



Pointing People to Christ-Part 3
Calling for Repentance
Pastor Mike Fabarez

A man named Francesco who sits in a Roman prison today and he's in the middle of serving a 16-year sentence. What surprises me about this prisoner is the reason for his incarceration. I had always heard about this as something you shouldn't do, but I had never heard of anyone going to jail or prison for it. You see, Francesco is a prisoner because he, as a ship's captain, abandoned his sinking ship. Now, you've heard the old phrase, the captain should go down with the ship. I don't think that's the law. Matter of fact, it's not the law. But it is the law, apparently, that you cannot, as the captain of your ship, not do everything in your power to get your passengers safely off the ship if it's sinking. And so when he came before the tribunal in Italy, they testified that he'd left hundreds on his ship while he whisked himself away on a lifeboat to safety. The Italian court threw the book at him. So he sits in prison now as someone who looked after his own well-being without a concern for the well-being of his passengers. As a captain, you can see that you are in a unique position to know everything about your ship and to know all of its safety features and to know how to get people to safety when there's a catastrophe. But he failed to do that. It reminds me of the teenager who went for a job at the local movie theater. As he was being interviewed, the manager asked, "Well, what would you do if fire broke out in the theater?" And the teenager said, "Don't worry, I'd get out."

The problem is, whether you're an usher or a captain is that you may have a responsibility that you're not taking seriously. It's not just about you being saved, it's about seeing people around you being saved. I'm all for you having an assurance of your salvation that you know, that when it comes to God, you've had your sins forgiven. That's a very important thing for you to be sure of. But God would have you take seriously your responsibility to take a survey of those around you who you rub shoulders with every single week and say, you know, I need to be concerned about their well-being. As a matter of fact, it's a moral issue in Scripture. In Proverbs 24 verse 11, it says that we ought to see ourselves as those involved in rescue, that we ought to rescue those who are perishing, those who are being led away to death. You ought to have a concern about it. And if you say it, as verse 12 says you might say, "Hey, you know what? I didn't know anything about it." It's just an interesting comeback in the middle of that verse. It says, well, does not God, the God who knows everything, who searches the heart, doesn't he know? Doesn't he really know what you knew and what you didn't know. To claim that you didn't know, I mean, it's not going to fly on the day that God looks at you and says, "Wait a minute. You did. You knew that there were people around you who did not have clarity about 'there's the exit' and you were the one that was commissioned in your generation to point to that exit, to say there's a lifeboat right there and it is available for you to get in it."

I had hoped when we started this verse-by-verse study of the acts of the apostles that we would be re-ignited as a church to see our generation of Christians in our sphere of influence here at least kind of repurposed in our mission to see people reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We can't make anybody believe, we can't force anyone to get in the lifeboat, but we certainly can be faithful to give that message to them. To not just sit back and say, well, I got mine, I'm glad I'm



here, and, you know, I've got salvation and I can sing about God's grace. It's about you caring, once you have that assurance, that those around you see it as well.

We can take Peter as an example in the early part of this book. We've reached the third chapter. We've been studying his sermon here in Acts Chapter 3. Today we get to the place where he's actually calling for people to turn from the direction they're going, to put their trust in Christ, to see their sin for what it is and to head for the exit. It's a great section of this sermon. We've broken it into three parts and we're going to look at the middle part, really the call to repentance today and I want you to look at it with me.

I want to read it for you. If you haven't turned there yet, Acts Chapter 3 verses 17 through 21 is all we'll have time to cover this morning. But I want you to look at these verses and to remember where we've been. Peter had been very clear about the problem of sin. That's what we dealt with last time. He's willing to say that your sins put Jesus on a cross. Now, of course, it was the Father's decision, but it was my sin that was being paid for on that cross. He died for my sin. That's very important for us to recognize the culpability that we have. Now that we understand it and have clung to the solution, it's our job, as uncomfortable as it is, to love people enough to be honest about the problem.

He says something that seems to mitigate that guilt and it's helpful in many ways but I want us to not misunderstand it. Let's start in verse 17, I'll read from the English Standard Version these verses, as Peter continues saying, "And now, brothers," verse 17, "I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled." He used your sinful actions, not knowing the full extent of what you were doing.

Ignorance, by the way, is not exoneration, and it's not like they were completely innocent, that they didn't know what they were doing, and completely ignorant to the fact that they were doing wrong. It's just that they didn't know the full extent of their wrong. He says, but God used that in his master plan to send Jesus to the cross where he would pay the penalty. He would suffer the human suffering of what all of our sins deserve, that you and I could have our sins credited and imputed to his cross and his righteous life credited to my life. That was all a part of God's plan.

Your response now is to understand all that and to do something here with two different imperative verbs in verse 19. Here it comes, a word that should be familiar to us. Unfortunately, in modern evangelicalism, it's not preached or even known like it ought to be in our generation. But here's the word, as old fashioned as it sounds, to repent. "Repent therefore, and turn back," as if that one word repent wasn't enough, we make it really clear here. The word "Metanoeo," repent, that's translated, we talked so much about from this platform. Unfortunately, so many people come to our church or they start reading the Bible and they say, "Wow, I grew up in church. I never even heard about repentance." Well it is the first word of the gospel. It is the key issue. It's the beginning of us understanding what it is to respond to the problem of sin and to turn now, he uses this word "Epistrepho" in the Greek New Testament to "turn around," now go back to the other direction. The way you're going is not right. Here is the exit. Here is the salvation. Here is the lifeboat.



If you're willing to turn here, if you see your sins for what it is and you're going to cling to the solution, here's the greatest line in this sermon, "that your sins," bottom of verse 19, "may be blotted out." Lots of ways to talk about forgiveness. We've been in Luke 24 and we hear the call to repent for the forgiveness of sins. We see the word "forgiveness." But here we have a much stronger, more dramatic phrase "blotted out." I want to make it clear, they're just erased, they're deleted, they're expiated, they're removed, they're blotted out. That's a great word and an encouraging one as we tell people to repent. The good news is when you do, "our sins are blotted out."

And then here's the hope and focus of the Christian life: "that the times of refreshing may come from" the presence of the Lord, the presence, literally "the face of God." That when we see God face-to-face, we'll have a whole new experience. On this earth, you going to have a lot of tribulation, but one day, bottom verse 20, he's going to "send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive." They just saw him ascend there in Chapter 1. He's gone from the planet for now, but heavens got to keep him there "until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago." There's a time, a set of events called the Times of Refreshing. It's going to include the restoring of all things that are based on the Old Testament Hebrew prophets who spoke of what was going to happen on that very Temple Mount one day in the future.

That's all good news, and it's helpful for us to understand it, but it starts with us calling people to realize that their sin is something that can be forgiven. As a matter of fact, it said there, though it seems to mitigate the problem of sin, of course when we're convicted of our sin, we feel it with all the force and gravity that we ought to. But he says something about it, and he says, you know that sin, even you yelling for him to be crucified, was done in ignorance. Even if you were an anti-Christian persecutor of the church, as Paul confessed to Timothy, "this is who I was. But God showed mercy because I acted in ignorance." Does that mean you didn't know you're doing wrong? Clearly. I mean, you've heard the preaching of Stephen. He knew he was doing wrong. Saul of Tarsus, who had become Paul the Apostle, knew he was doing wrong. The Pharisees, the Sadducees certainly, Jesus said they were doing wrong and made it clear they were doing wrong. But even from the cross, he said, you don't know what you're doing. You really don't know what you're doing.

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, you know, had they known the truth of God, I mean, the whole unmitigated truth of God, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. The greatness of God and all that it means to follow God is something that is understood when God takes the scales off of your eyes. But before that, there's an ignorance.

Just for biblical clarity and comprehensive coverage, if I can do it just for a second, I want to say there is one exception to that in Scripture. Historically, it was when God incarnate walked the face of this earth, and he did things after teaching things about who he was, and then proved them with miraculous signs. When those people with their own eyes and their own ears heard everything that Jesus said and all that he did to prove it and when he did a miraculous... the laws of nature suspended before their eyes and they attributed it to Satan. He said, you know what?



You've just blasphemed the Spirit. Every other sin can be forgiven but that one cannot. I'm just going to tell you right now, that is a non-reproducible event. It can be that you are one of the militant atheists of our generation leading many people to hate Christianity, but you don't have the full presentation of all that they had there in the gospels of the New Testament to reject this. I guess if you were in that situation, I could say, well, you didn't do it in ignorance and I guess there's no forgiveness available to you.

But even today, you could be the worst, the persecutor, the insolent, the kind of prideful person who shines God on in every way in their life, has no interest in Christianity, matter of fact, you attack it in a hostile manner, there is forgiveness available to you because there's a level of ignorance there that the Bible says is present in everyone except for a very few in the time of the ministry of Christ. And that's good news and you ought to proclaim that to our generation.

Number one, if taking notes, jot it down that way, "Proclaim Available Forgiveness" because it's much like the ark sitting there before people with the door open. You may be mocking Noah for years as he builds it, but the door is still open. As Hebrews Chapter 4 says, the place where there's protection, he calls it rest in that passage, he says, because that rest remains available, man, you ought to see to it, you ought to fear that you don't miss it. I mean, yeah, there's a lot of pressure to apply on non-Christians when they're considering the gospel, when they're piddling around with the truth of the gospel. But we want to urgently call them, as Paul said to the Corinthians, today's the Day of Salvation. As the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews Chapter 4, "Today, if you'd hear his voice," if you feel that conviction, "don't harden your hearts," as other people did. Because there comes a point when your ignorance is continuing to be turning into knowledge, you have more and more knowledge.

I remember sharing the gospel with this guy I had known for years, I was so clear on bringing the gospel to him, and at one point I said, "Just in my evangelism, you know, I've given you so much information, so much clarity from the pages of Scripture, that right now you are more responsible and there's more judgment that you will be held to if you reject this, because you know so much more now than you did when I first started sharing all this with you." And he looked at me and said, "You mean to tell me all this evangelism you've done has put me in a worse state before God than before?" I said, "Yeah. Only if you don't respond to it." We got to call people to the response of the gospel.

I've met with people trying to continue to persuade them to understand the truth of the gospel so that they might get saved. But even as they continue to study and study and learn, their ignorance continues to shrink and you don't want to sin with knowledge, as the Bible says. You want to not harden your heart because it gets harder and harder.

I was sharing the gospel this week with a guy talking about the truth of the gospel and he had the clarity which people get to when they understand the gospel of grace. He said to me, "You mean to tell me that the guy who sits there in prison, who's had a heinous life of all kinds of crazy egregious crimes, if in the last season of his life he puts his trust in Christ as you're telling me to do, he's going to have a better afterlife than my neighbor, who's just an upstanding, law-abiding



citizen, but rejects Christ." I said, "Absolutely. Now you're understanding the gospel. You get it now. It's exactly what I'm saying."

Because I could be on a ship that's sinking and be the worst passenger ever. I don't tip the bellman. I go to the nice dining room in shorts and a tank top. I'm just a terrible passenger. I find things that aren't nailed down and throw them overboard. When I see the captain in the hallway, I slap him in the face. I could be the worst passenger you have. And my neighbor can be a great passenger. He over tips everyone and he comes in his tuxedo to dinner and he's so nice. He just bows to the captain. All of that. He can be a great, great passenger. But when it comes to being saved, you've got to get into the lifeboat. If I choose to step into the lifeboat and my upstanding neighbor does not, yeah, the difference is the grace of a buoyed-up salvation in the lifeboat of Christ, that's what matters, whether we'll respond rightly to the gospel. When they make that objection, as they often do, "What are you telling me, that all it takes is trust in Christ and you're saved and someone who's living a relatively good life, they're not?" That's the point I understand that they understand the gospel of grace.

So, of course, they like to say, "Well, then I'll just wait to the end." No, I don't suggest you try to time this thing called life. You don't know. The Bible says not only do you not know when you'll breathe your last, but the Bible is very clear, the more you harden your heart, the harder this does become, because with more knowledge comes a decreasing ignorance and it is more and more difficult as you harden your heart against the gospel. So I would say it to you today, and I would advise you to say it to your friends, your neighbors, your coworkers, "Today is the day."

Now, I don't want you to jump blindly into anything. I want you to understand the reasonable nature of our faith. But I need you to respond. I need you to respond if you're hearing his voice and his conviction, I want you to respond to the gospel. Is there enough urgency in your evangelism? Do you share with your friends, your neighbors, your family members, and say to them, you know what? Is today the day? Today ought to be the day. If this is starting to assemble in your mind and your understanding it, a resurrected Christ offering his forgiveness of sins. He's done everything and proved everything and the prophetic word is screaming from the pages of the text, "This is true," then you need to respond. That forgiveness is available. We want to make sure people understand it and know it.

And once they do, we want them to do what verse 19 says, "Repent and turn back," for this reason, "that your sins may be blotted out." Like I said, "aphiemi" this Greek word for forgiveness is a great word. Do you want to talk about what happens when I repent? My sins are forgiven. That's a great, great thing. God releases me from the culpability and the penalty of my sin. Great. If you want to get really dramatic about what that means, use this phrase: "It's blotted out." What a big dramatic way to say it. Well it was there and now it's completely eradicated. It's gone. It's done. It's completely removed. To use the poetic language of the Old Testament, it's like God taking your sin and so blotting it out that it's as far removed as the east is from the west. It's like your sin being blotted out and buried in the deepest sea. You're never going to see it again.

That all of the guilt that you have and culpability and responsibility for living up to God's standard, all of that deficiency, all of that transgression, all of it is as, I just love the way it says,



"I'll blot out your sins and cast them behind my back." They'll just be no reference. Between me and you it's gone. It's obliterated. That's the offer of a full pardon. I want you to jot that down. Number two, "Promise a Complete Pardon" to people, because that's not what they're getting in religion. Before you start yawning through this going, "Oh, yeah. That's it. Forgiveness and full pardon." But that's not what's being taught in other churches you understand. There are a lot of people under the banner of Christianity saying this: Jesus is going to help you shape your life up so that when you stand before God, he's going to say, "Yeah, you did pretty well and Jesus helped you and now you're in, you're good." Because they don't see what Pastor Rod said in the baptismal tank this morning, that what I'm doing is exchanging the totality of my life for the righteousness of Christ. I'm not trying to get Jesus to help me to clean myself up to get me acceptable to God, because you think you're 80% righteous and 20% sinful. If Jesus could just help me with that 20% or maybe even tape over and put some nice stickers on top of my sin, and then maybe before God he could look at me and really see that I'm more good than bad. Actually I'm going to have Jesus make up for the moral deficit of my life.

Paul, who was head and shoulders above everyone else, all of his peers, in terms of keeping the rules, he recognized this. They need to exchange all of that. "I count all of it as loss in light of surpassing value and greatness of knowing Christ, Jesus, my Lord." I've exchanged all of that, "Not having a righteousness of my own." That is so important for us to catch. What we're telling people is right now at a moment, a split second, your repentance can change everything about how God sees you. 100%. You could be the criminal on the cross and if you trust in Christ, Christ could look at you and say, "Today you'll be with me in paradise." That's a fascinating thing to think about.

I'm not offering people a religious path to walk up so that through their acts of penitence, they can get right with God. I know penitence comes through Latin from the word repentance. I understand that. But that's not what repentance is. Repentance is I'm grasping onto something I'm trusting in here, which is my life, the Bible says, you're clinging to the vain idols of your life. I'm ready to let all that go and cling to the cross, cling to Christ, cling to the finished work of Christ. That turning around. Does it change the trajectory of my behavior? Yeah, it does. Imperfect as it is, it does change the trajectory of my behavior. But it's a complete turning around that I'm going the wrong way.

I was preaching down in San Diego County on Friday, and I was driving down there and I took a wrong turn. But thankfully, we all have that little thing on our dashboard that sticks there and yells at us when we take the wrong turn. I should have known because I looked through the windshield, I saw the ocean, I figured the hotel I was speaking at, the conference room, was not in the ocean. So I should have known I'm going the wrong direction. But I kept driving until I could find a place to turn around because here was this little device on my dashboard saying "turnaround, turnaround, turnaround, turnaround."

I've got to have that sense in my own heart. I'm telling people to have that sense in your own heart that what you're doing and how you're living and what you're all about and what you're trusting is the wrong thing. Turn around, "metanoia." That's the word to "turn around." That's how it was used. I know people tell you, "metanoia," this Greek word translated, "repentance" is



"meta" after and "noeo" from "nous" our "minds." "Noeo," to think. Well, it's just to think differently. Well, just to avoid that kind of simplistic breakdown of a word, I'm glad the word "epistrepho" comes next, and translated here, "turn back." This is about my whole life, the whole direction of my life, the priority of my life, the focus of my life. I'm now trusting in what God has done for me. I'm recognizing that he is the king and I follow him. I'm going to go on my path abandoning my pursuits and say I now live under new management and I follow and trust in the finished work of Christ.

Promise that complete pardon to people and I know when you talk about sin, they don't see their way is all that bad. But please know that when people really get convicted of the truth of the gospel, and look for this in your evangelism, they'll get to the place where they realize their sin, even if it was against other people, is a sin against God and it will weigh on them. That's why it's so great to hear so many testimonies this weekend in our services because they testify to that sense of the gravity of their sin. We've got to get people past that simplistic kind of like, "Well, I can reform a few things in my life." No, it's full-blown life repentance, because we see the heinousness of our sin before a holy God.

If someone were to hop the back fence of my house this afternoon and, you know, they're trespassing on my property, I wouldn't advise that, but if you did that, let's just say I pick up the phone and call the sheriff's department and say I got a trespasser, they might say, "Well, go find out who he is and what he's doing, you know, we've got other things to attend to. I don't know what kind of big deal. Just ask him to leave." I mean, it would probably be a casual response to just some guy coming into my backyard. I might not like it because you're transgressing my property line, but I probably wouldn't get, you know, wouldn't get top priority in the Orange County Sheriff's Department this weekend.

But that's my house and it's because it's my house. Go to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in D.C., hop that fence and transgress that lawn and see what happens. Right? No one has to pick up the phone and call anyone because you will be hauled away in cuffs immediately. Go look on YouTube. You'll see plenty of examples of this. They may call it "The People's House," but you people better not go there, right, without an invitation because you are going to get hauled off. Now what's the difference? Well, his house is a lot bigger than mine, I understand that. But he's a much more important person. And in our society, see, the magnitude and the concern regarding transgression it correlates to who you've transgressed. And when people start to see that my sinning and my lying and all the deception or whatever it might be in my life, my ego, my pride, my complaining, my gossip, whatever it is that I start to get convicted of, when I see that as a transgression against God and his law, I've now encroached upon the property of the holiness of God, I start to feel that, I start to recognize it. I start to realize, man, I need a pardon. I need a full pardon.

It's not like I can just say, "Well, you know, boys will be boys. And I did, you know, everyone does it." It's like, wow, I made a big, big, big moral mistake here. A grievous error. I've transgressed God's rules. That's what we're looking for for people to understand. The Spirit of God convicts people of sin, righteousness and judgment. Think about those things. Sin: I didn't do what I should have. Righteousness: the standard is so high it makes that sin so egregious. Judgment: I



deserve judgment. You know, the key phrase there, as David thinks about his sin, he says, you know what? "You are just and right when you respond in judgment to me. I know I deserve a punishment." But the good news is that we're proclaiming that people get a complete and full pardon. That is so refreshing for us to tell people who are so conditioned to think that religion is some kind of crutch. It's not a crutch. It's a gurney. You lay on it. You put your whole life on it. You say, I need the totality of my life exchanged for the hope of the gospel. All those things that are hostile against us, Colossians 2 says, have been "nailed to the cross." Repentance, the turning from our sinful life of independence to God, it changes everything "so that your sins may be blotted out." We've got good news to declare to our generation.

They may say, well, great, let's get going, verse 20, let's just get everything better now. Well, this is important for us to realize that this is a future-focused gospel. This is not about you putting Christ in your life and having your sins blotted out so that you can now have a fantastic earthly life. Well, you get the presence of God. Well, that's good. But you know what? It's still through a glass dimly. The kingdom has not yet come. What I'm looking for in that changed status with God is the coming of the times of refreshing. "That the times of refreshing may come," from the face, "from the presence of the Lord." Well, he's not here yet. Right? His Spirit is here, but the Lord has not appeared yet. But one day he will. The fullness of deity dwells in bodily form in that body. Jesus Christ is going to come. God is going to "send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus of Nazareth, whom heaven must receive," you saw him go in Chapter 1, "until," he's coming back, "the time for restoring all things," which goes right back to Chapter 1 when he is about to leave, they said, "Is now the time going you're going to restore the kingdom to Israel?".

Is now the time all those Old Testament prophecies are going to come true? Well, here he is, not long later, Peter preaching about the return of Christ. He went and the angel said he's going to come back the same way you saw him go. He's going to come right back to the Mount of Olives. You're going to see that happen. He says, "Heaven's got to receive him until that time for restoring all things." What are we talking about? "About which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago."

Now is there application for us this message? Absolutely. But I want you to not miss the initial historic context. Where is Peter? He's in Solomon's colonnade on the Temple Mount. We know in Chapter 4 there are 2,000 more people who are going to respond to this message. So it's the crowded Temple Mount in the court to the Gentiles, the exterior of the temple complex. He's preaching there on Mt. Zion, if you will, on the Temple Mount, on what used to be Araunah's threshing floor where Solomon built the temple and now Herod had remodeled it after Zerubbabel built it after the Babylonian captivity. Here is this temple and Peter is preaching and see back up in verse 12 as he starts this sermon. "Men of Israel..." This is a Jewish epicenter of the gospel. We start with Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. So we're still in the core center of a Jewish fisherman preaching about a Jewish Christ to the Jewish people on the Jewish Temple Mount. He says, "there are a lot of promises in the left side of your Bibles, guys." For them, that was all the Bible they had, the Old Testament prophets, and they talked about the "restoring of all things."



Now, are we going to be a part of that? We're going to be a part of that. But God had business to do with restoring the kingdom to Israel. I don't believe we've replaced Israel. I don't believe we've supplanted Israel. I believe that God has a plan and he's going to restore Israel in that last generation that Romans Chapter 11 speaks of, and one day, all the things he promised in the Old Testament prophets will come true.

Now there's another block behind that, the eternal block, the eternal state of Revelation Chapters 20 and 21. I'm sorry. Chapters 21 and 22. Sorry. I know my Bible, I think. Chapters 21 and 22. But what happens in Chapter 20? Well, there's something there that's six times described as a thousand-year period. That's why they call it the millennial period. In that period of time, God is going to restore the kingdom to Israel. That's what Chapter 1 referred to. I don't believe we're Israel. We share in the promises made to Abraham. I get that. But here is the promise of restoring things, as the holy prophets said would happen. That is a future focus. We get to rule and reign with Christ.

Here's one of the characteristics of Revelation Chapter 20 is that "those who have authority will ascend their thrones," and they will judge the nations. They will judge Israel. Jesus said it to his twelve apostles, he said in Matthew 19, "I will sit on my glorious throne in the renewal of all things," a great word. It's translated in the English Standard Version "new world." It's not the word "world." It's the "renewal." He's going to renew everything, the times of refreshing, the restoring of all things. And he said, you twelve who have followed me in this life. "You twelve will sit on the twelve thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel." This very Jewish focus on a restoration of the nation to Israel.

Now that is parallel to what we should always keep in view when we share the gospel. That is, this is not about the here and now. This is about the then and there. There is a future time coming when God is going to do great things. Right now, we're struggling through with some pre-refreshment experiences. I understand "he leads us by still water" sometimes. I get it. Sometimes he "leads us into green pastures," but we also are led through the "valley of the shadow of death." We're also surrounded by enemies. He may prepare a meal for us and that may be refreshing, but we're in the presence of the enemies of God and our enemies.

So we understand this: the reality of the Christian life is future. Paul said, "If we've hoped in Christ in this life only," First Corinthians 15, "you ought to piteous more than all men." Number three, let's keep it that way. You need to "Point to Our Future Hope," Are you going to do evangelism? You should. You ought to. You are an usher, there's a fire, get people out and tell them what lies beyond those doors is where we're going. You need to get in the lifeboat. It's not that the tumultuous, frigid waters that you're going to traverse between here and the shore, it's the shore that we're aiming at. It's then and there. It's not your best life now. That's a lie. It's our best life then. That's what's coming. Through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God, but it's coming and we get to share, even as Gentiles in the Church, in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb he then assigns to us cities, he assigns to us authority, and we get to rule and reign during this time. The nations are involved, but Israel is at the epicenter.



I want you to turn to at least one or two passages real quickly with me. Go back to these Old Testament prophets. It says in Isaiah, for instance, go to Isaiah Chapter 2. Here is a picture of one of the many promises through the mouths of the holy prophets long ago, seven, eight centuries before Christ. Here were the promises about Israel. Know this, Isaiah is looking at the collapse of the northern tribes by Assyria, the northern tribes of Israel by Assyria. The southern tribes are going to go off and be hauled off to captivity for 70 years by the Babylonians. Then there's going to be a restoration. But guess what? That restoration was lackluster because even those who were old enough to traverse that 70-year period, the old men who stood and looked at the temple that Zerubbabel built, they wept because it didn't reflect the former glory of Solomon's Temple.

Well, Herod put some money in it, but he also put like an eagle up at the top. He put the Roman fingerprints all over that, and they sat there knowing that Rome's heavy hand in the first century was all over the Jewish temple. So they were waiting for the restoration, the glory of Israel, the restoration of all things. So it was that there was a day they look forward to like this and it's called something in "the latter days." Look at verse 1, Isaiah 2:1, "The word of Isaiah the son of Amoz what he saw concerning," now, let's be very specific, "Judah," that's the environs of Jerusalem, "and Jerusalem." What did you see regarding Judah and Jerusalem? Well, here it is. "It shall come to pass," verse 2, "that in the latter days," not in Zerubbabel's day that was coming, not when Herod put his fingerprints and put his gold all over the temple. No. "That the mountain of the house of the Lord," that's the temple, "shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and be lifted above the hills."

Now, if you go to Israel with us, I'm going to lead a tour again in two years, Lord willing, that's the plan. We'll go back there, we'll always go as we do to the Mount of Olives. If you look from the Mount of Olives and take your pictures at the Temple Mount, you will recognize that we are higher than the Temple Mount. We sit on the Mount of Olives. The hills surrounding the temple are not the highest mountain.

But the Bible says one day, Zechariah says, Christ is going to come back. It says, the Lord who dwells in bodily form, who has toenails, will come back and "his feet will touch the Mount of Olives" at the end of the time of preparing Israel to receive their Messiah. It says the "mountain will be split in two." There will be geotectonic changes to Jerusalem, and "that the mountain of the Lord will exalt above all the other mountains." It will no longer be in the shadow of the Mount of Olives. "It will be the highest mountain, it will be lifted up, and all the nations are going to flow to it, and many people shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us.'" God's going to teach us? The Lord is going to teach us? Yes, because the Lord dwells now in bodily form, the Christ, the Messiah. "He's going to teach from Jerusalem his ways that we may walk in his paths. For out of Zion," that's the idealized word for Jerusalem and the mountain on which the temple is built, "shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And," he, God, the Messiah, "shall judge between the nations and decide disputes for many people."

So we got a big multi-cultural world, but Israel is at the center of it all, and the Messiah is ruling from the Temple Mount and the peoples, because of the great leadership of the Messiah, "they're going to beat their swords," that they use for warfare, "into plowshares," so they can do



agriculture, "and their spears," that they use to fight each other, "into pruning hooks," so they can go fishing. "Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." Now, that has never happened. You going to have to do some really poetic fuzzing of these prophecies to say, "Well, that's the Church and that's now and that's Christ."

Jesus, when he talked about wars, said you're going to have wars, you're going to hear of wars and rumors of wars and pestilence and earthquakes, all that's going to happen. But the ends not yet. He even told parables about people who thought the kingdom was going to come right away. He said no, no, no, let's tell a parable about a monarch going away and having to come back after he's received a kingdom and establishes his reign. He said, when you pray during this Church age, you pray "your kingdom come." We're praying for the return of the Messiah, the times of refreshing, the restoring of all things.

Go a few chapters later. Isaiah 11. We can spend all day in Isaiah just alone looking at the promises of the coming kingdom. Look at verse 6. These are familiar verses, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb." Now that doesn't happen. Usually you can't get a wolf to calm down around a lamb because he sees lunch. Right? He is not interested in hanging out with the lambs. "And the leopard shall lie down with a young goat." That doesn't happen either. Leopards want to eat goats. "And the calf and the lion and the fatten calf together." Even a juicy, like you sit in front of a juicy hamburger or a cake, it's like your desire is to eat it. Well, that's their natural desire. But it won't be then.

And you know, I tell you what, if there's a wolf and a leopard and a lion, you don't want your kid to go out there messing around with them. "And yet then you're going to have a child shall lead them." "What's your kid doing with that lion, that leopard?" "Oh, just leave them walking around." "And the cow and the bear shall graze." What are you talking about? Oh, we know that cows eat grass. You're telling me the bear who likes to chomp on things, that carnivore, he's going to be eating grass? Yeah. "And the young shall lie down together." Little cub, little calf hanging out. That doesn't work in the modern era. That doesn't work in this current arrangement of things. "And the lion," is going to be a vegetarian, "is going to eat straw like an ox? And "The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the adder's," that's the venomous snake, "the adder's den."

I mean, I know there's no Orange County mom is going to let their kids play with snakes. Right? You see an adder or a python or a cobra, "Well, yeah, let's just go hang out..." No, you are going to stop them from that. Why? Because there are natural animosities in the animal kingdom. Just like in Chapter 2, we saw there's natural animosity between nations. All that's going to be done. There'll be a time of refreshing, a time of peace, a time of restoring Israel to its proper place with the Messiah, the Jewish Messiah reigning from Jerusalem, from the mount of the temple, exalted above all the other mountains.

It says in this passage that "They shall not," verse 9, "hurt or destroy in all of my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea." That hasn't happened yet. Pressing into foreign lands to do gospel missions work. That's not this passage. This is a day when the Messiah rules and reigns on earth. It's coming. It's coming for a time. How



does all this work? Well, it works because in Revelation 20, when six times it's described as a thousand-year period, it says, "Satan is bound so that he can no longer deceive the nations." So there are no wars, no jealousy, no envy, no strife. Not only do we not have fighting between people, we don't even have natural animosities in the animal kingdom.

Peter says to those Jewish people on the Jewish Mount, on the Temple Mount, he says, guys, you need to get your sins blotted out so that you can wait for the holy one to return so that you have nothing that stands between you and him. You're completely accepted and ready for the inheritance in the kingdom. You can ascend as the Bible promises us to our own places of prominence in that kingdom to rule and reign with Christ. The nations are represented. We're leading the nations and Israel itself, Jewish ethnic Israel, established in the earth, is primary, and everyone flooding to Jerusalem to hear personally from the Messiah. That's a day that's coming and we get to participate in it.

The ultimate home after the thousand years, the Bible says, is the eternal state when the world then is torched and the elements melt and God brings in a new heaven and a new earth. Three blocks in the future, a time of preparation, the time of Jacob's Trouble, the time when 144,000 Jewish missionaries go out, 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes. You have then at the end of that, the establishment of the millennium, and then the eternal state. The future is where we're headed, and we ought to look toward that, not denying that there is not some kind of foretaste of refreshment from time to time. But it's not about the journey. Right? As silly as people try to make that sound, it's not about the journey. The joy is not in the journey. Really, there's joy through the process of the tribulation and the pain. But the fulfillment is when we enter the kingdom.

When I fly to some destination, you go to work, and unless you're sitting in the front, which I try to pass without any envy or jealousy as I'm going back to coach, I know that it's not about the journey. I don't look forward to flying. I don't want to fly in the aluminum can and have my knees up against the seat. I'm not interested in it. I don't go to the airport and say, "Well, I just want to take a flight. That would be fun." I want to go somewhere. And on this journey between here and the kingdom, Paul said through many tribulations, through much turbulence, you've got to enter the kingdom of God. And I'm not denying that we're led sometimes by still waters and he restores our soul in the process. You may get an extra packet of Biscot cookies, you know. You might have a nice blanket that's laid over your knees when you're chilly. But the reality is our message is the message we're trying to get out to more and more people and that creates a hostile environment. "He's prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies." Think about that.

It's like the guy who grabs that smelliest thing he can find in the terminal to bring onto the plane and unpack 30 minutes into the flight. The anchovy sandwich or whatever he bought that we don't want to smell. And it's just pungent. The Bible says that's what we're all about now. We are the fragrance of Christ. Now, for some who are drawn to Christ by the Spirit's preparation, they want to know more about it. But to most people, we're the smell of death, the stench of death and it's going to be hard. Will God give us some refreshment? Yeah, but we're not in this for a blanket and a few packs of cookies. We're not in it for sodas or waters delivered by the angelic host, if you will, between here and the kingdom. What is it about? It's about getting where we're going. If you



don't evangelize with the future in focus, you're doing the wrong thing. The whole focus of it is repent, get your sins blotted out so we can get onto the end. That's what it's all about.

It was another prisoner that sat in a Roman prison in the first century. It wasn't because he abdicated his responsibilities, because he fulfilled his responsibilities. The Apostle Paul didn't have any graces with the leaders of his day because he was a smell of Christ to his generation. He was faithful to point people to the exit, to the lifeboat. They even conjured up enemies against Paul and Barnabas and Silas and the rest, because they said, "You guys proclaim there's some other king besides Caesar. You're living for something else." He said once to Agrippa, "I'm on trial because of the hope I'm proclaiming about the resurrection that faces us, the Christ who's provided us the assurance of our future home. That's why you don't like us.

But you know what? I'm going to be faithful. I'm going to," here's what he says in the last chapter we have from the Apostle Paul's pen, "I fought the good fight. I've kept the faith and there is stored up for me," he's always looking forward, "a crown of righteousness," he said, "that's provided not just for me, but all for all of those who love his appearance." I hope you love his appearance and when you share the gospel, you're not just trying to have people get their sins forgiven so they can have a few foretastes of peace and refreshment. But that you're looking forward to the times of refreshment that are coming from the face, from the presence of the Lord, when he sends his Christ and restores all things. Point people to Christ. Call them to repentance. Forgiveness is available. Repentance can change everything regarding your status with God and our future is forthcoming.

Let's pray. God, help us, please, to be much more focused on where we're headed that we might be able to share the gospel with that anticipation of the fulfillment of all of your promises, not just to Israel for a thousand years, which we get to share in and to rule and reign with Christ, but for the eternal state, when everything is made right and there's not another blip on the timeline. There's no rebellion, there are no left turns. Everything is what it ought to be. We get to serve you for eternity. So God, we look forward to that. We pray that you would give us a real sense of anticipation regarding that, that it might affect the way we do evangelism. Bold enough to reveal the problem of sin. Clear enough to call them to repentance. And really hopeful in our evangelism that it's not about this life, it's about the next one. Get us ready for that as we open our mouths about the gospel this week.

In Jesus name, Amen.