

Isn't it funny what religion will do to you? Here are these men who are so steadfast about the law they're going to murder a guy who teaches against the law that says, "Do not murder." I'm telling you, religion will make you a fool. In the end, word leaks back to Lysias that the plan is for these Jews to ask that the tribunal be held down in Caesarea and, as they headed down that way, these 40 men would ambush the small group of soldiers and murder Paul.

At wind of this, he wiggled out a little bit, and he loaded up Paul on a horse with 200 soldiers and sent him to Felix, the governor. So now we've left the mayor, and we're on to the governor. We get to the governor's house. Felix wants to know what's going on, so Paul shares the gospel with him. "Here's my story. I don't know why they're wiggling out. Here's what happened."

The Bible says that while Paul is sharing the gospel with Felix, Felix is troubled, specifically when Paul begins to talk about the judgment that is to come. So he sends him away, but for two years, under house arrest, Felix and his Jewish wife Drusilla visit Paul often, and Paul continually shares the gospel with them.

Now the Bible tells us next that what happens is Felix is succeeded by Festus. Aren't these awesome names? Felix to Festus. Now Festus is the new governor, and he's not quite sure what to make of Paul, but he wants to please the Jews, so he leaves him locked up for another couple of years, and then finally gives Paul the option of whether or not to go be tried or says, "How about we make your trial in Jerusalem?"

Paul says, "I'm a Roman citizen. I've done nothing against the Jews. I want to go to Caesar." He throws down the "You send me to Rome" card. At that point, Festus is bound by Roman law to send Paul not back to Jerusalem, but now on into Rome, which is, by the way, where Paul felt compelled to go by the Holy Spirit since before he got to Jerusalem. Paul is like, "Okay, you want to arrest me? You want to roll this up? You want the stakes to increase? Send me to Rome."

Festus' issue is he didn't know what to write to Caesar. He says, "I know this has something to do with y'all's religious skirmish, but I'm not sure what the charge is exactly. I'm not sure what to write." So his friend King Agrippa shows up with all the pomp and circumstance of a king. You have the Praetorian Guard. The Bible says just all the pomp and circumstance of a king's arrival. Agrippa comes in. Festus and he sit down. Agrippa knows about the prophets. He knows the Jewish religion, so he's intrigued by Paul.

Festus and he have this conversation about, "Let's bring Paul, and let's get to the bottom of this." Festus loved the idea, because he didn't know what to write to Caesar. So Paul comes in, and he starts talking about Jesus, starts preaching about what God had done. In the middle of all of it, particularly the part about the resurrection of Jesus Christ and that Christ was going to rise from the dead and proclaim light both to the Jews and to the Gentiles, Festus freaks out. Look at verse 24.

**"And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.' But Paul said, 'I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.'"**

I love that. Remember me talking about the expansion of the church being known in the Roman Empire? Well, now Paul's defense is, "Hey, Agrippa saw these things. We didn't do this in private. Surely he's aware. I know he's aware of these things. They're not secret." Verse 27:

**"King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.' And Agrippa said to Paul, 'In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?' And Paul said, 'Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.'"**

Agrippa is like, "Are you trying to persuade me to become a Christian? Do you think you're going to do so in such a short time?" Paul's response is, "Yes! I'm trying to persuade you! Not just you, but Festus with his goofy name, the whole Praetorian Guard, all of you. I want *all* of you to believe as I do, to become like I am except for these chains."

Notice in Paul's defense of himself, he's not really dealing with the Jews at all, but rather just preaching the gospel, and the stakes are high. See, here's the reality. The opportunity to share the gospel with people is always around us. We just sometimes miss it. Paul, his life on the line here, sees an unreal opportunity not to just save his own skin, but to see the gospel take its root in the highest leadership structures of Rome, and he seizes the opportunity.

All around you and me are opportunities to make much of Jesus Christ. We just sometimes miss it. Sometimes we miss it and it's just blatant. Sometimes we miss it because we're just not looking for it. I'll give you my greatest fail ever. My mother and father were long-haul truck drivers. When I was in high school, you would make fun of a kid by saying, "Your mama is a truck driver," and mine actually was. So it didn't really work, because she actually was.

Or you'd say, "Your mama wears combat boots." My play was, "Of course she does. She drives a truck, man. What do you want her to wear? Flip flops?" My mother and father's route was... They would pick up the load in Miami, and then they would drive to California and drop it off, and then they would repeat. That was their haul.

Every Sunday morning at 4:00 a.m., my parents came through Abilene where I was in college, and there, on Interstate 20, was a truck stop, the Flying J truck stop. I would get up very early, and I would go meet my mom and dad at the Flying J in Abilene, Texas, B-1B bombers flying overhead,

landing at Dyess Air Force Base, and I would just hang out and have breakfast with them before I went to church.

I got there early or they got there late. I'm sitting at the table drinking coffee, waiting for them to get there. This would probably surprise you, but I'm a bit of an extrovert, so I started internally stressing, because it had been about 45 minutes since I had spoken to anyone. I looked over, and this guy was bussing a table. I just said, "Hey man, how are you doing?" He said, "Well, all I have is my soul, and nobody wants that." To which I responded, "I hear you, bro."

That's what I said. "I hear you, bro." I'm a pastor, Bible degree, actively sharing the gospel with people in the apartment complex I live in. "All I have is my soul, and no one wants it." "I hear you." Like it didn't even... My parents showed up. We started talking. Then I'm driving to church, and it just hit me, like, "You've got to be kidding me!" That's like striking out in slow-pitch softball. It just shouldn't happen. If that happened to you, I apologize. It shouldn't have.

Praise God. Here's where I'm putting my faith. My understanding of the Word is that what was happening in that moment is the Lord was inviting me to play, and, for whatever reason, I just didn't catch it. My hope is that someone else got invited to play and the good news was heralded to this young man and he became a believer and somewhere out there now he knows somebody wanted his soul deeply...so deeply and desperately that Christ died on the cross.

I just dropped the ball. I didn't see it. I don't know if I just wasn't dialed in or if I was tired or I was selfish. I don't know what was at play. It's a long time ago now. But I do think about that guy sometimes. I think about what a moron I was. I mean, he might as well have just said, "Hey, will you tell me about Jesus?" Maybe then I would have gone, "Oh, okay." I don't know why that didn't settle in well that very early morning.

I'm telling you... I know you might not believe me, but people are open to talking about spiritual realities. They're hungry to know and understand, and it's just about seizing the opportunity to do it. It's just about having your eyes open to be able, in that moment, to enter the space and answer questions. Of the people I talk to about Jesus, the percentage of those who think I'm an absolute moron for believing that is tiny. Most are grateful for the opportunity to ask questions and get to the bottom of things they don't understand.

That you might have the courage to take advantage of, to seize these opportunities I think is imperative. It's how we got in this room. Others have seized the opportunity. Now the thing I appreciate about the apostle Paul is even when everything is going wrong and nothing is lined up like you want it to be lined up, he still will use this opportunity to share the gospel, or at least to commend God's faithfulness and goodness to you.

After the meeting with Agrippa and Festus he's put on a ship, and he tells the soldiers on the ship, "The Holy Spirit has told me if we launch this ship, we're going to get caught up in some nastiness, and there might be loss of life." The captain said, "I don't think he knows what he's talking about. We should be fine." The soldiers, rather than listening to their prisoner, listen to the captain of the ship. It seems like wisdom. They set sail for Rome.

The Bible tells us they get caught outside of Crete in a terrible storm. In fact, for 14 days they saw neither sun nor stars. The boat is being tossed about. Everyone is mortified. So busy are they trying to keep the boat from sinking that the Bible tells us they don't eat. They're literally just trying to keep the boat afloat. In the middle of all this storm, the apostle Paul stands up.

Chapter 27, verse 21: **"Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, 'Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss.'"** If I was there I would have been like, "Not now, brother. Not now. You were right, you got it, but wait till we're safe. Nobody has eaten, brother. We're stressed. Sit down."

**"Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.' So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on some island."**

So here Paul's whole world is falling apart. There's nothing but chaos, and he stands up in the middle. Don't worry about the "I told you so" moment, but he says, "The God to whom I belong and in whom I believe has said this to me, and *you* should believe and have faith, because I trust we will be well. This is what we must do."

Here's what I want to talk to you about briefly in light of this moment and this opportunity being seized. I feel like many of us are hesitant to ever share the gospel with other people because we don't feel like we're quite the example we should be yet. Please do not buy into the lie that what you need to be in place for you to be effective at sharing the gospel with others is a perfect life. One of the brightest billboards of the sufficiency and grace of Christ is our weaknesses, not our strengths.

"Chandler, if I started trying to tell somebody about Christ and they really looked at my life, they would consider me a hypocrite." Listen, I love you, but you are. Stop. You *are* one. But here's the play all of us should be taking. Let's say you're in this place and you're like, "Man, my marriage is not easy. I'm struggling with addiction. I have a tendency to fall back into old sinful patterns." Our position and posture is, "We're going to confess that, we're going to seek help, and we're going to bring those who don't believe along with us."

Just think about the ground your doubt gives you that's in common with those who don't believe. If you have doubts, then don't *not* share, but share, and share that you have those doubts too. "Let's go find the answer. My marriage is hard, but this is where I believe Christ's sufficiency will be seen. Yeah, I fall back into my sin at times. This is the goodness and grace of God. But here's how I'm trying to walk in a greater posture of holiness, seeking to be upright. This is the community I've put around me to help stir me up toward love and good deeds." If you wait till you're perfect, you're never going to herald.

Plus, surely you know it's not your coolness and togetherness that saves people, right? They don't hang out with you and go, "Man, everything is so perfect about them. I think I want to follow Jesus." In that moment, if that's what takes place, then what people are envious of is your marriage, your job, your money, your car, your house, or whatever they've seen they think is put together. So their love isn't of Christ; their love is what they perceive Christ has given you, and that's idolatry. You don't have to be perfect; you just have to seize opportunities.

From there, he finally gets to Rome, and as is his MO, once he gets to Rome, he waits a few days, and then he contacts the rulers of the Jewish synagogue. His MO is Jews first, then Gentiles. In fact, in all of his journeys, he stops in the synagogue, proclaims, and when things go badly in the synagogue, like they always did, he would roll out and begin to teach somewhere else. If you think Ephesus, he's in the synagogue, it goes badly, and he moves to the hall of Tyrannus. This is his MO. So he's calling the Jewish leaders in. We'll pick that up in Acts 28, starting in verse 20.

**"For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain.' And they said to him, 'We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you.**

**But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against.' When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets."**

I want to stop there, because it seems like in this moment, the opportunity that's being seized is an opportunity where the deck is pretty much stacked against Paul. What we know at this point in time is that throughout the ancient world, the Jews have not jumped on board quickly for the message of Jesus as the Messiah. In fact, they have been hostile, they have been aggressive, and they have been violent.

Yet despite the fact his experience had been these people were not going to be open, despite his experience that this was going to end probably with him being beaten again or ostracized or maybe even having more false, trumped up charges levied against him, he calls and begins to once again expound and share the gospel.

Let's do this in regard to honesty in here. How many of you know people and you're like, "I just know they wouldn't be interested. I can see how they live their lives. I know what they value. I just know they wouldn't be interested, so I don't know why I would share"? How many of you would say that? Yeah, we know people, and we're just going, "There's no way they'd be interested. I see what they value, what they're after, how they live their lives. They're sinners who are sinning. They wouldn't be interested in this."

Yet verse 24 says, "But some were convinced and believed." See, here's the great news. Even when it seems like people don't want to know, God will call out from darkness. I'm not asking you to turn into some sort of stalker. My experience has been even those who are hostile to the gospel will certainly allow you to pray for them. It's one of the great hypocrisies of the secular mind. "Hey man, you know I'm the religious guy. Do you mind if I pray for you? How can I pray for you?"

"This would be a great way for you to pray for me."

"Okay, I'll write that down. Will you keep me in the loop and let me know how this goes? I mean, I'll come back around and ask, but I want to just pray with all the information I can." Then I've gone back and said, "Hey, here's a verse I thought of while I was praying for you in your marriage, while I was praying for you in this opportunity for a new job, a promotion. Here's a verse I thought of or something I came across. Why don't you read it and we can talk about it?"

Now I'm having ongoing spiritual dialogue with people that's not offensive. It's not me hounding. It's not me tracking down. It's just built on, "I love you. I'm going to pray for you. How can I serve you?" Again, sidebar. Maybe you're an unbeliever in this place. A friend has invited you and you're like, "Wait a minute. What is this...Amway? Are you guys trying to convert me?" Yeah! Yeah, we are.

I don't even know you, and I desperately want you to know Jesus. I want you to know him. I want you to know how good he is, how gracious he is, the beauty of a life in glad obedience to pursuing him. I want you to know him. Your friend wants you to know him. We're not being subversive. It's not a program. We're really praying for you. You're not a project. We desperately and earnestly want to see Christ come alive in you.

As Paul told Agrippa, "Whether short or long, our hope is that you would be as we are except for these chains." He seized the opportunity. Really, the last thing we see here is that the apostle Paul was going to do this until he died. He really said he was going to do this until he died. He was going to seize every opportunity. He was going to take any chance. He was going to look for any window, any in. Even when it was not there he would take it, to preach the gospel to those who might hear, for those who might believe.

We see this probably most clearly in the fact that Paul, while he was in Ephesus, says, "I'm headed to Jerusalem, and the Spirit testifies to me that what waits for me there is affliction and imprisonment." That's Acts 20:23. Verse 24 says, **"But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."**

You hear him saying it. "The Spirit has told me affliction and imprisonment await me, but I don't count my life as anything to me. In fact, that imprisonment means I get the opportunity to share the gospel with the guards. The trial in front of kings and tribunes and governors gives me the

opportunity among the elite of culture to make known the glorious deeds of Jesus Christ. I count my life as nothing to me for the privilege of serving *this* end. If it means I die, then I die; but until then, I'm going to seize any and every opportunity to make much of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the good news of the forgiveness of sins and for the fullness of life to be had."

Here are the last couple of verses we read in the book of Acts, Acts 28, starting in verse 30: "**He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.**" The last picture we get of Paul is a man under house arrest, awaiting trial before Caesar, who, without hindrance and all boldness on his own dime, is sharing the gospel with any and all who will hear.

History tells us that somewhere between AD 62 and AD 67 that trial actually happens. The apostle Paul is dragged out to the outskirts of Rome, and he is beheaded. His desire to share the gospel unto death to any and all who would hear ran its course. God's plan was not just to Rome, but to the ends of the earth. You and I trace ourselves back to 120 men and women in Jerusalem standing face to face with a resurrected Jesus Christ and him saying, "You will receive power." Now what I've tried to say, guys, is it's just our turn. It's just our run. Somebody seized the opportunity with us.

Maybe it was your mom and dad. Maybe it was a friend. Maybe it was a coworker, but somebody seized the opportunity. They prayed for you. They prayed for me. They shared the gospel with us. Somebody seized the opportunity to make much of Jesus Christ for us, and here we are...worshippers of the King. Now it's our turn. So even now, both as the individual as well as the organization, we seek to seize any and every opportunity we might grab hold of to make much of the name and renown of Jesus Christ and to humble ourselves before him.

I don't know how dialed in you are. The 11:15 is a bit of a different service for us. There are not a ton of covenant members who come to this service. It's much more people who are just kind of checking us out or who have been checking us out for about seven years but haven't fully committed. I'm not dogging you; I'm just saying that's more than likely who's here. Over the course of the last three to five years, the elders have been earnestly praying about some things we felt the Spirit was leading us into.

On Friday our Denton Campus, about 1,500 to 1,700 men and women, of whom many are covenant members of this church, met to pray about whether or not God would have them roll off and

become an autonomous church. No longer a part of The Village Church, but an autonomous church of its own with its own teaching, its own elders, its own ability to make decisions; to no longer be a campus of ours but an autonomous church altogether.

This morning and later tonight in their services, the Denton Campus covenant members will vote on whether or not to pull the trigger on this action, to step out, to take the risk, to, I believe, seize the opportunity to be a church for the city of Denton in the city of Denton. Whether they vote all yes or they vote no, my confidence is simply this: The Lord has asked us to enter the process, and as your elders, we have led you into the process.

If they vote their conscience and say no, my confidence is that we're going to get more of Jesus, and if they vote their conscience and vote yes, my confidence is that we're going to get more of Jesus, a greater understanding of his, a more grateful grasp of the mission he has given us. In every way we can, whether that be organizationally or individually, we want to grab hold of opportunities to make much of Jesus Christ, grab hold of opportunities to humble ourselves, grab hold of tangible opportunities to say, "This isn't about us; this is about him."

We want to step into that space, trusting that God is good, gracious, and right. So once again today, as a church, the Denton Campus will lead us. I thought it would be a good idea just to close our time together today simply by praying for The Village Church and particularly praying for the Denton Campus. These are our family members, our friends. We are in Home Groups with them. We have rejoiced together. We have wept together. We have prayed together. For the last seven years, we are them, they are us.

This is no divorce. Relationships are good, right, and beautiful. Beau Hughes, John Warren, Jeremy Daniel... I could just rattle off that staff. I was there on Friday. This is no divorce. This is a gospel goodbye, if the Lord reveals today that it is indeed a gospel goodbye. So let's pray. Pray *with* me. Don't just get caught listening to me pray, but rather agree with me in prayer for The Village Church to continue to be willing to take risks, continue to prayerfully seek the face of the Lord, and to continually operate in a way that shows we're much more interested in spiritual things than we are tangible types of successful markers.

It's a foolish thing in some regard to go, "Yeah, this couple-million-dollar facility that sits on the campus of the third largest university in Texas filled with a ton of college students and a lot of energy that's making an impact in Denton... Yeah, let's just roll that off of our records. Let's just

make our church shrink. Let's just make our church smaller in all measurable ways." It might seem foolish...unless the Lord is in it, unless the Lord is asking us to take that step. Then it's not foolish at all. Then it's brilliant. Let's pray.

Father, our prayers have changed little over the years. Our desire is to know you, to see you do a work in our day that we wouldn't be able to take credit for, but rather, Father, you would pour out your Spirit in such a way that we might even experience revival in our day. I thank you for the good work you have done here. I thank you for the good work you have done and are doing and will continue to do in Denton.

I pray for clarity from the Holy Spirit for our covenant members up there. Father, in this moment, if they're still not sure, if there's still some fogginess, I pray, Father, you would just lift that fogginess, and with crystal clear, pinpoint accuracy they would follow your leading into what's next. We thank you for the invitation to just prayerfully consider.

We thank you for the invitation to lean in and take risky steps, trusting that regardless of what's on the other side, obedience is always better than being unwilling to take risks. I pray that you would keep us dialed in to the great cause of seeing men and women come to know you and love you, heralding the good news, seizing every opportunity imaginable for the glory of your grace and the joy and fulfillment of our own lives. It's for your beautiful name we pray, amen.