



Gospel Advance 3

Calling People to Repentance

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Like you, I assume, I do most of my important business and written communication online these days. The physical mailbox at the end of my driveway rarely contains more than junk mail. A lot of junk mail. It's not that I don't occasionally get an important letter or two. I do. But it's so hard to sort out because it seems like every other piece of mail I have says on the front of it "Important." Right? "Critical information enclosed." Right? "Open immediately." "Check included." I mean, you get all that on, you know, the front of these envelopes, they promised so much and you open them and they deliver so little. I heard a guy once say that every single piece of mail that he gets in his mailbox, he immediately throws directly in the trash. He never even looks at it. I thought, wow. Right? I mean, I'm not quite there, but I understand the sentiment. I get it because it's mostly just nonsense of stuff that's in my mailbox saying it's important, you open it up and you realize it's not important at all. I get it.

Much like that when it comes to us as Christians doing what we have been learning in Acts Chapter 8 we're called to do, and that is to advance the gospel, the good news. Think about that. Nothing had been emblazoned on an envelope more important than the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I mean, these are big words, God and Christ and heaven and hell. And I mean, these are huge things that we are presenting to people and sadly, much like the guy that I just mentioned, people are taking that envelope of information, whether it's in our conversation, tract or a sermon, and immediately throwing them directly into the trash can because they've opened enough of those in the past to realize there's not much there.

Now, you can blame some of that on hard-heartedness of our non-Christian friends and neighbors, but a lot of that really is the fault of those who have sent those communiques and they really have nothing to do with the reality of the gospel. The gospel is huge. It's big. I mean, it's earth-shattering. The kinds of things that are said in the pages of Scripture about heaven and hell and the afterlife and Christ and God, those are gigantic topics and they're jarring. And yet most of what people have heard is the tripe and the cliches and the platitudes and the sentimental views of God, that he's some kind of guru or self-help person or someone who is going to help you achieve your best. So they open these after a while and go, "I don't want anything to do with it."

Then you come along and you come along, perhaps, I trust, with the true gospel of Jesus Christ and they say, you know, been there, done that, don't want to hear it. They tune you out immediately. It's like that old Wendys commercial in the 80s, right? The old lady said, "Where's the beef?" Right? I think it's time for us to get back to the meat of the gospel. I think a lot of you are here because, I mean, that's what we're trying to do in the book of Acts, is to understand that. We looked at the supremacy of Christ. We've looked at the reality of what took place on the cross. We've seen so many things already in the first seven and a half chapters that remind us of the significance of this. You just cannot turn your nose up at this. This is something that demands either your full-blown repudiation and rejection or your full and complete submission. I mean, that's where we're left with all of this. And that's important.



And while we focused on various aspects of it, I want to focus on a part of it today that when you open these envelopes that say Christianity, the Bible, truth, heaven and hell, you often don't even find this mentioned, and that's the word repentance. Just no discussion of that it seems in a lot of pitches for God these days. Repentance. I mean, that doesn't fit in a lot of people's vocabulary. Some people have told me after years of going to church that when they hear a sermon or they read something or they go through our Partners Program, our discipleship program, they say something like, "Well, I've never even thought of it. I've never considered it. I've never even understood it." And I think to myself, well, then you haven't had the meat of the gospel ever presented to you.

Not to mention the information, but now the response that's required of you, which is biblical repentance. We've got to make sure we don't fall into the trap of bringing to our neighbors and coworkers some tailored, some truncated, some emasculated, eviscerated, some, you know, anemic gospel. We've got to bring the whole gospel, the real gospel, the biblical gospel to our friends and neighbors.

I want you to look at a passage, while the word is not there, the elements of repentance are there. And it sets the stage for us by an example of Philip sharing the gospel in some big city in Samaria that's left unidentified. But here are these people in a community who are hearing Philip come and preach and it's just like the information we've had, we can safely assume, that Peter has brought, that Stephen has brought. That you need to repent, that Christ is Lord, that "there's no name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." I mean, the reality, the sharp edges of the gospel, we're sure were on the lips of Philip.

But what's interesting as we study this passage, if you turn there to Acts Chapter 8, beginning in verse 9, what we see in this text is the description, really, if you think about it comparatively at great lengths, of people who are hearing the gospel, one in particular. And I think it's important for us to get this because in some ways we're dealing with this every time we share the gospel with someone. In this case, it happens to be a Samaritan celebrity. And that's exactly what he is, a celebrity. And if you know what it's like to present the gospel to a celebrity, you'll know that that seems to magnify all the problems that we often have just talking to our next-door neighbor, because in some ways it's just only different by degree. Right?

So study with me this morning, if you would, Acts Chapter 8 verses 9 through 13, as we look at Philip coming into Samaria, he's doing things, as we saw last week, quite unique and unusual in Scripture, I know people think it's on every page, but it's not, when God endows people with a supernatural ability to break natural law. That is a huge thing and it's happened in very few cases and very few segments and periods in biblical history. And here we have Philip being able to heal paralyzed people in Samaria. That's a big deal and it gets the attention of the people.

There's one particular person that Luke, under God's direction, wants us to understand and see if we don't see some of this at some scale in people's lives every time we open our



mouths about the gospel in our generation. Acts Chapter 8 verse 9, follow along as I read it for you from the English Standard Version. It says, "But there was a man named Simon," a very common name in the first century, by the way, and it's not Simon Peter, you know, this is a different Simon, as who is explained here, "who had previously practiced magic in the city." Simon the Magician, he's often called outside of the Bible or as the old expression, Simon Magus. Magus is this name for the person who was practicing magic. We'll talk about that in a minute. But that, of course, is something that is unusual and it says he "amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great." Healthy self-view. And you know what? He was successful at that, getting that view across to other people. "They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest." Whether you were, you know, kind of reading the pop magazines about who the great celebrities are, the influencers are. I mean, the greatest all the way down to the person on the street, you know, the guy that's working as the, you know, the horseshoe guy in town. "Yeah. Oh, yeah. We know about Simon."

They were saying, "This man is the power of God, that is called Great." Well, you know, some people think they're God's gift to the world. Well, celebrities have no problem getting that point across in one way or another. I heard one celebrity say, at least I read it recently, I don't know when he said it, he said, "My greatest pain in life is that I'll never get to see myself perform live." Healthy self-esteem, right? His greatest pain in life, "I don't get to see myself on stage, man. I only have to see it on tape. It's terrible."

Well, they bought this as a lot of people do with the celebrity culture that we live in, which is just like celebrity culture then, everyone has their celebrities and this culture had its celebrity and here was Simon and they said he's the great gift of God, right? He's the power of God. He's great. And it's a weird, awkward English sentence and a weird, awkward Greek sentence in the Greek New Testament, but there it is. Just to recapitulate, just to summarize, verse 11, "And they paid attention to him because for a long time," he wasn't a flash in the pan, this was a long-term A-Lister, you know, in Samaritan Hollywood, "long time he had amazed them with his magic."

But look what was happening here, this evangelistic endeavor in Samaria, "But when they believed Philip," the people who were paying attention to this great guy, "as he preached good news, there's the "Euaggelion," we get the word "evangelical" from this, the good news, the good news that we can be forgiven. And here's how God determines to describe it to us. He encapsulates it this way "about the kingdom of God," which is a very strategic way to say this, as we'll see, "and the name of Jesus Christ." Right? If I want to talk about someone I usually don't say "their name." It's not just talking about a moniker, some kind of appellation, some kind of label. We're talking about the fact that "name" as authority, that's the idea in Scripture. The name of this person, like you might yell out, "Stop in the name of the law." Right? This is representing the authority, the sovereignty of this person, the oversight of this person, the name of Jesus Christ.

When Philip preached that the people were responding, "they were baptized, both men and women," just like in verse 11. There were all kinds of people amazed at Philip. Matter of fact, verse 10 says "from the least to the greatest." We've got all kinds of people here responding



positively to the gospel in Samaria, "even," verse 13, "Simon himself believed," which is a word that describes one aspect of what it is to respond to the gospel. But it's not something that is isolated. Right? You can't just say, "Hey, he believed the gospel," and say, "Oh, well, there you go," because as James says, "even the demons believe." Right? But that's not the kind of saving faith that we're talking about in Scripture. There's more to it than that.

But he had a response and it was positive and "he continued with Philip." He wanted to be with Philip. "And seeing signs and great miracles," as it said up there in verses 7 and 8, it says, the ones that Philip performed, "he was amazed." Matter of fact, you should read it this way, "And seeing the signs and great miracles performed, HE was amazed." Right? Why? Because everyone was amazed at him. Now he's amazed at Philip.

Now you're going to see and it's important to get this right out of the gate, that whatever happened here to Simon, this celebrity, it wasn't a textbook conversion. Matter of fact, you got every reason to believe that the way Luke presents it to us, even in the way it's said here, this is a phony conversion. Now, I know you've never seen a celebrity claim Christ and be a phony conversion. I know you've never seen that before. Right? (audience laughing) But it happens a lot. Drop down in this passage, if you would. Scroll down to verse 21. We'll just get into the middle of this. We'll deal with this in a few weeks. But it says, Peter comes to town and he says, "You have neither part nor lot in this matter for your heart is not right before God." So whatever it was, much like the demons, there wasn't a right heart before God. "Repent." Right? Apparently, that's not what happened here. But it needs to now, "therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you." So we know where this is going or at least we should. So Simon, the celebrity, is not truly converted here. But he gets in the group and we'll try to analyze why he wants to follow along with Philip.

Now, let's understand this just a little bit, if we can, up in verses 9 through 11. Let's understand perhaps why there might be some help in looking through this description of him. He's amazing people. He thinks he's great and people think he's great and everyone's paying attention. That's called celebrity, right? The thing about this that's weird is magic, the word magic. What in the world is that? What kind of magic was he doing? If I said to you, "Houdini is a magician," you'd know what I'm talking about. Matter of fact, one of his great tricks, he would, you know, get himself put into chains. Right? He would have himself bound with chains and then he would get out of them and they'd go, "Whoa!" And Houdini would say, "I'm a magician." Right? Magician.

In Luke there was a man called, in our English text, a demoniac who was bound with chains and he got out of those chains. He did it by demonic power. He burst the chains and had supernatural strength. Now, Houdini was a magician and I guess if you want to say, "Hey, you're breaking natural law by the power of demons," you'd say the demoniac of the Gerasenes that lived among the tombs was also a magician. Right? He was getting out of chains, too. But just a little different. One's doing tricks, sleight of hand. You know, one is doing illusions. The other one's doing the real thing because he's like got demons in his life.



David Copperfield, you've seen his specials back in the day, makes things appear. Wow, how does he do that? Tricks, illusions. There were sorcerers in Egypt back in the book of Exodus who made things appear and they're described as magicians in our English text, the Hebrew word for that, obviously, in the Old Testament, that describes what they're doing. And as the Bible says, even on into the New Testament about these magicians, they were doing something by the power of Satan, demonic beings. They had the ability to make things appear but they weren't tricksters. They weren't illusionists.

So the question is what's going on here? Simon the Magician. Now part of this, I think, is helpful as people were amazed at him, look at verse 11, "for a long time, he amazed them with his magic." OK? Look at the bottom of verse 13 again, "And seeing signs and great miracles performed, HE was amazed." I think that by itself starts to help us understand what kind of magician he was. There was a medium who would contact the dead in the Old Testament. She's called a witch in the Bible and she lived in a place called En-dor. And you might remember the Witch at En-dor story in the Old Testament. And she's making a living by contacting the dead, just like we have in our county right now. We've got people who are making a living by trying to get you in touch as a medium with dead people. Well, that was her shtick. That's what she did.

And what happens was when the king of Israel shows up in disguise and really desperately, I mean, frantically desperate, to hear from the prophet Samuel who had already died. He wanted to hear some information from Samuel. He wants to hear from Samuel. So he goes in there and asks if she would call up Samuel. And do you remember the story Sunday school grads, since you know everything about the Bible and everybody's names in the Bible? What happens? Samuel shows up. Samuel shows up and what was her response? To use the text here, she was amazed. She screamed.

Now, I'm thinking, if you do this for a living and someone comes in and asks for someone and they show up, you ain't going to be amazed because that's your job, right? She's amazed which shows me she's a con-man... woman, right? She's a con. She's a charlatan. She's a trickster. Just like most people that you hear today who want you to pay them to contact your great uncle or whatever. They're taking your money and they're scammers and you just look at all the ways and the tricks to do that. Now, there are times where you have people in touch with, according to Deuteronomy 18, where you have people who are actually doing things within the spirit realm that God condemns as evil, as an abomination to him, and they're connecting with spirits, fallen spirits. That's rare, at least in the occurrence and eruption of it. It happens in the life of Christ. It happened in certain places in Canaan, but that's a reality. But there are two different kinds of magicians.

I'm just saying here, because Simon the Magician was amazed when Philip is doing what he claims to be doing, which is the whole point, he does magic and now all of a sudden someone's doing magic and he's amazed at the magic. I'm thinking, I mean you're going to fist bump Philip going, "Hey, you're doing the stuff I'm doing." It ain't going to be no big deal. But instead, he wants to join kind of, you know, the Union for Magicians with Philip and he wants to, as it says, "continue with Philip" and learn about Philip and learn what Philip is doing



because he's the con-man learning from the guy who's all sudden coming to town doing the real thing. He's healing paralytics.

And again, I'm not going to die on this hill here, but I think he's a con-man. Not that it matters because he convinced everybody in town he was someone great. So he had the fame. He had the celebrity. I'm sure he had the money to go with it. And everyone thought he was great. And here comes Philip coming to town. It's not until Peter comes to town that we have some of the text of what was said. But Peter is now saying, "Hey, you need to repent." Repentance is what needs to happen in anyone's life if they're going to respond rightly to the gospel. Let me say this. How many envelopes that say become a Christian that come in the conversations and sermons and tracts and books that get out there under the name of Christianity and they never even mention the word.

And all I'm saying is one of the things that makes it so hard and maybe one of the reasons we kind of tailor and tuck back and amend the gospel just a little bit with that word, we don't want to talk about repentance like we don't want to talk about hell, is because when you start dealing with egos, which exists not only in the celebrity world, they also exist in your office and in your neighborhood, we don't want to talk about repentance. But repentance is required. Without repentance, we will not see God. To quote Luke 24, the whole point is for us to go into the world and preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins. I want my neighbors to have their sins forgiven. The only way to get there is through the portal of repentance. And repentance is going to take Mr. Big Shot and it's going to remind him, though he thinks he's great, that he's not great.

Let me just put it out there for you. If my job as an evangelist is to say to you, Christ died for your sins, I going to have to deal with you as a sinner. And the whole point of repentance in Scripture is you recognizing that, that's called confession, and turning from that, you've got to own it. And here's something that doesn't equal greatness, right? Being a sinner who deserves God's punishment. And you don't have to be a celebrity making movies in Hollywood to answer this question in the affirmative. Here's the question. Are you a good person? Ask every non-Christian you know, are you a good person? And unless they're having a super, super, super bad day, they're going to say, "Yeah, I'm a good person." And you press that and start using your Bible verses and Old Testament law, whatever you want to do and they'll reply, "Well, no one's perfect, but I'm a good person."

All right, they may not be going around saying, "Hey, I'm the power of God that is called great," saying that I'm someone great. But to say that you are a good person is to certainly flies in the face of the gospel call for you to see yourself as a transgressor of the law, guilty of sin and worthy of God's punishment. You're going to struggle with that. And every neighbor, every friend, every person you deal with is going to struggle with that. Repentance, which usually when you start to see it unpacked in Scripture, it's going to happen in the context of people grieving over their sin, of weeping and mourning and having even a rending of their clothes in repentance, which is the ancient near-eastern sign of being destitute and stricken with grief. That's what repentance looks like. You can see the difference between a synthetic Christianity that's pitched to our neighbors and coworkers and friends where we say, "Hey,



come to Christ and maybe he'll merge into your life," which, by the way, is a great celebrity gospel pitch, right? "Christ can come in and make your life even better."

The subtitle of our sermon today is calling people to repentance, let's get clear about the aspects of that, that certainly fly in the face of a guy who's saying I'm someone great. Sin says you're not great. You're a sinner. Repentance, number one, is a call that is always going to bring you low before God. I put it this way, "Call for a Repentance that Humbles." Call for repentance that humbles. It humbles you. It makes you see that I am not worthy of God's love, I'm not worthy of God's honor, I'm not worthy of God's favor, I'm not worthy of God's treasures in heaven. I'm not worthy of that.

Hard, I know, for us to present that message to our world, but there is no other gospel than a gospel that calls us sinners. I know it's easy to make a caricature of Christianity that's delivered in an envelope that says, "Hey, have Christ on your team and everything will be great, get your best life now." They say, "No, we just see that a mile away and not interested. That's called the prosperity gospel. I'm been to church five weeks at least. I know that's the prosperity gospel. That's bad. That's bad."

Culture, in its increasing hostility toward God, I think really hit the turbo charge when Friedrich Nietzsche came along. Nietzsche, you might remember from your college freshman philosophy class, was remembered for his "God is dead" philosophy. Which gives you a sense of what he thought of Christianity. And if you studied him, at least a thumbnail of his philosophy that trickled into society, it really flooded into society and eventually made its way even into the Church, he often spoke of in German, the *ubermensch*, the *ubermensch*, the *ubermensch*, the super person, the super man. And that's the goal for you to get to your full potential, the *ubermensch*.

And the problem is that Christianity keeps getting in the way of that. It keeps reminding you that you're a sinner and that you're not the center and then you're not supposed to reach this top. Matter of fact, he had in German the phrase the "Sklavenmoral," the *Sklavenmoral*. It even sounds about the *Sklavenmoral*. He said that's what Christianity is all about. It's the slave mentality that you are to submit yourself to God and God is in charge and there's a kingdom and Christ and all that and you submit to him. If you have urges and desires and aspirations that are not in line with his directives, then you've got to submit to that. *Sklaven*. That's you. When really what you should be is the *ubermensch*, you should be the super person, reach your potential. And again, you'd say, "Well, I know the Christian version of that, that's the prosperity gospel."

The number one tract when I grew up began this way. It was in evangelical Bible-teaching churches. It started with this, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." OK? Now, is there a sense in which that's biblically true? Well, sure it is, if we redefine all of those words biblically, but that's not the way most people understand it when I go to them and say, "Hey, hey, hey, the God of the universe, he loves you and he's got such a wonderful plan for your life. That's awesome, that's going to be great, you just get him in your life right now."



And if you don't think people misunderstood that, you get to the bottom of the tract after you sign it and say you're in and all that, you get all the rules about Christ, he loved me so much, he died for me. You get to the end, you get the fine print. And in the fine print of the tract, even the fine print says this, "OK, where we really want you to go with this is into varsity Christianity. But right now what's happened is this is your life," and they drew a circle for you and there's a little chair in the middle of your life, and that's called the throne of your life. "And Jesus just went from the outside to the inside because you prayed a prayer. Now he's on the inside with all those dots, which are the priorities of your life. And what would really, really be cool, I mean, if ever you think it would be good for you to do this, I mean, if ever you might just get there, if you could just get the 'S', which is self, off the throne, maybe we could put Christ on the throne. And really, you know, I'm writing tracts, so he's on the throne of my life. It'd be cool if he's on the throne in your life. But he's in your life now, so that's great. Praise the Lord. You're going to heaven. Get Christ on the throne of your life at some point. If you ever want the letterman's jacket, do that."

And you know what most people thought, "I don't want to do that. But I don't want to go to hell, and if you're telling me God loves me, which I totally understand, I get that, then if he's got some good plan for me, maybe a plan I hadn't thought of, I'd like him in my circle, put him in the circle. I got a lot of other things in the circle. Let's get Christ in the circle. I think maybe if ever things don't go well with my life, I can get Christ on the throne. That'd be awesome."

OK. I've stated that all sarcastically. But it's true. That's what I grew up with, that's what I was told. I was told when you come to Christ, here's the thing. Follow him. That would be good, follow him. And if you follow him, I think things will get better for you. That's what Jesus said, right? "If anyone would come after me...", follow me. Oh, wait, that's not quite how I remember him saying that over and over again. "If anyone would come after me...", follow me. No. "If anyone would come after me, let him...", remember this little brief phrase? "Let him," first of all, "deny himself." People respond, "Uggh, that doesn't sound good. The wonderful God I got sucked out of that plan for my life. I don't want to deny myself. That's the whole point of the word wonderful isn't it? I want those things in my life and so I got a plan. I want Christ to help me get there."

And then, oh, there's another thing, "take up your cross." Think of how bizarre that is. Right? I mean, if we were growing up in the Old West and Christ was there as the Messiah coming in the Old West of America, you know, if perhaps, and of course, this is not the way he would die because he didn't really come just to die, he came to suffer and die in that dying phase. But maybe the way that I was used to seeing people die was not a Roman cross where people were hung out to die and suffocate, but it was a hangman's noose. If I said, "Hey, come to Christ, but first deny yourself, you're not in charge anymore, and take up your hangman's noose and follow me." Uggh!

You're so used to the word "cross" and it's gilded around your neck and tattooed on your arm and it's on the front of most churches and it's like the logo for Christianity and it looks really tidy and nice, but it was a place where people were executed and died. And he says, "Do you want to come after me? All the stuff that you want, deny yourself and then, hey, die. Die. Put



yourself to death and then follow me." Now you can see why that doesn't make for a great first spiritual law, right? I don't know. "Deny yourself and die." I mean, that doesn't sound so wonderful anymore. Is it wonderful good news? It's good news. But it's good news of the kingdom, and guess what about kingdoms? You're not the king. And the name, the authority, is no longer you. Matter of fact, you are the sinner and you need to repent of your sin, and that's going to be a humiliating thing for you to do. It's going to hurt. You're going to weep. There's going to be mourning. There's going to be the recognition that I'm not all that I thought I was.

John Wycliffe, when he... well he did a lot of early English work. One was on English lit, but he had a phrase about the "high horse." We got the phrase in English, like you've heard people say, "get off your high horse?" At least if you look that phrase up, most people take it back to John Wycliffe. High horse. Get off your high horse. He talked about people in the Church at time who were on their high horse. Piecing a few things together, I think about, and I've told you this before, and if you've been there, you remember the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the city where Christ was born. If you go there, there was a church originally built by Constantine. But the Ottomans, when they were in charge of it, they used to have raiders who would come in on horses and carts and, you know, steal all the treasures from the churches. So they took the archway, the big archway to the church, and they sealed it up with mortar and stone, all but except a tiny little four and a half foot, not even four and a half feet, little keystone doorway. That's the way you get it. I mean, it does not meet OSHA requirements, let me just say that. There's no ramp and it's not big and there's no back door. You just got to go in through this tiny little portal. And literally, that was a security measure by the Ottomans so that they could have people get off their high horse because we don't want you running in here and grabbing our stuff and leaving.

I just think it's so poetic, as William Barclay points out in his commentary, just that you have to stoop to get into the Church of the Nativity. There's that sense in which all of us have to get off of our high horse and we have to bow down before Christ, who even as God presents him to us, is in the meekest and lowliest form as a baby born outside in a stable with nothing, from a teenage girl on the road at the back of a roadway inn. And as you go there today even there's that sense in which you are physically reminded, if you can bend over that far to get into the church, that this is a humbling experience. You can see why it's hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. You see why it's hard for a celebrity to enter the kingdom of God. You see why all of us with a sense of wanting to be rich and famous, we're going to have a hard time with Christianity.

It would be bad for you to not share the gospel. It would be worse for you to truncate the gospel and give a false gospel to people. You got to give a gospel of repentance. And the repentance is going to humble your neighbors and your friends and your coworkers, just like I trust that it humbled you. And if not, you haven't repented and you need to repent of your sin.

Well, there's the other side of this, I suppose, verse 12. Acts Chapter 8 verse 12. "When they believed Philip as he preached the good news," that's good news, it's great, forgiveness, I want that. That is a wonderful plan ultimately that I'm forgiven. I get to live in the presence of



God, the unmitigated favor of God with all the blessings of God. I look forward to that. It may lead to my physical martyrdom. I may not have any money left when I'm done with all this, but I want that. And it's summarized here by the Holy Spirit through the pen of Luke, "about the Kingdom of God and" the authority on the "name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women," which of course we see throughout the gospels and throughout Acts as this expression of repentance. Repentance and baptism. It's the baptism of repentance it's called.

And the idea here is that all these people had to do what Christ said because Christ is the name, the authority, the one in charge. And there's a kingdom and the kingdom I'm now stepping into as I get into the circle. Of course, I don't have Christ come into my life. My life comes into his kingdom. So he's already on the throne and I'm stepping into this thing. That's where the tract is just categorically wrong, right? I'm bringing my life into his kingdom, and there's no place for me to scoop my buns on his throne, you understand. He's already there.

I now need to do what the king says, including getting baptized, which seems so idyllic in our minds as we think back to the first century, what that must have been like. Even as we're going to read later in Acts Chapter 8, when the Ethiopian, this very important guy with his regalia and his entourage says, "I need to be baptized." He knows the teaching of baptism. I need to be baptized. And so he stops and they go and get baptized because they see a body of water and Philip baptizes him. I know that seems idyllic, but you do understand it's about as embarrassing as it is now. If I say to you, "Hey, you're a Christian, you need to be baptized in water," which was the command of the Lord, "make disciples baptizing them." And, you know, you may say, "I don't know, that seems... I spent all morning doing my hair, I don't want to get up there looking like I just got out of the shower in front of everybody. And then they're going to give me a towel. I got to wrap myself in and it'll probably be cold."

And, you know, can you imagine what it must look like? He's unpeeling his regalia, his fancy clothes, getting out of his chariot and he's going down into the water and he's coming out and they have to hand him a towel that's worse than the terry cloth towels we hand you when you get out of the baptismal, some linen first-century version and wrap himself in that. Who knows what the weather was? He didn't say, "Hey, the weather's nice. I feel like I'm up for a dip." He's like, "if Christ told me to get baptized, I'm going to get baptized. Even though all these people around me may think I'm crazy because I'm not even from Samaria. I'm not from Jerusalem. I'm from Ethiopia. But I will do it if that's what Christ said." That's what repentance looks like, it always looks like that. And the other side of the coin is if you're supposed to get off the throne of your life and now step into the kingdom of God, well, then you're supposed to obey the king.

Number two, that's what we're calling for, a repentance that obeys. "Call for a Repentance that Obeys." That is what this is about. Do you want both sides of it in a verse? How about this one? Second Corinthians Chapter 5 verse 15. Second Corinthians 5:15. The whole point of this is that we would "no longer live for ourselves," which we're all programmed to do. You do not have to be Kanye West to have that thought in your mind, you understand. And we "no longer live for ourselves but now we live for him who died for us and rose again." Now I have a whole different perspective. And all these people who say, "I want to be a Christian, I want



the benefits of that," if they see Christ is merging into their lives to help them have a wonderful plan, they miss the idea of what it is to come to the end of my road and say, "Now I lay it all down, my life is on the altar. I'm all in. What do you want me to do?" We all watch because they live in a bubble, we watch the celebrities of our day make their commitments to Christ, whether it's Bieber or Kanye or whatever it is, go, "Wow. Let's see what happens."

Please understand that we all have the same struggles, but we have to realize that the whole point of this is saying I'm no longer living for myself. That's what it means to deny myself, take up my cross, now here's the positive, follow me, live for him who died for me and rose again. Now, I got to say, "If I open my Bible and it says Christians should be baptized and the word baptism means to be submerged and it happens after I become a disciple, then I need to be baptized in water after I become a Christian. I've never done that. I guess I got to sign up to do that." That comes with the authority of God as a command in my life.

Keep reading in my Bible, that's the dangerous thing, and I come to another verse and it says in Galatians 6:6 that if I'm part of a church and I'm taught by that church, as Paul sitting in First Corinthians, well then I'm supposed to support that church financially. "Let him who was taught share all good things with his teacher." The one who invests spiritually in your life you're supposed to now have them reap material from you. Some say, "Oh, I don't want them to be a Joel Osteen." Don't worry. You're giving is probably not going to make me Joel Osteen. Right? I don't think you have that giving capacity. But let me tell you this. It's a commandment of God. And you open it up and you say, "Well, I became a Christian, so I got to do that."

I mean, think of these. It's so easy for us to give a pass to celebrities and say, "It's really hard for them to change their whole schedule and not forsake the assembly of those together or, you know, they're going to be such a distraction if they go to a church and just get involved in a small group. I mean Kanye in my small group, that's not going to work." Listen, I don't care if it doesn't work for you. I don't care if you have a million excuses. I don't care if you're, you know, every Sunday, every weekend you're traveling to the Bahamas because you're, I don't know, the most important person doing concerts all over the world. You better not forsake the assembling of yourselves together because all the rules apply to all of us in the kingdom. There's one king and your repentance is no longer living for myself, but living for him.

Now you get through the doorway, the very first act of obedience needs to be baptism. "I'm being baptized in water as an expression here of my repentance." And then we go back to whatever we might be doing and say, "Now I have to live for Christ in this area." Unless, of course, it's immoral or illegal, I have to live in this thing, whether I'm a rock star, a movie actor, or whether I'm an accountant, I got to do the things that God has asked me to do.

Matter of fact, here's a good example. Go with me that Luke Chapter 3. Luke Chapter 3, speaking of water baptism, here is John the Baptizer baptizing people in water who've come for repentance. And talk about not holding back "the deny yourself, you're not the rock star," he says to them, "Who warned you to flee from the wrath that is to come and he calls them snakes, brood of vipers. And I know he's talking particularly to the leaders of the group, but



the idea is he pulls no punches on diagnosing the problem and saying, you are not great, you need to repent of your sin.

Then they say, great, we'll repent of our sins. Now, look what happens here in this passage. They got to go back to their jobs now. Look at verse number, let's start in verse 12, tax collectors are coming. They came to be baptized and they said to him, "Teacher," speaking to John the Baptist, "what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." Now, that takes all of the fun out of being a tax collector in the first century. I mean, it really does. Because that's why you would sign up for this very coveted position to take taxes from people, because you could skim off the top, you could ask for more. It was understood, that's just the way the ethic worked. But it wasn't right. Now, go be a Christian now. You've repented of your sins. You've obediently been baptized in water as an expression of that, now live in the context of your career and do it right. Live by God's rules.

Soldiers, verse 14. They said, "What shall we do?" John said to them, he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusations." Now, again, one of the great advantages of having a sword and a badge back there in the first century is that you could do that, right? Do you want a free meal? You walk in, you're the law, man. You can extort, you can intimidate, you can pull people over and say, "Well, you know, pad my pocket here and I'll let you go." That's what you could do. But you weren't supposed to do that. And so you repent of doing that. You used to do that. You're always looking for a way to make a buck using the power that was invested in you by the Roman government. But he says don't do it. Matter of fact, "Be content with your wages." Funny how many of these are financially connected, isn't it?

Go back up to verse 10. The crowds in general to get more broad in this, to start at the beginning of what he's saying, the crowd said, "What shall we do?" And he said, "Hey, whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none." Think about that. There are people in this church who have four cars. "Oh, man, don't start talking about my cars. I got a reason for every one of those cars." I don't care if you have four cars. There may be someone in your small group who's got no car. There may even be a couple in your small group who only got one car and they're driving each other to work every day. And I'm just saying this, the Bible says these are the ramifications of you obeying Christ, not just by the things you can't do, extorting money, skimming off the top, but the things you must do, which is to exercise the love of God in practical ways. How can the love of God exist in you if you, seeing someone, a brother in need, you have the material possessions to meet that need and you don't do it, how could the love of God exist in you? I guess you haven't repented. This the whole message of First John.

To quote that particular passage in Luke 3:11, "Got two tunics share with him who has none." Some of us respond, "I really, I saved a lot of money to get that second tunic. It's great having a backup tunic. When my one tunic's in the dry cleaners, it's great to have that other tunic." How about food? Do you have too much food? See someone who doesn't have enough food? "Do likewise." Repentance has to be lived out in your life. Nothing, whether it's love for money or your fear of being ashamed or I don't want to talk in front of people, or I don't want my hair



wet in front of people. Whatever your fear is, you say all of that was already decided the minute I repented because I denied myself and took up my cross. My desires, my aspirations, my definition of a wonderful life, I cashed it in for Christ who's on the throne. And there's no varsity Christianity. There's only one kind of Christianity.

Sometimes we think, "Well, I don't know about that. I see a lot of talk about discipleship and every time we talk about discipleship in the Bible, it seems like the requirements are really high. Like Luke 14 talks about, 'If anyone wants to be my disciple he must renounce all that he has,'" verse 33. Well, that seems like second-tier Christianity. You do understand there was no first-tier Christianity because when you read back into the text, well, there's normal Christianity, then there's discipleship. You understand the word Christian was a pejorative term used against the Christians. It's only used three times in the New Testament. They called themselves disciples. If you are part of the forgiven band of people, if you are a participant, a recipient of the good news of forgiveness and grace, you were a disciple.

In a lot of ways the Church has tried to talk out of the hard edges of repentance and obedience. You can't put your toe in the water here. Which, by the way, don't you hate that when you have, you know, a pool party and you really want to swim and people all lined up along the edge of the pool put their feet in and think they're in the pool? I want to swim. Right? And that's what churches, for a lot of people. They're all lined up with their feet dangling in there. They got their lemonade, they're chit-chatting, and it's all cool. They think, "We're in the pool." No, you're not in the pool. You've got to be all-in in this thing. Repentance is all in and it results in you being obedient.

Here's a passage which we have no time for it. Acts Chapter 26 verse 20. I mean, such a classic text that's put so well. Paul looks back at his ministry and he said, "I told people everywhere in Judea, all the Gentiles," Acts 26:20, "repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with repentance."

All right, back to our text, Acts Chapter 8. You know where this goes, Simon ends up having the wrong heart before God, but here it says, "Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip." Now, that looks good, like, oh, he's continuing with Philip. He's continuing with Philip with the wrong motives. "And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed." Even he was amazed. Now all that's great. But we know it's not going to last. As a matter of fact, we know what happens is, though you couldn't tell and everyone was saying, "Even Simon became a Christian. That's awesome. Did you hear that? It was in the Christian Post, man. He became a Christian. It's awesome. So glad, brother."

Now, I'm all for handing out my right hand and saying welcome to the family if you put your trust in Christ and repented of your sins. But I don't know where that's going to go. Especially if I don't get very clear that this is not a temporary thing with mixed motives. This is not something you're trying to engage in some kind of transaction with God, where you know what? "I'll try that and see how that goes and see if it really pays off, if the plan is as wonderful as I thought it would be. I'll give it a try." Put it this way, number three, you need to "Call for a Repentance that Lasts." We're coming to people and we're asking them to follow



Christ. Your old life is gone, you've burned the ships to use that old analogy, that historical analogy. Burned the ships, we're not going back. I'm not turning back.

When I was a kid, I've told you this before. Some bulletin-passing-out deacon, this is old Michael, "Do you know any Bible verses?" I said, "Yeah, 'Jesus wept.'" Right? Snarky little kid. And if anyone ever called me on that, "Wow, it's the shortest verse, but just give me another verse." I had to back up, by the way. "Jesus wept" is the shortest verse in the Bible. I also had the second shortest verse in the Bible ready to go. OK? Jesus said it, here's how it reads in English, "Remember Lot's wife." So I said, "Remember Lot's wife."

Jesus was telling the disciples there's going to come a time in the Last Days when people are going to be scurrying out of the city. To be faithful to the Lord, they're going to leave the city and they're not supposed to turn back. And he goes back into the Old Testament story and simply drops three words "Remember Lot's wife." The second shortest verse in the Bible. Good for you to memorize that. Can you memorize that today? Remember Lot's wife. By the way, the best sermon I've ever read, J.C. Ryle, 100 years ago, "Remember Lot's Wife." Such a great sermon.

We cannot turn back. We're not asking people to come to follow Christ and give it a try. Speaking of famous people, I think it was because of Kanye finding Jesus that Brad Pitt was interviewed in some magazine. And in the article he's talking about Kanye's Christianity. And he says, "Yeah, been there, done that." Listen, to how he put it. I wrote it down. He said, Brad, A-list Hollywood star, "I grew up Christian," even like that, right? "I grew up Christian," like, you know, Democrat or Republican, I grew up Christian. "It worked at times," Mr. Pitt says. "I tried spiritual things, but eventually it didn't feel right. Yeah, good for Kanye." Brad says, "Yeah, been there, tried that."

When I was a kid, there was a campaign here in Southern California, it was on the billboards that said "Try God" and it had a phone number. Try God. Maybe that was Pitt's generation, right? "I tried it. Thank you. Thanks. Didn't work out. Wasn't feeling it after a while." I just think one of the most wrongheaded evangelistic efforts ever was to tell people to try God like switching toothpastes, right? "Just try it. You might like it."

I don't know what it costs to get your kids married these days. Well, I kind of do, but I tried not to add it up at the end. But let's say you are the father of the bride. You've spent all this cash. You got finally your daughter up there and here's your future son-in-law and the pastor's up there going on and on about all this stuff and finally gets the part, "Do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded husband, have and hold till death do you part?" All that's coming out of his mouth. And your future son-in-law says this, "Yeah, I'll give it a try." (audience laughs) I think it'll be the talk of the reception, right? Well, actually, I think you may try to cancel the reception and get a little bit of your money back at that point. It's like, "I'll give it a try? I didn't give my daughter's hand in marriage to you for you to give it a try, right?" No, no, no. This is called a covenant, a commitment. You're turning and this is your wife, right? That's the idea.



And you're not calling your neighbors to something that's not going to humiliate them in their sin, denying themselves and enthroning Christ as they step into his kingdom as the name, the authority of above all things, and then it's not something like Simon the Magician where, "Hey, if this didn't work out, Mr. Celebrity, I can't get out of it what I want." I love Pitt's line, "It worked at times." Oh, did it work for you? Did it? Was that good? Had a few good seasons with Christ. What are you talking about? This is the King of kings. Are you insane? Right? And again, I blame the evangelists in part who send them this envelope, that says, "Hey, here's Christianity" and they open it and says, "Yeah, give God a try." They respond, "OK, I'll try that." You're badly in need of Christ because you're a sinner in need of salvation and Christ has come to die in your place after living in your place and you repent, a repentance that humbles you, a repentance that calls you to obedience, a repentance that lasts.

Go to Hebrews 6 real quick. Last... Well, almost the last passage I'll turn you to. Let's look at a couple of passages in Hebrews real quick. These will be quick. I mean, you're free to listen, this is not communism, you can leave any time you'd like if it's too long for you. But if you can hang in there with me for a few more minutes. Hebrews Chapter 6. I guess a little context would be good here, verse 7, right? "For the land," here's the illustration of us, "that has drunk the rain that often falls on it." And here all these good sermons they were receiving, these first-century Hebrew Christians, and they had all this stuff that was going on, "if it produces a crop that is useful to those for the sake it was cultivated," which, by the way, is not your sake, not your sake, you're not bearing fruit for yourself. You're bearing fruit to God. And if your life pleases, which may end in martyrdom, I mean, you never know. The wonderful plan is for him, his plan, not yours, "all works together for good," for his good, his plan, not your plan necessarily. And if it produces, great, "receives a blessing from God," that's good. That's called Christianity. "But if it bears thorns and thistles, it's worthless and near to being cursed, and in the end it is to be burned."

Jesus told those stories so often about the fact that there's going to be these seeds of the gospel planted in a field and you're going to have good soil and bad soil and rocky soil and soil that's not going to work out, thorns and all that. But these two stories are told back-to-back. The "four soils" parable and the next parable Jesus tells us, recorded in the gospels is the "weeds and the wheat." And they're going to grow up. At first it's not going to be easy to see. Matter of fact, it may last throughout the whole lifetime that you don't know who's who. But one day God is going to separate sheep from the goats. There's going to be a distinction between the wheat and the weeds. But we can't have in the previous illustration is you can't have the rocky soil or the thorny soil spring up with joy receiving the word and bearing fruit, and then all of a sudden hard times come and they bailout. The wonderful plan wasn't as wonderful as I'd hoped. And so they bail.

That's not good. Real Christianity bears a crop that's useful for those for whose sake it was cultivated, which in this case is God's. "Though we may speak in this way" verse 9, "yet in your case, beloved," we love you, "we feel secure of better things," right? We don't think that's going to be the case for you. "Things that belong to salvation." Well, there's a key. If it's salvation, real salvation, if you really have saving faith, if you really have a repentant, penitent, saving faith, well then that's not going to happen. Matter of fact, God's going to be so



good to you, "God is not unjust to overlook your work, the love you shown for his name and continue to do." It's a great thing we see the evident fruit of your life in serving each other. Even if you have two tunics, you give one away. It's great.

Verse 11, "And we desire each one of you show the same earnestness," you work hard," to have the full assurance of hope." How long? "Until the end, so that you may not be," I love this word, "sluggish," lazy, "but imitators of those who through faith and patience," man, they hung in there, "they inherit the promises." Look at verse 11 again, "Full assurance of hope until the end." The full assurance of hope until the end. Scroll up, if you would, to Chapter 3 real quick. Chapter 3, look at verse 14. Verse 14, "For we have come to share in Christ" you have salvation. I mean, that's a perfect tense. You have salvation "if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end."

The reason Brad Pitt, I can share the gospel with him today and say you have not been there and done that. You think you have, but you haven't. You think you tried Christianity, but you haven't. Because, there's no trying Christianity. Real repentance, that is salvation where you have come to share in Christ, you thought you shared in Christ and then you walked away from it. If you've come to share in Christ, well then you hold that confidence firm to the end. Whatever you had, it wasn't real Christianity. "For we've come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firmly to the end." I got to read it wrong so you understand what it's not saying, right? Verse 14, "We will come to share in Christ IF indeed we hold our original confidence firmly to the end." Is what it says? No, it's not, "We get to earn this if you hang in there." It's "if you have it, you'll hang in there." You ask, "Well, what if I don't hang in there?" Then you didn't have it.

Go back up in this passage, verse 6. Christ is faithful over God's house as a son." Great, I want to be in that. Great, I want to be a part of that house. "We are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope," that we know we're Christians. Guess what? A lot of people aren't boasting in the hope of Christianity anymore. They think they've been there and done that. It's why they won't listen to you when you start talking about Christianity. All I'm going to say is when you start talking about Christ to your friends and neighbors, say, wait a minute, I know you think you've been there and done that, but let's just see if there was any beef in that burger when you were dealing with it last time. Because there is something called self-denial, crucifixion, dying to yourself, becoming a slave of Christ. Now, did someone produce that Christianity in you? Or was it praying some prayer, walking some aisle, getting a better life if Christ was in it. I'll bet the latter in most people's cases. Bring them the real gospel. Repentance that lasts.

I know that opening illustration about junk mail and my physical mailbox you probably rolled your eyes at. You thought, well, you do all your business and stuff online, communicate online. Well, that's even worse than my mailbox. I get it. I understand it. There's a lot of junk mail in my e-inbox. I get it. But there's something much better about my electronic inbox than my physical inbox. And that is that I get my algorithms to start to sort it before I ever get to it. And that's helpful. You got your junk mail folder, right? Hopefully you've trained that well enough to where it's actually taking stuff out of your mailbox and putting it away just like it can



be like the guy I knew who said, "Hey, I throw it all away." Great, throw all that away, I don't want to see it. Your junk mail folder.

But if you're really doing the email the way you ought to, you got more than one inbox, do you not, smart guys, right? You've got all these different inboxes. You've got, OK, this is worth reading at some point, and this is something that might be good. And hey, this is important and this is super important and this ought to be read right now. The priority inbox. Do you have one of those? Now, that's super helpful. If your inbox is like my inbox, the challenge is not just to read what's in your inbox, but to be able to recognize, at least in my work, I find like half the time it's like you got to take this, you've got to do something with it, and then you've got to move it on to another department or another situation or another person, or you've got to get this on to someone else. I mean, how often do I hear, "Hey, did you get that email?" Yeah, I read it. It was cool. No, no, no, no. You didn't respond. You didn't forward it on to the accounting department. You didn't send it on to that guy, that leader, that pastor, whatever. I got to deal with it and I got to forward it.

Let me be super bold here. If I preach to you a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and it clarifies the truth of the gospel, the response to the gospel in this sermon and you get it. Now, I'm saying you just read the e-mail, you got it. That's great. That's really good because I said it's worse than not sharing the gospel to share a false gospel. But if you got the real gospel, if God has clarified to you in this sermon or past sermons or in the last five years of your life, you've really got it clear about what repentance and faith are, that's great. Now, here's the deal. It does not a lot of good if you just let it sit in your inbox. It's kind of nice for you if you read it every now and then, that's good, but the whole point is for you to pass it on.

The title of the series is "Gospel Advance," right? We're trying to advance the gospel because that's our commission. And one day, God's not going to say, hey, did you read it? That'll be important. But it'll be did you pass it on? Praise God for electronic inboxes that can sort things for us and maybe by God's grace and his Spirit he sorted out the real gospel in your mind. Let's share it this week, please.

Pray with me. God, give us the boldness, the courage based on what we've just talked about, the clarity to preach the real gospel, the kind of gospel that has a supreme Christ, not a God among other gods, but the one for whom all things were made. The supremacy of Christ that requires of us a genuine repentance that humbles us in our sin, turns our laughter into mourning, our joy into sorrow, to see the sin that put Christ on a cross and gets us off of our knees and into a life of obedience, as imperfect as that may be. But we're committed to doing what the king says. And then it's a commitment that lasts the rest of my life. There's no going back. There's no turning back like Lot's wife. We're moving forward, no turning back. God, let us not only live that out, let us pass that message on to those around us this week.

I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.