



Amazing Conversions-Part 2

Saul: A New Purpose

Mike Fabarez

I was hosting a radio show yesterday morning and someone called in with a Bible question about Psalm 23, about the imagery of Psalm 23. It got me thinking how common that imagery is that God is depicted as a shepherd, as a good shepherd, and that we are depicted as sheep. That's so common just throughout the Scripture, Old Testament, New Testament, everywhere. Sometimes it's the sheep analogy for us. Sometimes it's the shepherd analogy for God. Sometimes it's a combination of both. But in an agrarian society where that's common fare, they see it everywhere, I mean, they understood that perhaps with a greater sense of what actually it means than we do, although we get it. Right? The shepherd is the leader. He's the one who directs. He's the one who guides. And the sheep are those who are supposed to listen and follow and be guided and that all makes sense.

But maybe we don't understand quite as well as they did as just how wayward sheep can be, right? How thick-headed they can be, how scared and timid they are to follow the shepherd when he's trying to lead them where they need to go. And what's important for us to catch is God continually reminds us we're sheep, is that it's so easy for us, as he says we often do, to wander, to wander off the path, to not do what the shepherd asks, to not follow the shepherd down the path that he has laid out for us. And that's the problem. We all like sheep have gone astray. And that's the problem that God says he wants us to solve. Preaching in one sense every weekend is trying to make sure that we do what the Good Shepherd asks us to do.

As we think about why the Good Shepherd wants us to walk down this path, particularly a path that is lined, according to Ephesians 2:10 with "good works for us that he's prepared beforehand" is not only so that we can have a good experience in this life because sometimes it's a hard experience following the shepherd. Sometimes he leads us into places like the valley of the shadow of death. Sometimes he leads us to have a meal surrounded by our enemies. I mean, there are a lot of situations that are hard, but it's not just that you can have a good experience because sometimes it's hard, it's so that others can have the benefit of you being on the right path. In other words, there are people who are depending on you staying on the right path in doing what God has called you to do.

And that's so important as we see this series of Amazing Conversions is what I've called this series in Acts 9 and 10, people being turned off the path they were on to follow the shepherd who's going to take them on a different path, that conversion, a change or redirection. And that redirection is so important for us to see, not only because it will benefit you, Saul of Tarsus, if you become Paul the Apostle, but it's going to benefit so many other people. Matter of fact, so many people will rely on you being faithful to walk the path that God has called you to walk.

As we see the next installment, we've taken four weeks, we plan to take on Saul of Tarsus becoming Paul the Apostle, we're in the second installment of this in Acts Chapter 9 verses 6 through 10. And what I want us to see is not only was it important for the apostle Paul to



follow the path that God had laid out for him, but even the man that he now enlists, seemingly out of nowhere as he's going to Damascus, Paul is, to arrest Christians. God picks a Christian in Damascus and he says, "OK, I need you to follow my lead. It's down a little scary path here, but I need you to do what I'm asking you to do so that you can be the instrument and the means to accomplish what I need accomplished in this guy's life, so that he can fulfill the mission and calling I have for his life."

So it's really a series of reminders of how important it is that you and I are faithful to follow the Good Shepherd. It's a good path laid out with good works that are going to result in good fruit. And in the end you'll look back on it, even if it does take you through some kind of twisted, shadowy path, it's going to be as you look back, it's good if I stayed on the path. What's bad is wandering off the path. I want us to look at this passage and be encouraged and heartened by two men in this text who follow the lead of the Good Shepherd, even when it was scary and difficult.

Grab your Bibles, pull it up on your phones, whatever. Look at it, verses 10 through 16 of Acts Chapter 9. I'm going to read from the English Standard Version. Follow along as I read it for you, starting in verse 10. Acts Chapter 9 verse 10. "Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias." By the way, if the Bible were a fairy tale or a fable or some fictional story, you would not pick this name for this guy because we met this guy named Ananias in Chapter 5 and he was no good. He ends up lying and being killed. So this is a different guy. He just happened to have the same name, Ananias. And not only that I wouldn't have named the high priest Ananias because he is also kind of co-regent, if you will, with Caiaphas. And he shows up later in the book of Acts and we meet a guy named Ananias who's the chief priest of the Sanhedrin.

So it's neither of those. We got three Ananias's in the book of Acts, and this is the one here who is going to do something a little bit scary. And he's going to do it faithfully and follow the will of God for his life and we're grateful that he did. "The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said," Ananias responds, 'Here I am, Lord.' And the Lord said to him, 'Rise and go to the street called Straight at the house of Judas and look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.' But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I've heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.'"

He's called an instrument of God, and certainly he would be. The rest of the book of Acts is going to play out how much of an instrument of God he was. But right here, I mean, we can't miss that Ananias is being used as an instrument of God. And aren't you glad that Ananias was faithful to do the will of God in his life? And we should all be grateful because we study his letters that Paul was faithful to do the will of God in his life. It's all about you and I recognizing there are other people depending on you doing the will of God for your life. And



there's a lot of disappointment, not only for you, there's a lot of disaster, a lot of pain, a lot of frustration that comes that's way more important than our inconveniences or our fears that will come when you and I say I'm not interested in doing the will of God.

Now, again, we look at a passage like this and say, just like we've seen in previous passages, "It would be really nice if God showed up in a vision and told me what to do. Go to this street, Aliso Viejo Parkway, you're going to meet at the Starbucks, you're going to meet a guy named Fred, he's going to be from Anaheim. This will be great. I'll know the will of God for my day." OK, but before you get into that and we'll deal with that, but I want to start right now with the fact that before Ananias even knew what the will of God was, he responds in verse 10, look at it afresh, with a phrase that is loaded. And I say that because all throughout the Old Testament, this same phrase in a different language, in Hebrew, in the Old Testament is repeated constantly by the people who are being called on by God to do something.

God comes and shows up and says to several people like Samuel, "Hey Samuel," and Samuel responds, "Here I am, Lord." I mean, he shows up to Abraham. "Here I am Lord." He shows up to Moses. "Here I am, Lord." He shows to Isaiah. "Here I am Lord." This is a common response that shows I understand who you are and I am here to respond and do your will. And so Ananias, this disciple from Damascus, is told in this vision, first of all, all I get is his name here, "Hey, Ananias," and he says, "Yeah, here I am, Lord, I'm here." And there's a lot more to that than just picking up the phone saying, hello. This is a disciple of Christ who's ready to do whatever God says. Here I am boss. Here I am Lord. Here I am captain. Here I am, one in charge of my life.

Talking about the will of God this morning for Ananias's life and Saul's life, I can't help but think about God's will for your life. And some of you saying, well, I'd like to know God's will for my life, but here I'm going to tell you you're never going to know God's will for your life. You never know any specifics about God's will for your life if you don't start where Ananias started, where Samuel started, where Isaiah started by saying, "Here I am, Lord." That's an implication, if you're taking notes, number one, that you are "Willing to Do God's Will." As Jesus himself said, you will not know a lot of things about God's will unless you're willing to do his will. So you've got to be willing to do his will even before you know what that is. Number one, "Be Willing to Do God's Will."

Do you want to know what God wants for your life? Do you want to walk the path and follow the Good Shepherd? Well, the first thing you start with is I am willing to do your will. If I have a will to buy some things on my laptop and we are together and I say, well, I got some things I want to buy and I look at you because you're over at my house and say, "Give me your debit card because I want to put it into this website so I can do my will and buy my stuff." And I bet you're going to say, "Tell me what you're going to buy first before I give you my debit card. I mean, I don't know, if you need a nine-dollar item, that's fine, you're OK. I guess I'll buy your nine-dollar item on this website." But if I say, "Nope, just give me your debit card," I'm assuring you that most of you, unless you're a little crazy, you're not going to give me your debit card. You want to say, "Show me what you want to buy, then I'll give you my debit card



and my PIN number and then I'll let you buy it. But I'm not going to let you go on a shopping spree with my credit card. I need to know what it's going to cost me."

And here's the thing about Christianity, we've studied this a lot in the series already in Acts, is that we come to Christ, according to Luke 14, and we say, "I've already given everything up." Matthew 19, the rich young ruler. I'm giving everything up. I know in my mind I've already said, "God, all right, everything about my life is yours. So whatever you want to do is fine." Now we're living along, plodding along in our Christian life, and when we're moving through that saying, "God, what is your will for my life? What should I do next in life? What should I do for my job? Who should I marry? Where should I go? Where should I live? What kinds of things should I be doing in this next season of my life? What ministry should I be involved in? Should I go on the next church plant?" All these questions you have, what's God's will. Well, you got to start with this. "God, here I am, Lord."

Matter of fact, if you think back to Samuel, when Samuel keeps running into Eli, he keeps hearing God calling him and he keeps saying, "Here I am Lord, here I am Lord." Here's what Eli sends him back to say. Not only do you say "Here I am, Lord" but he adds this phrase. Eli wisely said to the boy, Samuel, he said, "Say this." He says, "Here I am, Lord," that's fine, you can say all that, but here say this, "Speak for your servant is listening," speak for your servant is listening. So there is just so much compounding in that it's like the other side of the word Lord. Lord means you're the boss. Now, here's how Eli helps Samuel understand the will of God. It's going to start with, "Hey, Samuel, I've got a plan for you." And the response is supposed to be and rightly so and the rest of the trajectory of his life proves this. He's saying, "I am your servant. You tell me what you want me to do. I'm here to serve."

So many of us are pitched to Christianity early in our lives that keeps us right there in the center of our world and Christ becomes a part of the orbit of our world. And we're hoping, much like the old geocentric view of the universe, that, you know, the sun will nicely warm up my life and kind of rotate around me and I'm the center of the universe. And that's kind of how we like to think about religion and Christianity. The reality is much like the heliocentric view of the solar system replacing the geocentric view of our solar system, it's like, no, no, no, wait, that's not how it works. It may appear that way, with God's shining his blessings down on me. I mean, but that's not how this works, right? You are not the center. Christ is the center. And you are here as his servant saying, "God, what can I do for you?" A lot of people are saying, what can God do for me? What can Christ do for me? What can my Christianity do for me? That's the wrong thing. And it's pitched that way so often from tracts and Christian books and sermons. And you got to just blow that out of your mind and say that's not the biblical view.

The biblical view is there is a God and God is God. That means he's at the center. That means everything is there to serve and glorify him, to use a biblical phrase. And the idea of my life is God what would you like me to do? So I want to know what your will for my life is. I'd like to know if you're going to interrupt my life with an appointment this afternoon on Aliso Viejo Parkway at Starbucks with a guy from Anaheim. That would be good. I'd like to know that or I'd like to know about my career path that's about to be changed like Saul of Tarsus. I'd like to know that. But it's got to start with me saying my life is a servant life and I want to hear



the will of God. I want to know what God wants, but I'm here to serve you. I'm listening as a servant to the Lord.

By the way, I know you know this phrase that came on the heels of "here I am" when Isaiah said it in Isaiah 6, Sunday school grads, think that through. Here, there is this statement from Heaven's Throne and Isaiah responds, "Here I am!" What's the next phrase? Do you know it? "Send me." Send me. Now, what's funny about that is it didn't start with a statement from the throne of God in this vision. "Hey, I need to send a missionary off to Maui and so I just wonder if there's anyone who wants to go?" "Well, here am I. Send me." That's not what he says. He has no idea where he's going to go.

Matter of fact, here's all that God says in the preceding verse. It says the Lord said, "Who's going to go for us? Who should I send?" And I'm going to say, "Can you put the things in the cart so I can figure out whether my debit card can cover that? I mean, I don't know if I want to sign up for that. Where are you going to send a person? You're looking for someone to send? Where are you going to send them? I wonder how long is it going to take? How much is it going to cost?" He has none of that. His response is simply, "Here am I, send me." I just want to know if I said the Lord's going to walk out here on the platform and he wants to send someone, I hope everyone in the auditorium who is a genuine Christian is going to stand up before Christ ever gives us the mission and say, "Here I am, send me."

How do you get there? Let me turn to Isaiah 6 real quick. Turn with me. Call that up on your device and look at Isaiah Chapter 6 and notice two-component prerequisites for that response. If you want to be able to say your servant's listening, "Here am I, send me." If you want that kind of "I'm willing to do your will before I even know what it is," you're going to need these two things. We've already alluded to them. Let's look at them in a great context here where they're all compounded together in Isaiah Chapter 6. It starts with a statement of the king, King Uzziah, who for 52 years was very prosperous, things were going well, not unlike America. Things were well economically, but morally they were on a decline and collapsing and degenerating quickly. And Isaiah is a part of this kingdom and he has a king here, Uzziah, and he dies.

It's just interesting now that we have the real king behind it all who's concerned with more than the economy in Israel and he is way above king Uzziah. "He's seated on the throne, he is high and lifted up and the train of his robe filled the temple," which is a picture of his majesty, like the gals that get married, the princesses over there in England with a super long train on their robe. It's like that's way too long, right? You don't need that as you go. You're making a big statement there with that. Well, the point is, it's like almost comical, the picture of his robe, the train of his robe, talking about the majesty of it, it's like filling the whole room. And then there are the burning ones it says in verse 2. Seraphim. Seraphim in Hebrew, the burning ones. The seraphim, "They each had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, with two he flew. And they called out and said to one another this: 'holy, holy, holy.'" That means different, set apart, Different, set apart, completely other, transcendent. Unlike any king you've ever met. Way above all kings, all lords, all bosses, all



managers, all sovereigns. He's all above that. "Holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." Do you know that word? The armies.

But if someone walks in and says, "I've got a command for you guys," you're going to go, "Well, who are you?" Who are you? And I bet a lot of us would cross our arms even if it was like your boss from work or your mayor or the governor, clearly. You would probably like, I don't... I'm sorry. I don't want to get political. I could keep going up the chain, but I'm going to stop there. You would like say, "Who are you? I don't do what you say." And the point is you need to keep in your mind going all the way up. Even if we lived in a place like King Uzziah, who could lift up his scepter and have you executed. I bet you'd have more respect for him. But you keep going up. But the king of all the armies of heaven, the king who is superseding and sovereign over all kings of the earth. He's the holy one, and the whole earth should be filled with, and is at least reflections of his glory. It's a fallen earth, I get that, but there ought to be people who recognize the greatness of God.

"And the foundations of the thresholds shook," that's going to get your attention. If we had a big earthquake right now, like, "Oh, now you're listening." Well, then God's going to speak. "The voice of the Lord who called out, the house was filled with smoke and I said," and here's what Isaiah said, "Woe to me, I am lost. I'm a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King," the Lord of the armies, "the Lord of hosts!"

I just say this, the prerequisites, number one, is that you probably don't have a high enough view of God if you do not sincerely say right now that if Christ walked out on this stage and said, "I got a mission," that every one of you should stand up and say, "I'm willing to do whatever that mission is." You have to do that. It's not, you know, here is your mission if you choose to accept it. That's not how it works for Christians. It's for you, it is like, "Yes. Yes before I know what it is." I mean, that's where this goes. Matter of fact, let's jump down here to the punch line. "I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send and who will go for us?' And then I said, 'Where do you want to send someone?'" No, he said, "Here I am! Send me." I don't even know where it is. I'm going to go. I'm willing. I'm here.

OK, so that's the first component, your view of God may be too small, you may not have enough respect for authority, because in our day, particularly in Western culture, we don't want to give anyone authority. We got a flat-lined view of life. Well, it ain't flat line, trust me. It's a pyramid and in God's mind, he clearly is, in all absolute objective truth, he is at the top. He can snuff your life out. He can destroy our nation. He can destroy everything. He can do whatever he wants. He's a sovereign king. And if he's got a will for you, if he's got a desire for your future, your afternoon, next month, next year, for the next ten years of your life, you should be able to say, "OK, you're the authority." Here I am, Lord. That's what Ananias said, "Here I am, Lord." That's what Samuel said. Samuel said, "I'm a servant. You're the boss."

There's another thing here in verse 6 that I think stands in the way of you saying what Isaiah is going to end up saying before he even knows what it is. It's something going on in your own heart, your own mind. "Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning



coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. He touched my mouth and he said, 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin is atoned for,' it's covered, it's gone. You're no longer guilty. He sees the greatness of God. And the higher you view God, the more you see yourself as a sinner. And some of you don't even see yourself as a sinner because you don't have the right view of God. If you have the right view of God, "I am unworthy. I am sinful. What could I ever do for God?"

Well, there's no way you're going to say, I'll do whatever God wants me to do. I mean, if I hired Christ to walk out on the stage and say, "I got a mission," you might say it isn't because I'm not willing to do it. You might say I don't think I'm worthy to do it. And if you think that you don't understand this part. Two prerequisites, a high view of God. Right? And a high view of your forgiveness, I am forgiven. I am forgiven. And here's the problem. It happens in the Bible. A lot of times people have the right response with their words, but in their hearts they don't.

Moses, I hate to throw Moses under the bus this morning. But Moses hears the voice of God in this vision from the burning bush and he says, "Here I am, Lord." He says the right thing. And then the Lord says, "Great, got your attention. Here's the mission. The mission is you're going to go to Pharaoh and tell him to let the people of Israel go." And he goes, "Yes, sir, here I go." Is that what he said? No, we just read this. Exodus Chapter 3 and Exodus Chapter 4 is this whole scene at the burning bush. And here's what Moses said. In the end, here's what he ramps up to saying, "Send someone else." Oooh, what are you busy this week? What do you mean, to send someone else? No, no, no. It wasn't about that. What did he keep saying? I'm not worthy. I mean, that really is saying I can't do it, I don't have the right abilities, I don't have the right skills. Send someone else.

And I don't think with being told of Moses that he's the most humble man, I don't think this was because of the fact that he was too proud to do it. It's because he wasn't willing to accept the forgiveness that God grants. He didn't believe in the atonement that God grants. The problem is he really looked back at his past and he saw the failure of killing that Egyptian, burying him in the sand, gets run out of town, becomes an employee of his father-in-law and mopes around in the Midian desert. And when God says, I got a task for you, he doesn't say, here I am, send me. He goes, "No, I don't want to go." And I think he didn't want to go because he doesn't realize that he's 100% completely accepted and forgiven.

Why do you think God shows, by the way, as long as we're talking about an instrument of God who changes the world, why do you think God chose Saul of Tarsus? Well, we know that Saul turns around and tells Timothy, here's the thing, God chose me the foremost of sinners, that he might demonstrate his perfect patience, his mercy, his grace, his forgiveness. He took the worst to show that any of you here thinking I'm not worthy to do what God asks. What if Christ came out and said, what I'm looking for is a pastor of the next church plant. What I need is a key player in a huge new ministry I'm starting. A lot of you say, well, I want to hear what it is first because I don't know that I'm qualified for that. Now, I know there are practical qualifications for things that God calls you to do. There's training to be had and all that. But I don't want you sitting here saying, Well, here's one of the reasons you can't sincerely say,



"God, I'll do your will before I know what it is," because you're hung up on the fact that you carry in your heart guilt that you should not carry because you think, just like Peter who went out fishing in John 21 when he should have been out preaching, he didn't do it because he carried around stupid guilt in his own heart that God had said is removed, Psalm 103, "As far as the east is from the west."

God uses weak vessels, sinful vessels, people who have done wrong in their past, who have to look at their sin and know this: my sin is atoned for. And then if God says I have a task for you, you say, "Here I am, send me. Because whatever it is, I will do it, I will do it because I'm willing to do your will." I need you to have a high enough view of God to say, "Here I am, send me." I think Moses had that. You also need to have a high enough view of forgiveness in your atonement. Christ said that it is finished. You have to believe, unlike religious people in our country today that think, well, I don't know, I'm hoping to be good enough to be accepted by God. You are, according to Colossians 1, fully accepted. You are fully qualified for this inheritance in the saints and light of the Bible. You have full access the moment you die completely. You're not going to purgatory. You're not going to spin around in some cosmic vacuum until God figures you're pure enough to get there. According to the Bible, your forgiveness is so complete you're fully acceptable for God.

And if that's the case, if he tags you to do something, whatever your imagination is, it scares you that I don't think I'd be worthy of that. Some of you were there. You need to let that go. To do the will of God, you've got to be willing to do the will of God. That is foundational. A high view of God and servant. He's the Lord. I'm a servant. And a high view of your atonement, of forgiveness, of what's been provided you in Christ, God wants to tag me for it. I don't care if I was a blasphemer. I don't care if I was a persecutor of the Church. I don't care what my background is. I will do the will of God. Be willing to do his will.

Back to our text. Like I said, it would be great if I had verse 11 clarity, right? That's super cool. Look at verse 11, "The Lord said, 'Arise and go to the street called Straight,'" of which we have none of in South Orange County, a straight street. But I like the name. Easy to read. Very descriptive. The Straight street. There's a house there with a guy in it named Judas, that's his house. And there's a man staying there, a man of Tarsus named Saul. He's praying. That's what he's going to be involved in doing when you show up. And he's seen in a vision as he's been praying and seeking what God's will is for his life. He sees you showing up and coming and laying hands on him that he's going to regain his sight because remember, we left him for three days blind, not eating. He's fasting. He's there wondering what in the world God's doing with his life because he knocked him off his horse.

Well, it's great Ananias, I'd like to identify with you Ananias but unfortunately, I don't have the advantage of having a vision. I mean, it would be great if I knew the... "Lord, what should I do with my life?" And he tells you directly. That would be awesome. First of all, I would really question how awesome that would be. Because you think you're jealous of the clarity of a vision that he has and here's what I need to tell you. First, let's start categorically - two categories. When it comes to God, God revealing things that would not otherwise be known, there are two categories if we think it through logically, we call it theology. One is what we call



General Revelation, general ways that God expresses things that are general truths. Right? They may be specific reflections of things like the attributes of God. He does that in creation. He does that in conscience. So there are things that I can do to kind of discover a little bit about God by sitting on a beach and watching the sunset. I can learn something about God and even the plan for my life in some general way by looking at the constellations of the stars on a clear desert night. I can say, "Wow, I learn something about God," generally.

Then there's another category, it's called Special Revelation, when God particularly and specifically reveals things that would not otherwise be known. And in that category, you have all these things that you like to envy, like dreams and visions. Oh, if only I could have those. But the capstone at the very end of the clarity, the objectivity, the unchanging nature of God's specific special revelation, the capstone of it is his written word. That's at the top of it. It's God-breathed, just to quote here for a second, a very familiar verse, "All Scripture is breathed-out by God."

Matter of fact, that would be worth looking at, let's look at it real quick. I'm talking fast but we'll have time. So let's go. Second Timothy Chapter 3. Second Timothy 3:16 and 17. Let's take a look at this. You want clarity like a vision, but here's the problem. You had a vision two nights ago about God's will for your life, particularly if it was like Abraham's vision from God when he said, "Here I am," when God said "Abraham" and Abraham said, "Here I am." Do you know what the vision was? "Take your son, your only son, the son that you love, go to the mountain that I'll show you and there sacrifice him as a burnt offering." OK, you had a vision. You got to tell your wife at some point. How does that conversation go? Abraham says, "I had a vision last night." Sarah says, "Really, what was it?" "We're supposed to kill our son." Sarah responds, "Ahhh. What did you have for dinner? Are you on any medications?" I mean, there's going to be a little argument going on, I'm assuming, with your wife about killing your child. I'm just thinking right there we're already into subjective worlds of "did you rightly hear God? Are you sure about that?"

I mean, when Samuel goes in and tells Eli what God revealed to him when he showed him in a vision what was going to happen in Israel. Eli could have said, "Well, now are you sure that's what he said? He said that about my sons. Are you saying that God said about my sons that they're sinful and that Israel is going to suffer because of my parenting? Are you sure? I wish I could see the vision so I could know that." The subjectivity of that is far different than the "ta grafe," the writings in Greek, ta grafe, of the Scriptures, all the Scriptures. "All of the Scriptures are breathed-out by God," this library of 66 volumes of God's revelation. "And they're profitable" for what? "For teaching." It's going to make it clear what God's path is. "For reproof," if I start going off the path. It'll be like a warning bell bing, bing, bing, bing, blind spot. Get back on the path. "For correction." Sometimes you're going to have the wheel, like in these really fancy cars, that push you back on the road. It's going to correct your path. And it's going to train you like reps in a gym, it's going to "train you to do the righteous," good thing, to walk in the good works that are prepared beforehand for you to walk in. That's what it does.

How sufficient is it? "That the man of God may be," here's a big word, "complete, equipped." Equipped for what? "For every single good work." I just want you to go to Samuel and say



"I'm just really jealous, you got clear revelation from God, man, you got a vision. God told you exactly what you should do." Really? And what do you have? "I only got 66 books of God's written revelation." Samuel would say, "How many? 6? I only have 5." You'd say, "No, no, I didn't say 6, it's 66." Samuel would exclaim, "You have 66 books of God's mind on paper? Are you kidding me? So that when you see in God's word something clear that God has said and your wife argues with you about it and you can go and open up the Bible and, 'So look right here, God said it.'" You can end all the debates of the subjectivity of a dream or a vision or a voice by looking right here at the objective propositional truth of God's word. Samuel would declare, "You're telling me you're jealous of my vision last night as I laid in this tent in Shiloh. I'm sorry, you're stupid." I mean, that's what Samuel would say. I mean, really, he'd say, "I'm jealous of you. I'm jealous of how much clarity you have from God." I mean, Isaiah had a few more books than that as God was developing his written canon of Scripture. But you have the totality of God's word on paper so that he says you got enough there that you can be fully complete, fully equipped for every good work. That's huge, that's big.

So we have to work to know God's will, and it isn't you going to sleep and waiting to hear a voice. Number two, "Work to Know God's Will." You work, first of all, by reading the book that he wrote that reveals his will. Matter of fact, it's put this way in Psalm 119, it is a light to our feet, a lamp to our path, "a lamp to our feet and a light to our path." It's going to give us direction. It's going to show us what the next steps ought to be. You've got to saturate your thinking with this book. And I know it doesn't seem that easy because where does it tell me to go to Aliso Viejo Parkway, Starbucks, meet this guy from Anaheim. I don't have all that detail there.

Listen. A couple of things you need to learn. When it comes to the Bible, I know there are lots of genres, I used to teach a genre class at the seminary. But let's just look at two basic genres of literary text of Scripture. One would be called Narrative and one would be called Didactic. I know we can get into a lot more detailed specifics, but Narrative and Didactic genres. The Narrative genres. Some of you are familiar with the narrative genres of Scripture, you read the narratives and as I was teaching classes on this, I would talk about that being simply understood as this is what happened. You wanted to find a narrative genre of Scripture is God telling us this is what happened. It doesn't mean it's the right thing, doesn't mean it's the wrong thing, but it means this is what happened. It's an accurate portrayal. The inerrancy of the word. This is actually what happened. God is not lying to us about what happened. He uses the prophets to record what happened in the narrative texts of the Scripture.

In the narrative text of Scripture, there is a light and a lamp for you to take steps in your future, the will of God is revealed in those narrative texts. And you just knowing history or biblical history or ancient Near Eastern history is not enough. And some of you study the Bible and you don't work hard enough at it because you stay in the ancient text and you never bring that ancient text out into a principalized place where you see the principal and then say, OK, now I have to apply it. Some of you do half the Bible study you should. You don't go all the way. You read a passage like Jeroboam, Solomon's son. Jeroboam then inherits the kingdom. His dad is dead. He goes, "What do I do now? I mean, David, Solomon, now it's me. I'm the grandson of Abraham. What do I do?"



And so he says, "I guess I should call a meeting to figure out what my administration should be about." So he calls in his advisors, which are all of his dad's advisors, and they say, listen, "Your dad built the temple, your dad had this palatial palace built, he did all these fortifications of the city. But what you need to do to establish your kingdom is kind of ratchet back, lower the regulations, lower the taxes," sounding good to me so far, "all of that. That's what you ought to do. And that will establish you in your position. The people will be fine and everything will go great." And he thinks, "OK, well, let me think about it. Pray about it. Get some more council."

He calls in his friends, you know the story? He calls in his buddies, his peers, the kids he grew up with, the people he grew up with. And he says, "What do you guys think I should do?" They say, "Well, man, you're in charge now. You've got all the power, that's awesome. You can tax them as much as you want. It would be great, building project. You can just do as you want and build some really cool places." What's going on? "Just tell them this. Do you think my dad's taxes were high? Wait to get a taste of my taxes. Do you think my dad's regulations were high? Wait to you see my regulations." He starts hearing all these things that he turns around and decides to do and he ends up splitting the kingdom. Jeroboam with his decisions based on who he took counsel from ends up sending Jeroboam into the north, stealing ten tribes away from Israel and it breaks the nation in half in the 10th century B.C..

You can learn a lot about that passage that we just read in our Daily Bible Reading not long ago. "You know, it's interesting, I've learned a lot about the Bible today." And you can go win some Bible trivia games that you play. But it did nothing in revealing the will of God for your life. You never took the time to say what is in this passage that I can learn about what took place in Rehoboam life that will help me put a principle down in my journal and then start to say, how would God have me live this week, this month, this year, based on that principle. If you start doing that disciplined hard work every day in the Scripture, the will of God is going to just brighten up in your mind and you'll say, "I get it now."

I learned a lot about my parent's expectations and teachings to myself and my brother by simply watching how my brother might be suffering under the punitive measures of my parents. Let me put it this way. I walk in, see my brother, he's all down and dopy or whatever, and I go, "Why are you down and dopy today?" He says, "Because I'm grounded until the weekend." I reply, "Really? You're grounded. What did you do?" And he tells me the story. I don't have to hear a word from my parents as to what they said. I can hear it secondhand through how they treated my brother. And guess what? If I'm careful enough to principalize that and apply it to my life, I've just learned the will of God for my childhood in that situation. And the problem is so many of us read what happened in the Bible and all we do is try and master the data, the details. We think it's all about the knowledge. It is about the knowledge, that's foundational. That's about the "then" of the text. I got to figure out the "always" of the text and then I can start working on the "now" in my life in the text and that becomes then the revelation of God for my life. That's the narrative genre.



The other genre is the Didactic genre. "Didactic" comes from the Greek word "Didaktikos." It means "to teach," it's direct teaching. The book of Acts is largely narrative, but every now and then it breaks into instruction that is given to the Church. The Church, hey, I'm a part of the Church. It starts talking about disciples and what they should and shouldn't do directly. "Well, I'm a disciple of Christ." Great. So now I see direct didaktikos. So I see didactic narrative. And I think, OK, there are the commands of Scripture for me and I should live by those.

But it's not as easy as you think. You start looking at passages like Romans 14 when the church at Rome was all mixed in with Jews who had this background with making sure that they celebrated Rosh Hashanah, they celebrated the Feast of Purim, they celebrated the Passover Feast. And now they're Christians and none of that matters anymore according to Hebrews 10:1 and all that Christ taught about the ceremonial law being out the window and all these other Greeks and Romans in the church in Rome, they didn't care about that. So there's all this conflict. We read this. We see direct principles as to how Christians ought to treat one another as it relates to those debatable matters. And you say, "Well, oh, there you go. I'm just going to apply this text." Well, you can apply this text, then you should apply the text. But the specifics of how that text were applied was applied in a context that's no longer valid for your life. You've got to extract even the teaching and be able to say, "OK, now how do I update this? How do I understand how this applies now?"

Put it this way. You can work for a company that's been around for a long time, 75 years, 100 years. Let's just assume you're in a business that's been around a hundred years. It was incorporated, it's got articles of incorporation, it's got bylaws, the things that run the company in the corporation's documents, they are there and they're set. But they were done at a time where the whole context is completely different than yours. But thankfully, if the company is still around after a hundred years, it's probably successful, it's probably profitable and so it's been a winning formula. But you are here 100 years later as an executive in the company trying to figure out how to apply them, even though they're direct statements, you've got to now understand at least the context in which you live and say, "OK, how does that specifically address the situation here today?"

All the issues that we're dealing with in life, right? I mean, down to the bioethics. Bioethics is not an issue in the Bible, but there are principles there, even in the direct didactic sections of Scripture. That's the hard work of Bible study that some of us aren't doing. And then we're going, "I wonder why I don't know the will of God for my life. I don't know if I should take that job. I don't know if I should take that ministry. I don't know if I should do that thing." And I'm telling you this, we've got to work hard to know the will of God. And it starts with you studying the Bible to know the will of God. We don't start with application, but we end with application every time we study the Bible. And some of us don't have that discipline in place.

And I'm exhorting you one more time, it's like your grandpa's church used to exhort you, study the Bible. That doesn't mean learn the facts of the ancient Near East or the early church in Rome. It means really work to take the principles and put them clearly in place, make sure they're cross-referenced with the rest of the principles of the Bible, and then start saying how does this affect my life at work this week? How does this affect my career decision? How



does it affect my family life? How does this affect what I tell my children they can and cannot do? That has to be done every day in the Christian life as a practice. And guess what? Then you become saturated with the truth of God's word and guess what becomes clear? God's will for your life.

Our text says here in verse 12 about Saul, just almost says it in passing. Here are just three words in our English text, the last three words of verse 11, "he is praying." You're going to go and you're going to be clear about what Saul should do and guess what he's doing right now. Well, number one, I know he's not eating and he's not seeing, but he's praying. I'm quite sure you've been knocked off your horse, you've had a career in killing Christians, now the king of the Christian shows up, knocks you off your horse and says, "Why are you persecuting me?" And says, "Go to this house. You're not going to be able to see." I think Saul is rethinking his career at this point. It's good to know that he is praying. Praying is always a key element in deciphering the will of God. I just want to say that as a sub-point here. To work to know the will of God means you work at Bible study to know the will of God and you work at prayer to know the will of God. Again, Grampa's sermons. Fine, he was right. Study the Bible and pray.

But that means perhaps more than you think it does. A kind of prayer life that does this. Turn with me to James Chapter 1. A very simple verse. I know you know it, but let's look at a few passages here in James. You need to be praying this way. Let's start with this. James Chapter 1 verse 5. James Chapter 1 verse 5. Have you heard this verse before? "If anyone lacks wisdom..." Wisdom. You know what wisdom is. Wisdom is taking the principles of God's word and applying them. There's a genre, by the way, of Old Testament Scripture called wisdom literature. Wisdom literature it's a great thing. It's why, as young Christians, a lot of us are gravitating toward Proverbs because they're just the distilled principles. That's a great place to start to learn where every passage needs to get to a distilled principle.

But in that wisdom, it's always like, OK, now you have the principal and often even in Proverbs, here's how you live it out. So wisdom is being able to take the truth of God's word, didactic, parabolic, narrative, whatever it might be, and to say, OK, now I need to know how to apply it. Do you need to know how to apply it? Do you need to know the will of God? Do you need to know how you should be proceeding in your future? Well, here's what it says. Let him ask God. That's called prayer. Let him ask God, ask God. But I just wonder even that, oh, you know, you're yarning your way through this sermon. Listen, have you been doing that this week? Have you really been doing that this week? Have you been saying to God, "God, I need to know what's next for me? God, I need you to tell me what it is I should be doing, God I need you to give me wisdom. How do I apply the principles that are light and a lamp for my life and my path? Tell me how I put that to work. What's the next step for me?" Let them ask.

God's one who's waiting for people to ask that. He gives generously to all without reproach. That's a good thing that goes back to that principle of Isaiah 6. You need to be not so laden with guilt that you're not even willing to ask God for wisdom because you think he's going to say what did you do with the last wisdom I gave you. Right? You need to go, "OK God, I'm starting over, I'm going to right now pray to you. Give me insight. Give me wisdom." The Bible says he'll give it to you. But, verse 6, you can't waver. You can't ask without faith. "Let him ask



in faith without doubting. For anyone who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind." Some of you doubt that the wisdom that you need for life is found in prayer and Bible study. Some of you think that there are other things that really should be the primary factor for you, like what your parents expect, like what your friends want you to do, like what the culture says is acceptable, like what your friends at work would say. You've got to say, no, no, I got to look at this and say, I need to say, "God, you are the source of wisdom. You've recorded it in black and white in the Bible. And now you're asking me to pray to you that you might tell me how to live it out in my life. I'm going to ask you and I'm not going to doubt because if I doubt, I'm like bouncing back and forth like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind."

For that person, by the way, I don't think you can get anything from God. Shouldn't suppose you receive anything from Lord. You're a double-minded man and unstable in all of your ways, your paths. The will of God for you is messed up. It's frenetic because you're not someone praying in light of Scripture as to how to apply that to the future of your life. You do that and you believe that God has got the answer and not the world, not the voices of the world, not your talk show hosts, not your podcasts, not your neighbors, not your friends. But the ultimate authority and the ultimate wisdom as to what you should be doing in the future is going to come from God. If you believe that you'll be fine.

But that double-mindedness, he kind of revisits that in Chapter 4, so turn to Chapter 4 real quick in James. And this is the problem with our praying. We can even use biblical means with an unbiblical motive and unfortunately, we're double-minded. Our double mindedness comes from I want God in the equation, but really what I want is what I want. And he says in verse 3, look at James 4:3, "You ask and you don't receive, because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions." And let's just go back to the thing he told us to ask for in Chapter 1. Some of you are asking for wisdom and clarity, "I want to know the will of God," and you're not getting it, because really the first point of the sermon we really didn't get past.

The first point of the sermon was you say to God, I'll do your will before I even know what it is. And some are saying, "Really what I want is your blessing on my will. That's what I want." Even though the Bible says this and Jesus taught us to pray this way in Matthew 6 he said, you ought to be praying "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." All the earth, including my little part of the earth, including my life and my house and my room and my mind. I want your will to be done here. If you're praying that then you're not saying, "God, I want you to rubberstamp my desires. I want you to rubberstamp my... I want more green pastures and still waters. So give me wisdom on how to get there." I mean, that's really how some of us pray. "God, I want to know the will of God for my life so that I can have more green pastures and more still waters. That would be good. God, please. I'm praying, just like the pastor said."

You're not praying as the pastor said. The pastor said we come to God and say whatever it is you want me to do. I want to study your word to know the will of God, I want to pray to know the will of God, and I'm not double-minded because I'm not about just saying God bless my desires, my passions. I don't have a foot in both worlds. Look at verse 4, "You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?" You say, "I'd sure



like to please the world with the future of my life. I'd like to please all the people in my life with the future of my life." No, I've got to say, I got to make a decision. Who am I going to please? "Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says," look at verse 5, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he's made to dwell in us?"

That takes us back to the first prerequisite of Isaiah 6. God is great, he's the Lord, he's the creator, or to put it in terms of Psalm 100, "He is the shepherd. He is our maker. We are the sheep of his pasture." He created us, not ourselves. So I know this. He's created me. My spirit is his. I belong to him. Because I'm a moral agent, because I'm an individual with decision making capacity, I can be a wandering sheep, but God would like me to say, "Nope, I'm willing to please you. I'm praying with a motive that says whatever you want. I'm praying for your will to be done on earth. Just like people in heaven comply joyfully I'd like to comply joyfully down here." Be willing to do the will of God, that's primary. You got to work to know the will of God. And you know what? You don't need a vision to figure that out. You need more Bible study. You need more prayer.

Back to our text. If God is gracious in giving you that direction, which I'm confident he will, I need you to be as heroic as Ananias and Saul. Look at verse 13. When Ananias got the instructions, he did have a little stutter step here, right? "Ananias said, 'Lord, I've heard about this man. I know how much evil is done to your saints at Jerusalem,'" and he's got in his backpack a little piece of paper from the high priest that he could arrest people like me. "He's got authority from chief priests to bind all who call on your name,'" and I happen to be one of those people. But the Lord said, suck it up, right? The Lord said, man up, Right now, I just need you to do it. It's all done in two letters in English. "Go." He should go. Go. Why? Because I'm going to give you information about his future plan and his future plan is that "he is a chosen instrument," just like you're being used as an instrument right now Ananias.

"He's my chosen instrument" and he's got a whole career change coming. "An instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and the kings and the children of Israel," and I will show him how much fun he's going to have doing that. Underline the word "fun" in verse 16. Do you see that? No. Just like Ananias was walking through the valley of the shadow of death because he thought he might die if he ends up confronting Saul with information about Christ and revealing that he is a disciple of Christ, he said, I'm going to tell him that the path for him is going to be a little bit like yours. Matter of fact, it'll be a lot worse than yours. "I'm going to show him how much he's going to have to suffer for me."

I know the temptation once we hear clearly the will of God for our lives is, "I'm really glad, I was really sincere, I really wanted to do it, but now that I know how scary it is, I know how many enemies are going to confront me, I would like to pass." And I would tell you this, number three, you should never let fear or pain stop you. "Don't Let Fear or Pain Stop You." Do you want an example of that? Here's the negative example. In Exodus 4, Moses goes "Send someone else." I think it was part of his own deprecation, his own sense of his own unworthiness, like Peter in John 21.

But I'll tell you a guy who did it in a stellar way, Genesis 22. It's the guy I've already said who responded to the Lord, "Lord, here I am." Abraham. Abraham is told to take his son, the only son, the son that he loved, go to the mountain I'll show you and there sacrifice your son. And I imagine what the conversation might have been like. I'm not even sure he had it that night with his wife, but here's what the next verse says. "So Abraham got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, took his servants and his son, and he went." That passage is mind-boggling. If there's ever a morning I'm going to sleep in, I'm thinking that's the morning. If there's ever a morning I going to take the long road, go drive through, get a breakfast burrito, spend my time lingering on the camel. it's going to be that morning. "He arose early in the morning and he went."

I just love even in our passage, the Lord says, "Go." Matter of fact, we'll get to it next time, but verse 17. "So Ananias departed and entered the house." OK. Was it scary? Yes. Did that stop him? No. How about Saul of Tarsus who becomes Paul the Apostle, who I hope is a beloved instrument of the Lord in your life. I just wonder when he finds out how much he was going to have to suffer for his name, I just wonder how glad you are that he did the will of God.

People are depending on you staying on the track and not being afraid. Later, the apostle Paul, who knew what it was to watch guys like Ananias at the very beginning of his Christian life power through the fear and the pain. He met a guy named John Mark who was on a missionary journey with him and John Mark says, "Ah, it's getting too hard," and he bails out. I completely understand, I think there is absolutely nothing wrong with it, that Paul looks at a guy like that and goes, "I cannot depend on you. When the will of God is clear in your life you back out when it gets hard." And so when it came time to take someone on a missionary journey again, he goes, "I'm not taking John anymore." Is there our hope for you if that's been your past? Well, sure, there was hope for John Mark, because later at the end of Paul's life, he writes in Second Timothy, "I'd like to have John Mark back." Right? I don't think he was apologizing for what he did because I don't want to go and risk my life serving the Lord with people in the foxhole that I'm in who are going to bail out when the bullets get too close.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego needed each other in that fiery furnace because they needed comrades who were committed to the end, no matter how scary it was. They answered in a first-person, plural pronoun, "We will not bow down to you." And I'm just telling you this, I don't want it when it gets hard, when the valley of the shadow of death gets so dark that that shadow is like overwhelming that you say, "Well, now it's time to wander. I know the Lord's led me here. I know that this is where he set the table for me, but I just don't think I can do this." Don't let your own sense of inferiority, don't let your own sense of insecurity, don't let your fears, don't let your love for your own reputation get in the way of you saying I'm going to stick it out.

Are there course corrections? Sure there were. A couple of weeks ago in that Divine Appointments sermon with Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, we talked about that. There are times when God opens a door, you walk through it, he'll close the door and have you walk out. But I'm not talking about circumstantial closed doors. I'm talking about if you know God has called you to something in your life, I'm just saying do not let fear, do not let pain, do not



let suffering get in the way. Aren't you glad that Ananias did it even if he were scared? Aren't you glad that Saul did exactly what he should have done that when they told him in Ephesus you're going to suffer and go to Jerusalem and they're going to bind you, you're going to be arrested? He says, "I don't care. I count my life worth nothing to me, but only that I can finish the course that the Lord has set for me."

The prayer that Jesus taught us to pray. "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." I mean, he was the ultimate one to live that out, wasn't he? In the Garden of Gethsemane and you know the passage I'm about to quote, he lived out something that I just want to point out that maybe a passage you don't think of very often. About the Lord that is spoken of in Hebrews 10 when he was being incarnate, he was given a human body. That's the point of the passage in Hebrews Chapter 10 verse 5. It says that "When Christ came into the world," one of the things it says about Christ and it's quoting Psalm 40, it says that the Lord said, so picture the Son of God saying to the Father, saying, "Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as was written of me in the scroll of the book." Christ had a prerequisite foundational presuppositional, absolutely a definitive just resolve to say, "I will do the Lord's will."

Then it got tough in the Garden as he thought about the fact that not only would he be stripped naked and hung on a Roman execution rack outside the city of Jerusalem, but that God the Father would take all the sin that you deserve to be punished for and lay it on him and that he would become a guilt offering. He had all of that in view and he said, "This cup, if there's any way, let it pass from me, but," you know the passage, "not my will but yours be done. We can hail Abraham, we can even in the end, hail Moses for doing what he should have done in the end. We can hail Samuel, we can hail Isaiah, we can hail Ananias. We can be really excited about the apostle Paul doing the will of God. And I want that to be the motivation for you to stay on the path of doing the will of God, but all of it is trumped by Christ who said, "I'm here to do your will, O Lord, I'm here to do you will, O God. I will do what you want me to do."

And when the worst possible suffering, pain, fear gripped him in the Garden his end resolve was not my will, not what I want but your will, what you want. It's the only reason any of this makes any sense. I don't want to spend the rest of my life giving up my dreams, my hopes, things I wanted and I had plenty of dreams for my life to be doing stuff that I know God wants me to do, I don't want to waste my life doing this, if at the end of my life none of it matters. If I get cast into outer darkness and suffer eternity away from God or if it's all done when I die and it's just done, why would I waste any time on this? But the only reason doing the will of God and following the Good Shepherd down a path of good works ordained for me ahead of time, the only reason that ever makes sense is because Christ did the will of the Father and took my sins and atoned for them. Because of that we can say, OK, let's go out and do what God asked us to do. Let's not deviate from the path, let's not fear of pain, we're going to do the will of God, and if I don't know what it is, I'm going to start by saying, "I will do it whatever it is." I'm going to study the Bible and I'm going to pray and discover the will of God. I'm going to do it.



So that's why it's appropriate for us to end our time together with a celebration of the Lord's Supper. These elements remind us of Christ doing the will of God when it was hard. But more importantly than that, about the atonement that was purchased on a cross for us. If you're not a Christian, you don't know where you stand with God, just let these elements pass by. Do not take them, just pass them by. This is for our church families, this is for those who know Christ, who are repentant and put their trust there. You take those elements and spend some time in prayer. We always do that to make sure that you're confessed up with any unconfessed sin in your life. Tell God if it's your unwillingness to deal with God or even if that subtle sin of you saying, "I've been saying I'll do the will of God if you tell me what it is. Put those items in the cart and then I'll see if I'll hand you my debit card." If that's been your life, repent of that even now and say, "OK, God, I'm going to do your will. You did the will of the Father and you purchased my life so that I'm not going to go to hell. I'm certainly grateful." So look at that and say that for me is my hope and my life. It is what I live for and I'm willing to do your will.

So take those elements and hang onto them, we'll take them together. We'd like to do that corporately at one time. This is an expression of our unity in Christ. Spend some time, at least searching your heart, asking God as Psalm 139 says, "Try me, know me, see if there's any wicked way in me." Have that conversation with God. Then at some point tell God your resolve to do his will even before you know what it is. Then I'll come back up in about three minutes and we will take these elements together. You talk to God silently.

So grateful that Jesus Christ did what he was called to do. I'm grateful, as you are, that the apostle Paul was faithful to respond to the will of God in his life obediently. I'm even more grateful for his perspective on that as he writes to the Colossians, staying on that track of doing the will of God, even when it got hard. He called it a stewardship. So I see it as my stewardship, that, in other words, this is what I must do and he says I'm doing it for you he told the Colossians, of course, all for the honor of God. But he said, "I am," he put it in an interesting way, he said, "I'm filling up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ." That's a strange thing to say, almost sounds dissonant in our ears. Well, how could Christ's suffering lack anything? The stewardship of him giving himself for the body of Christ, walking the path as was revealed to him through Ananias of suffering many things and serving the Church. He said, I'm doing that joyfully, "I rejoice in my sufferings as I'm filling up the afflictions," the sufferings, "of what was lacking in Christ." That idea of him lacking something in his sufferings, of course, had nothing to do with his sufferings on the cross.

The anguish of Christ on the cross of course, he said at the end "Telelestai," it is finished, it's done. Paid in full. He did all the suffering he needed to do for us to hold these elements to think about the fact that his blood and his body on that cross allowed me to be completely forgiven. That God, in that transaction said, "OK, Mike Fabarez, you are not guilty of one sin that you've committed." That's a great thing. An amazing thing.

But there are a lot of things between here and the time his kingdom comes that has to be done. That God says he's going to "build his church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." I've got to build my church. And in building the church, everyone needs to who is called by my name "needs to walk on the path of good works that God has prepared



beforehand." Which is not you just keeping your nose clean in life. It's about YOU doing what God has called you to do. It's about serving. It's about being the kind of evangelist you need to be, it's about being the kind of sacrificial friend you need to be. It's about being the counsel that you should be. It's about being in the right job, in the right place, in the right geographical location, all those things fulfilling that path. And Paul said, I rejoice in the fact that even when it gets hard, I look back and say that's the right thing, that's a good thing, it's a stewardship. I owed that not only to God, I owe that to those who depend on me staying on the path.

The Lord is my shepherd. Jesus clearly, even though he called himself our Good Shepherd, looked to the Father and said, "I'm here to do your will" and he did it. Just encourage you as you think about the ultimate act of obedience, Christ dying on a cross that we might be forgiven should be seen as the ultimate motivation, as it says in Hebrews Chapter 12, that "He endured such hostility against himself from sinners, that we would not grow weary and not be fainthearted." "That we," it says two verses earlier, "can run with endurance the race that is set before us." We can look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him down the road, he can look back just like you will look back a hundred years from now, if you stay on the path and you follow the Good Shepherd and you will experience the joy of saying, the Good Shepherd, I followed him through the hard times and it was a good path filled with good fruit and good works. "For the joy set before him, he despised the shame." It's a great Greek word, he looked down on it. He thought less of it. Just like the apostle Paul said, "I rejoice in my sufferings." He despises the shame.

I hope that this sermon, I'm trying to focus on the negative, but I don't need to preach a sermon about doing the will of God when it's easy. Green pastures and still waters, well bring more of that on. A sermon that has to focus on the difficulty and the fears of an Ananias doing the will of God even if it was scary or Paul doing the will of God for the rest of his life, that career change when it was going to be tough, when he was going to suffer. But I am saying in the end, all of us, you look back and say it's good. You'll say, surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life. That's a strong Hebrew word, "Radap" to chase me down, it's going to overtake me, "and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." We'll look back and we'll see foundationally the obedience of Christ saves us and now the joy of fulfilling God's path and will for my life, it'll also motivate us as we're faithful to follow the Good Shepherd. If you're trusting in Christ, we invite you to eat this bread and drink this in remembrance of him.

God we have this experience of ingesting these elements to remind us who you are, the Christ that we want to be so associated with, it's as though we are in you and you in us, and we rejoice in the fact that we're accepted because of your finished work, Jesus Christ, we're grateful for you doing this for us. God, while we're not paying you back and we can't earn it, we certainly want to do our best to reflect what you did in saying every day "your will be done on earth as in heaven" and not just somewhere else, but right here in our lives saying, "not my will, but yours be done." Thank you, God, for this good reminder in the book of Acts.

In Jesus name. Amen.