



Useful to the Lord – Part 3

Open Doors for the Word

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I happen to know something good about you. Something good about you, something that resides as a virtue in the depth of who you are. You may not think about it as often as you should, but it's there. And in short, I guess I could put it this way. If you're a real Christian you want to please God, that you want to be pleasing to him, you want to make your life count for him. That's a desire, by the way, that does not reside in the heart of all the non-Christians you interact with throughout the week. It is not even the universal internal desire of everyone in the room. There are churchgoers here who are just here because. I'm talking about you as a genuine follower of Christ.

You know something of the depths of the grace of God that has forgiven you of all your sins. That didn't happen out of thin air. It happened because the second person of the Godhead put on human flesh, dwelt among us, lived as you should have lived, and then died and absorbed a penalty that you deserve. And you realize the depth of love in that. That there's no greater love than that, that God, your creator would see you as a sinner and send his Son to die in your place. That is the thing that makes it a core desire of a real regenerate heart that says, "I want to please God. I mean, I want my life to count for him. I want to make a difference. I'd like to be useful with my life for the King." That's your desire.

And because that exists in the heart of every real Christian in the room here today, I want to encourage you that this is not going to be a wasted time this morning because what I have to say to you, these three biblical principles from the four verses we're going to look at near the top of Acts 13, is going to make a difference as it relates to that core desire. It is going to, I guarantee you, is going to make you more useful to God. It's going to make your life count more for him. It's going to allow you to please God that will really be compatible with that desire that you have in your heart. I know that because if I invert these, if you don't have these, the absence of these three principles, I assure you, will render you as not useful to God because you will not be someone whose life matters for God's cause in this world. So these are essential.

We learned them from the life of the Apostle Paul and Barnabas here in Acts 13. We're just going to look at four verses beginning here in this passage in verse 13, Acts 13:13, 13 through 16, and I have finally gotten around to putting the much-promised and anticipated map on your worksheet. And I think it's helpful for you to orient yourself because part of the geography that is underpinning this historical trip really is part of what helps us get our first principle out of this text. And so maybe even by way of review, if you start by looking at this and if you didn't get a worksheet, it's all on the website. Go to compasschurch.org and you'll see one of the big orange boxes right up near the top that says "Sermon Notes." And if you download that either on PDF or Word or however you like it, there are plenty of options, you'll see a nice color version of it on your phone or your iPad or your laptop. So that map reminds us where we've been, where the map says starting point in the upper right-hand corner, that's where we started Chapter 13.



In Acts Chapter 13 we started in Antioch. As I often said when we were there, Antioch of Syria, Syria north of Israel. You can look down, straight down from that, and you'll see Jerusalem down there and that's familiar territory if you've ever had any biblical orientation of geography. You look to the left of Jerusalem and to the southwest of Antioch of Syria, you see that big body of water, that's the Mediterranean Sea of course, and you'll see the starting point there. That's where we started in the first few verses where we saw God saying to Paul and Barnabas set these apart, "Set Barnabas and Saul apart for the task or the work that I've called for them to do." And so there they were teaching in the church, leading in the church. And now God says, OK, these two guys on the team, we want to send them off on this work that I have for them to do.

So they get in a boat there near Antioch of Syria, and you see the solid line. That's their departure. And we studied this last week. They went there to the island of Cyprus and on the island of Cyprus there on the eastern side, Salamis, that was the port. And then they work their way through the island, preaching the gospel to people on the island. And then we saw the drama last week ending up there, where they ran into the proconsul of the island of Cyprus. He was, of course, the one in charge by Rome's appointment to govern the island in Paphos. And so that's where we saw some opposition. But the great news was Sergius Paulus, the proconsul there, becomes a Christian because of the testimony of the Apostle Paul and Barnabas. And so this was a major victory, even though it came amid much opposition.

Well, today we pick up the story when they're there at Paphos and they're going to sail north, northwest and they're going to sail up to the mainland of what today is Turkey in the first century Asia Minor and they're going to travel inland. So let's pick up the story in verse 13 with that in view. So keep your mind on that map and then let's read this text. I'll read it for you. You follow along. I'll read from the English Standard Version, and we'll see where they make this move from the island back to the mainland, which, by the way, is 170 miles. So I put this as a tiny little map, but this is a big distance here on ancient seafaring, and it wasn't easy to do. Imagine what it might have been like to be on that boat.

Acts 13:13. "Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. There on the map if you see Pamphylia is the most southern part of this landmass here. And then Perga is this just barely inland here about 10 miles, which was the major city, a fairly major city there in this region of Pamphylia. That's where they take a first point of reference geographically on the mainland. And then it says, sadly, "And John left them and returned to Jerusalem." So if you look at your map, you can see that dot and dashed line. That's where they return. Or that's where I should say John Mark returns. It gets on a boat there and heads all the way back, probably to, I'm assuming to Caesarea or Joppa and he finds port in Israel and then makes his way back to Jerusalem, so he goes home.

Verse 14, but after parting ways with John Mark, "they," that is Paul and Barnabas in particular, "they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia." Now look at your map again. That's where they're moving north through this, really it's an upward trek. Antioch in



Pisidia or Pisidia Antioch is 3,600 feet above sea level, so you're going from sea level to 3,600 feet and it's through a forest and it's 100 miles. So this isn't just, you know, this is not just taking an Uber to get there. This is a lot of work. Of course, there are plenty of roads and the Romans had done a great job with that. It was just all laid out perfectly for the expansion of the gospel in the first century and they go to Antioch.

Now you'll get confused if you're not careful because Antioch is where they left from. And then Antioch is where they're going here in this passage. But you know, those are two different Antiochs. There are actually a lot of Antiochs, there are seven different Antiochs at this point somewhere on this landmass, and I assume they put up with that a lot more graciously than we do because they weren't going to airports, you know, trying to catch a flight to Antioch. I mean, the travel was a lot harder. So if you're in Antioch, that's where you're going to spend most of your life near that Antioch, whichever Antioch it was, and Antiochus a popular figure in history and so of course, lots of Antiochs named after him.

Nevertheless, think about a 100-mile trek, 3,600 feet above sea level. You're marching up to Antioch of Pisidia, Pisidia in Antioch. They get there. They get there and on the Sabbath day, the Saturday, they went into the synagogue, which the synagogue you remember that's the place where the Old Testament believers in Yahweh, believers of the God of the Old Testament, they would gather together. They would read the Scriptures, they would study, they would be teaching. All that would take place. It would be open to those who wanted to have an interest in Judaism, or they were, as it says in the text that we're about to read, God-fearers, they were Greeks perhaps, Romans, but they wanted to know about the God of the Old Testament. They were welcome there, of course, as the reading of the law took place.

And it says on that Sabbath day, they came to the synagogue and they sat down. In other words, they were part of the service. After reading from the law and the prophets, and it's just the way to talk about the Old Testament, sometimes you'll see the Old Testament just represented with the word "the law." Of course, that represents it all, usually. Sometimes it's a distinction in this case when you have the word "the prophets," of course, it's distinguishing certain kinds of books from the first five books of the Old Testament. Sometimes even we'll see "the law, the prophets and the writings." Those are the three categories we often talk about, the historical writings, poetic writings, prophets and the law. So you're talking about the same 39 books that we're used to having on the left side of our Bibles, and they're reading it all.

Of course, this is in the first century, mid 1st century and they're in the synagogue. They're worshiping Yahweh, they're studying the Bible, it says, "The leaders of the synagogue," middle of verse 15, "sent a message to them, saying, 'Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.'" Now, that just seems odd, right? Like if you're visiting today and we say, "Hey, you want to come and talk a little bit up here, friend?" I mean, it's like, "No." It's just weird. Like, why would that happen? Well, for one, that was much more a part of what you saw in the synagogue services in the first century. But if you're out on the patio meeting Paul, you recognize this is a guy who was like educated at the top pharisaical, you know, educational institutions like meeting someone from Harvard or Yale or Princeton or



something is like he sat at the feet of Gamaliel, a great teacher of the law. This guy had all the academic background and degrees. Talk about someone who knows the law and the prophets.

I mean, I've been there a few times in my life where some luminary comes in and I think, man, you ought to be teaching, not me. You know, you're some big, huge brain in the audience. And there was that sense of, "Hey, do you want to come up and share?" So it made sense not only was it more free-flowing in terms of that kind of thing sometimes happening, we see that in the gospels with the life of Christ, but it made sense that this guy is a big shot. I mean, Paul has got such a pedigree, such a background, a resume of high education. So they say, "you have something to say?" I mean, we just read the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Do you have something to say? Paul says in verse 16, "Nah. No. I'm fine. Where's the Connect table?" No, he says, "Yeah, I'll talk." "Paul stood up and he motioned with his hand and he said, 'Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen.'"

Now, that's all we're going to say today. We'll see in verse 17 next week as we continue, we'll study what he said. It's the longest recorded sermon of the Apostle Paul and we have this record of him preaching. He's going through the Scriptures and there are very strategic reasons for what he says. But he starts talking, we're assuming about some of the things that might have been read in the scrolls that morning. And so off we go in that. That's very important and we'll get to that. But the only reason I'm dealing with four verses today is because I want us to take three principles from this that I think are critical, based in part on the fact that they had gone from Antioch of Syria to Antioch of Pisidia and 300 miles away they're in two different cities. This is not their home church, right? They're no longer worshiping in the synagogues. I mean, they're out of their normal routine. Paul is going to end up selling tents on the side to support himself. He's having to find places to eat he wouldn't normally go. He's trying to find a place to sleep at night. His companions are trying to make do with what they got as they're traveling into southern Galatia, and it's not home for them.

And if you came up to Paul and you came up to Barnabas as they sat there in a service in Antioch of Pisidia and you say, "Hey, what are you doing here?" They would know why they were there. They would go back in their mind to sitting in Antioch of Syria, saying, "God set us apart for work. We're here because God sent us here. God sent us on a mission to come here, to talk to you about Christ that the Old Testament speaks of." It would be very clear for them. They would understand clearly what they were doing. Their mindset would be this place is not where I would live, it's not where I choose to live. It's not Tarsus, it's not Jerusalem, it's not Antioch of Syria. I'm in a foreign place, but I'm here for a reason and I know why I'm here. That's supercritical. That's key.

And in our church, it's not unusual because we often have that experience in the minds of a good chunk of our people every 24 months or so. Because every couple of years we plan a new Compass Bible Church and we say to people, "Hey, here's the pastor who we're sending and we're going to get a team together and a core group, and we're going to have a launch team. And we want to have some people move with this pastor into a new community and start a Bible-teaching Compass Bible Church that's evangelistically aggressive and they're



going to go out there and reach the community for Christ. And even when we started up the road in Huntington Beach, our very first domestic church plant, and we say we're going to plant a church, we even said to the people that we're going, "Hey, we know you could commute up there, but if you're going to go be part of the core team, we want you to sell your house or get out of your lease and we want you to move up to Huntington Beach near the place where we're going to plant this church," which at that time was Marina High School and we're going to have our services there. We're going to rent some offices and you're going to go and help us reach the community for Christ.

We think there's a need. There's room for a good Bible-teaching expository preaching church and we're going to do that. So, 150, whatever 200 people, I forget how many there were. They all moved. A lot of them kept their same jobs. They could commute to their jobs, but they moved into communities and they set up shop. And you know what? If you ask them what are you doing here? They would have it in their mind clearly. "Well, we're here to plant a church." If someone said, "why did you move to Huntington Beach?" They said, "Because we're coming to plant a church and if you want to be more specific, we're coming to preach the gospel to the community. That's why we're here." And then we did another one in Tustin, and then we did another one in the Treasure Valley of Idaho, and then we did another one in the Hill Country of Texas. And we keep doing that and every time we take 150, 200 people and we send them there and they go with the mindset of we're here on a mission. That's what we're doing. We know why we moved into this community.

Now, granted, the worse things get in our state, people are fleeing for a lot of reasons. "Wherever your next church plan is, I'm going as long as it's not in California." And I get that that's why some of the motive gets a little cloudy with some of our church plant teams. But the folks who are focused on what their mission really is, they go in thinking, this is why I'm going. "Yeah, and I enjoy some things about that as opposed to here, but I'm going for that purpose." And if you had three families, you know, out of the dozens and dozens of families that are going out there saying, "Well, we got a house in this community and it's really cool because we got another Compass family moving into the same community about three blocks over here. And then about five blocks over here we have another core family over here and all of us we're all in the same community, it's awesome because the three families all representing Christ in the church and the gospel, it'll be great. We'll invite them to our programs and we'll get them involved in Bible study and we'll see if we can get them in Partners and it'll be great." They see their mission clearly. That's a mindset that's very important for us to maintain, even if we never move from South Orange County, California.

I recently was asked to address our Navigating Motherhood leaders a couple of Saturdays ago, and I got up to encourage them because I'm so proud of that ministry because they have this very aggressive mindset to say this ministry is not about just serving moms in our church, it's about getting people outside of the church to be exposed to our church and this program and their parenting to think about God and transcendent issues which people often do when they have new kids and to think about things greater than my own comfort and convenience. So let's get them in our church. Let's get them acclimated to who we are. Let's give them some principles about parenting. Let's preach the gospel to them, and they have that mindset.



And even before I went up into the pulpit to address them a couple of Saturdays ago, I was sent a map of the work that they did to go out and put the posters up to advertise for our new semester that's coming up for Navigating Motherhood. And it was so encouraging because I saw this map of South Orange County from Lake Forest down to San Clemente, and here were all these places where they were able to put up like advertisements and invites in the window of the dry cleaner and the window of the donut shop. And you know, all these different places saying come to navigating motherhood, come to our church. And they had that mindset, and I praised them for that. And I said to them what's so important for me as a pastor, staying in one place and trying to continually plant churches in other places is that I've got to make sure that the people who are staying here never turn in their minds into settlers. They have to continue to think as pioneers, spiritual pioneers and not spiritual settlers.

And I said, that's why I'm so grateful for this ministry, among others in our church that are focused entirely on this ministry is to reach people for Christ. And those ministries in particular help us keep on the edge of that pioneering spiritual mindset because they say, "Hey, I can get into this community. I can get into this park, into this neighborhood, go to this mall and I can help people understand who we are, who Christ is and lead them to faith in Jesus." And that is the picture of a missionary mindset, a mindset of saying, I know why I am here, I'm here for a particular purpose.

And ultimately, that is all summed up in one simple little phrase from Second Corinthians Chapter 5 verse 20 and I bet you know the verse. Second Corinthians Chapter 5 verse 20 simply reads like this, "Therefore, we are Christ's ambassadors." Do you know that verse? We're ambassadors. What's an ambassador? We're ambassadors. We're representing another country, we're representing another place. We come as a spokesperson for the King of that other place, and we're here as aliens and strangers in this land because our citizenship, to quote the book of Philippians, is in heaven. We represent the King. We can't wait for the King to return because he said he's going to return and set up a kingdom. But for now, we represent him in this foreign land. We're strangers and aliens and we're just passing through. We live here, but we're living here for a purpose.

I guarantee you this: if you, and I know you do if you're a real Christian and in your heart want to serve the Lord, you want to please the Lord, you want to be useful to God, you have to, number one, just like they did, and it was so clear for Paul and Barnabas. Number one, you have to "Live Like Christ's Ambassador." You have to live like Christ's ambassador. You have to think like Christ's ambassador. You have to think I am here for this purpose to represent Christ. That's my reason for being here. If I asked you, why are you living in South Orange County, right? You'd have a bunch of answers to that. And you probably have a lot of answers that would sound like settlers, "Well, I grew up here" or, you know, "we moved here for a job," or "part of this area, I looked for a place because I thought it would be good to raise my family and we moved here."

Your answer should be as a Christian, this is the picture in the Scriptures, that you are an ambassador of Christ, that you live where you live for the purpose of representing Christ.



Here's how Jesus put it, "Like a lamp that's set on a hill that can't be hidden," or "a lamp in a house you would never put it under a bushel." You'd never put a bucket on top of it. You would make sure that there would be light illuminating the room. You would never want to cover it up because the light is out there trying to represent the truth, the truth that people need. And you got to think that that's my job.

The lampstands are lit, and we always talk about that when we plant a new church, we're lighting a lampstand and the lampstand burns brightly when they all gather together on Sunday and they do church, and then they scatter into their communities and they got to think like, I am now a light in this community or I'm salt in this community. And Jesus said the problem isn't that Christians are or are not ambassadors, the real problem is whether they're good ambassadors or bad ambassadors. Here's the bad ambassador, they take a lamp and they put a bushel over it. Here's a bad ambassador. They are salt, but they're not salty, there's no effect there. They think of themselves only as living here for whatever earthly temple reason they live here.

I've quoted a few times in our study of Acts, but in Acts Chapter 17, we'll get to a sermon that Paul preached to the professors of Athens, and he said God is a sovereign God who places people at "allotted times" in the timeline and in geographical places with "boundaries" and puts them there. And then here's the purpose clause, for the reason "that those people might seek God" and find him. So God has scattered people, put every single human being in a particular place, and his goal is that they would seek him and find him, and then he's appointed the means. How does that happen? God uses not angels, not clouds, not volcanoes. He uses people to help people seek God and find him. He puts his chess pieces out there into communities and though that passage isn't speaking specifically to our side of the equation, it's speaking to the non-Christian side of the equation. The question could be why are the Athenian philosophers and professors sitting there listening to Paul in Athens? Because God put them there so that perhaps they might seek God. Based on what? On Paul speaking to them about God that they might put their trust in Christ. How? Because Paul is there speaking about Christ.

So the light and the salt comes into the community and it is there doing its job representing the King and that connection of the pawns on the chessboard put in a place so that those people who God has put there, they can be reached with the message. In other words, you have to think this way. You are here for the purpose of representing Christ, no matter what the earthly reason is. As a matter of fact. I know I just put 13a next to this first point, that they got on a boat and they sailed 170 miles to Perga. I get that. But then I said that they immediately went and then it says the only thing we know about Perga is that John Mark leaves. But then it says that all of a sudden, now in verse 14, they went on to Antioch of Pisidia. I said, "Well, that's 100 miles north and it's 3,600 miles in elevation incline. And I'm thinking, why would you do that? And I think that's a great question.

If I said, you are here in Antioch of Pisidia and you're having someone say, "Do you want to talk to us about spiritual things?" And Paul goes, "Of course I do." If I ask why are you there and not in Perga? I don't know the answer. As a matter of fact, biblical scholars and



commentators have spilled a lot of ink trying to figure out why did Paul not spend any time evangelizing Perga? Because later we learned, two chapters later, he comes back through and he does evangelize Perga. Why such the rush to get through this town? Why are you heading north? Why are you climbing up into the high country? And so people theorize about that. Luke doesn't tell us. We don't know why. He doesn't say here.

And people will point to the book of Galatians. In the book of Galatians, the first New Testament epistle that Paul wrote, he writes back to this area where he's doing ministry here on his first missionary journey in southern Galatia. I don't even know if our map shows that. Does it? Is that written on there? I guess it is. Yeah, Galatia. And in Galatia, he writes the Galatian churches, the southern Galatian churches before the Jerusalem Council, he writes about some specific issues regarding the problem with the Jews and this new church that had been planted there, the churches that have been planted there. And he speaks in that book about an illness that he had when he came to them to preach the gospel. And some commentators say, "Well, listen, he was sick and maybe he was there in the lowlands of the Mediterranean, and he needed to get to the high elevation and the better cooler temperatures of Antioch Pisidia. And so he made the trek up there for his health, and some people make that case. And maybe that's the case.

Some claim he had malaria because he talks about his eyes and the problems that he had there and maybe this is all a part of Second Corinthians 12 and his thorn in the flesh and his physical ailments. I don't know. He talks about his ailments and maybe that is the reason he didn't spend any time evangelizing in Perga and he has to come back to it later. I don't know, maybe. Maybe, as some have pointed out historically, Sergius Paulus, who was the proconsul of the island of Cyprus, there is a vague, little historical fact about him that he had roots in Antioch of Pisidia. That he had lands there, that he owned lands, tracts of lands and that he had relatives there. Now think about this, you just stood before the intelligent, most powerful person from Rome representing Rome in the city of Paphos on the island of Cyprus. You won him to Christ. Do you think that he would be interested in sending this messenger of the gospel to his family? Well, of course he would. Maybe that's what happened. Maybe, he said, "Could you go share this message with people up there that I know?" Now, there's no record of that. We don't know that. We just learned this little fact that Sergius Paulus had a background in Antioch of Pisidia. Maybe that's the reason.

I don't want to make an argument from silence, but there's a lot of ink spilled on why Paul just kind of blew through town in Perga. It was an important city and he might as well spent time evangelizing there but he didn't. All I got to say is this. There's a lesson in there, the fact that God did not give us the reason, at least it makes me think whatever the reason he was in Antioch Pisidia, he was there to represent the gospel. And I will tell you this whatever the reason that you live where you live, as I'm looking you in the eye right now and you're from South Orange County, whatever the reason is that you are where you are. I don't care how you got here, I don't care if it's a sinful reason you got here. I don't care what the reason is that you're here for the reason of representing Christ. I know that. And I'm telling you, you cannot be useful to Christ until your mind shifts into that mindset and you say, "This is why I'm here, this is why I bought in this neighborhood. This is why I got this job. This is why I got the



promotion. This is why they transferred me over to this other store." All those things that you think about, those are things you got to say, "God has put me here." He moved the chess pieces around to be his representative.

And when you start thinking that way, when you start thinking those neighbors next to me are there because God put them there, because he put those people there that they might seek him and find him. And he put the person that can help them seek him and find him right next door. That is a reason he put me there. You've got to think that way, and I guarantee you will be more useful to God this week if you can just shift your mind as though we were all moved to a new city and starting a new ministry. Matter of fact, think about that, think if I was an apostle in the first century and I could show you by some miraculous, undeniable, miraculous fact that I have God's prophetic truth right now for you, and that is this: that we have been praying as a church about a big, big ministry effort that's bigger than any we've ever done. And God has said to set apart the 11 o'clock service for this work. So all of you are going with me.

And on Tuesday morning, we're getting on a plane and we're all flying to our new home. So go wrap up all your situations here. Go pack. Do what you got to do because we're getting on a plane in LAX on Tuesday morning, we're flying to Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. We're going to go to the fifth-largest city in Canada. And God has called us for work because he's got a work for us to do. I'm not an apostle. I have no way to verify God's saying any of that kind of stuff. But let's just say I could and you had no option. You're like either obey God because he set me apart for the work. "I go to the 11 o'clock service. I'm going to Edmonton." Once we got there and you didn't have your dry cleaner, you didn't have your favorite store, you don't know where to shop you. You'd have to look for places to work and live. You would be there going, "Well, I know why I'm here. I'm here because God set me apart for the work." You've got to think that way, right here, even if you've lived in South Orange County for 50 years.

You are here for a reason. I don't care what the reason is. I don't know what the reason was that Paul was in Pisidia Antioch. I can only guess at it. God did not tell me, in part, I think to teach us a lesson. It doesn't matter why you're here. You're here for a reason. God may move you on, but right now you're here. And because you're here, we have to be ambassadors. We have to be light, we have to be salt. We have to be ready to see I'm here for the purpose of representing another kingdom. My citizenship is somewhere else and I'm here to represent the King.

Well, he does that well, verse 14. He goes to the synagogue, a place where people know about the Bible and they're reading the Bible, the Old Testament, 39 books the Old Testament, parts of it certainly in that service. And then they say, "Hey, you got anything to say here in the service?" And Paul goes, "Yeah, I do. Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen..." And then we'll get the sermon. Do you got something to add to the conversation? "Yep, I do." Do you got some say about God's stuff? "I do." You got something to say about the Bible? "I got something to say about the Bible. Yes, I do."



Now I already told you it's a little different that you've got Paul sitting there in the back row of the synagogue educated as he was, a guy who should know the Bible, he's memorized large sections of it by heart. He was trained. He knows things so well. I mean, multilingual, this guy's sharp. You would understand why he should take the microphone and talk about the Bible. But here's the thing. If you're going to be useful to God, you've got to have the mindset, my job is to talk about the Bible. I mean, really, I got to be ready to talk Bible any time with anyone all week long. That's at least what I have to be ready, willing and able to do. He is and he is ready. And I get that. And you're thinking, "Well, yeah, but he's seminary trained." Here's a guy who is not seminary trained. His name was Philip, and we studied in Chapter 8. Do you remember Philip?

Philip was a guy when we meet him, what's he doing in the church? Preaching? No. Paul was preaching, Barnabas was preaching. What was Philip doing? Serving tables. He's moving tables around in the church. Think about that. And yet he meets a guy on a road, God puts him in there, moves the chess pieces around, and here is this guy in the entourage of Candace, this Ethiopian eunuch, and he's riding in a chariot reading Isaiah 53, and goes, "I don't understand it." And he asks Philip, "What do you think?" And Philip goes, "I'm ready to talk Bible," and he starts talking. He uses the biblical discussion to lead this man to Christ. It doesn't matter what your level of education is, it doesn't matter how new you are at it, your job is to be ready to talk Bible. Number two, let's just put it that way "Be Ready to Talk Bible." Are you ready to talk Bible?

Here's the thing you got to have to be ready to talk Bible. Are you ready? You got to know the Bible. I mean, that's understandable. You've got to know your topic. And that's why we spend as Protestant churches have done throughout Church history, we spend so much time teaching the Bible. We teach the Bible so you can be ready to talk Bible because that's our job as ambassadors. If I'm the president of the United States and you're all the U.S. ambassadors here from all the different countries of the world they serve and they come here and they're going to spend an hour every week, I'm going to brief you. Then you're going to fly back to your countries and you're going to go represent the policies of the United States. So I got my cabinet with brief. I got stuff to say and I'm going to say it and I'm going to give you all this information about America, American policies and all your different countries and so let's talk. I would expect you to do something in that meeting. I'd expect you to take notes, I'd expect you to listen carefully. I'd expect you to soak it in, to memorize it, to understand what we're talking about, because it would be your job to take that message out.

Now, you may not use the information that I give you in today's briefing on Wednesday. You may not use it next week. You may not use it next month, but you would say I better learn the policies because I represent another country and I'm there as an ambassador. Here's what God wants us to communicate to the world, right? The words of truth. He wants us to take the truth, the light, and he wants that to be the thing that leads them to Christ. Our theme verse for our church, the reason we call it Compass is because a compass is supposed to direct us, right? And we use that verse from Psalm 43:3, "Send forth your truth and your light and let them lead us." Your light and your truth should be the thing that draws us to God. Well, then I



got to know what the light and the truth are. "Your word is a lamp to my feet, a light to my path." I got to know the Bible.

I can tell a lot about how effective you are for the Lord, how useful you are for the Lord, even by how I watch you listen to my sermons. I guarantee you there is a complete correspondence to the way I see you listening to what I'm saying if I'm teaching the Bible and how effective you are and useful to the Lord you are. Because if you take this seriously and say I'm going to learn the Bible, because I got to know the Bible, because my job is to talk Bible with the world, then I can see it. Matter of fact, I can see how you would apply yourself to the things that we constantly push. We're constantly pushing stuff like daily bible reading. Some say, "Well, I got my own way to read the Bible," or "I read my own thing," or "I just read a Psalm a day or whatever." Listen, we want you to read the whole Bible because your whole job is to represent God and his information is in the Bible, the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation, so we want you to read every day. We want you to read through it all the time.

Matter of fact, we got this archaic thing they used to have in civilization called a bookstore back here in the corner of this building. There are not many of them left. Matter of fact, go lookup on your phone. How many Christian bookstores you can even find in South Orange County? Right? It's just not a thing anymore. It's not a thing because it doesn't make money and neither does ours. But that's not the goal. The goal is for us to provide good tools. Why would we have a corner of our square footage in desperate need of space for everything around here, why would we put tomes of theology and systematic theology and biblical theology and doctrine and books about, you know, Bible atlas' and study Bibles and doctrine books? Why would we have all that back there? Because the whole point is for us to gather together to be educated on what God's word says, we got to know the content of the Bible.

Let me say this as carefully as I can. You've got to believe that those lost people that you interact with all week that they really need this. You've got to really believe that they need this. Here's one thing that you've got in common with every non-Christian you run across this week, right? Here's something you have in common. Sin. That's what you have in common. You're a sinner. They're sinners. S-I-N, sin. You fall short of the glory of God and you feel bad about that. And guess what? God imprinted his law upon their heart, it says in Romans 2, and they feel bad about it. They do a lot to suppress the truth. But trust me, they have a conscience and when they fail, that's why they lie about stuff and cover stuff up and sweep stuff under the carpet, they feel bad. You feel bad. You have a conscience. They have a conscience. Yours is heightened by regeneration in the presence of the Holy Spirit, but they are sinners and they fall short and they know they're not the way they're supposed to be. They know they are not who they should be. They know they fail. They know they fall short. They know they've got a problem. They got the same problem you got.

You know something and you've experienced something and you have appropriated something that they haven't. That is something that Psalm 32 calls blessedness. "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven." Blessed is the one who has all that sin and guilt, and all of it is completely expiated, it's removed, it's canceled out, it's zeroed, it's removed far from you, Psalm 103, "as far as the east is from the west," infinitely far, your sin is removed



from you, that you're 100% qualified to enter into the presence of a holy and perfect God. When you die and stand before God you know that you are forgiven. And as Paul re-quotes in Romans 4, "how blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven. How blessed is the man whose transgressions are not held against him," how happy a state is that? I mean, both the Hebrew word "Asher" in the Old Testament. How happy is that one gift. What a relief it is to not bear your sin anymore.

That's true for you. Not a single thing that you've done before God has not been appended to the cross because there was a payment for sin. All a non-Christian can do is hope that God is grading on a curve. "And I hope that when I get there, he's going to say, 'Well, you're not that bad.'" You and I know we have to be perfect. God is perfect. He's holy, holy, holy holy. He cannot approve evil in any way. And you know that right now, if you're a Christian, you know the great cost that God spent to have your sins canceled out. And you have that and they need that. They have no other way to grapple with their imperfection. They feel that pressure. You've got the answer. You got to believe that the biblical data and when we learn how redemption works in the pages of the Bible, you got to know that the captivity of Moses in the wilderness. Right? He goes and he has been sent. We read it this morning, he's sent back into to Egypt to deliver them and bring the people out. That captivity is a captivity that you have been freed from, that picture of being in prison.

By the way, when Paul writes to the Galatian churches, the southern Galatian churches, he says in Galatians Chapter 3, I think it's verse 22, he says sin, according to Scripture, the book, the Bible, it says, "We are all imprisoned under sin." An imprisonment. Paul's going to take the imprisonment of the Old Testament slavery in Egypt for the Israelites and use that as a picture of the redemption that's found in Christ. He's ready to talk Bible about the important things that they need because every Jew sitting in that synagogue needed forgiveness, complete forgiveness, and you've got to believe that people need that message.

Not only that, here's the thing, we got enough complaints from all non-Christians that we run into, we know that they're not happy with the way things are, right? I mean, they make it an art to complain about this world. They know that something is not right, not only in their heart, they have guilt, but they have all kinds of complaints about everyone else in the whole world. They don't like it, and they know it should be better. And I wish it were better. And you wish it were better, too. Don't you groan within yourself how cruddy things are? You don't like it. They don't like it.

But you've got this: a guarantee that "the kingdoms of the world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." Quote Isaiah 40, you know "that every crooked path is going to be made straight, every rough place plane, every mountain low, every valley filled up." God's going to make it right. You believe one day he's going to wipe away every tear. No crying, no mourning, no pain, no death. You know that. And you know that because of the resurrected Christ. You've appropriated that because you're forgiven. You're fully qualified for the redemption in Christ. Think about this now. You have that, they need it. You got to know and believe they need it.



You got to say I'm an ambassador from another country. My citizenship is in heaven. And here's the thing, the answer that I have is that this Christ has purchased the sins of the sinners who have sinned by the death of his own self on a cross. And Christ has paid the penalty, and you can now be right with a living God and become an ambassador like me. That's an amazing thing, people need that. And where's it all found? In the Bible. You've got to be ready to talk Bible. Now, I don't know if you're going to be invited into some, you know, conversation on a plane this week where they say, "Hey, I'm reading Isaiah 53. I don't understand it. Can you help me?" OK. Or you going to be in some circle where they're talking about stuff in the workroom, they go, "Hey, we were just talking about the Bible, you got anything to add to that?" That would be teeing it up]. But you know what? There are plenty of conversations that intersect with biblical themes all the time.

I don't know, did you hear anyone talking about politics this week? Do you think you will? I'll bet you will. I want to talk about politics. I want to talk about a king. A king? A King of kings, Lord of lords in charge. He's got a government. Matter of fact, those governments are going to rest on his shoulders. They already do, but he hasn't yet exercised his power and begun to reign. He's going to though. I'll talk about politics with you. I'm going to talk about a king. He's better than all the leaders we got in this world. And I know you don't like the leaders we've got in this world. I know that.

Do you think you'll hear anything about illnesses this week? Do you think there'll be any conversations with anyone about being sick? I bet. I'll talk about a sickness, about a heart sickness, a desperately sick, sick, sick sickness in the heart, a desperately sick heart that needs forgiveness, that needs balm, that needs salve for the eyes, that needs cleansing. You want to talk about vaccinations. Will you hear the word vaccination in any conversation? I bet you will. I've got a solution for you. I've got a solution for you in Christ. Did you hear anything about lockdowns? Did you hear anything about any kind of lockdown? I bet you will. Talk about lockdowns. I've already quoted the book of Galatians Chapter 3. "We're all in prison under sin." We're in a lockdown right now. You might not even realize it, even when we're out and about doing all that we want to do, you're locked down.

Matter of fact, one day you're going to be locked out from the presence of God. There's going to be a chasm between you and the goodness of God one day. You'll be shut out away from the presence of the Lord, unless you repent and put your trust in Christ. Talk about lockdowns. I want to talk about lockdowns. I want to talk about politics. I want to talk about illnesses. I want to talk about vaccines. There are all kinds of things I can talk about, and every conversation can be turned if you're ready to talk Bible about things that matter for eternity. "Well, that's going to make me a freak in my world if I start doing that Pastor Mike." It's going to make you an ambassador. Ambassadors care about the homeland. Ambassadors care about the King. Ambassadors recognize that they're aliens and strangers in this world.

One of my favorite passages in Hebrews Chapter 11, starting like verse 36. This great section about, you know what? People in the Old Testament "could only look from a distance," and they didn't even know how it was going to all be purchased. Christ comes, purchases eternity and says, "If I go away, you know this, I'm going to prepare a place for you. And if I prepare a

place for you, I'm going to come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, you will be also." John 14. That's going to be my promise to you. And here's the deal. There are people who have that perspective and "they call themselves aliens and strangers on earth, those who speak thus," he says in Hebrews. If they wanted to go back to the land from which they came, "they had plenty of opportunity to return." But as it is they're willing to see themselves that way. "And they long for a homeland," not an earthly one, a heavenly one. And those are the kind of people God says, "I'm not ashamed to be called their God."

I love those ambassadors. They care about the homeland, they're always thinking. They think like an ambassador. And they're ready to talk about the kingdom. And all I'm telling you is that's our job. I don't care what the topic is. Can you just get saturated with biblical thinking and try and turn conversations to Christ?

I quickly skipped. I mean, I didn't say much about it. Verse 13b. "And John left them and returned to Jerusalem." That is that dotted dashed line that goes back, as I said. The other dotted line we haven't gotten to yet where they're going to make their way back. We're going to go all the way to Lystra and Derbe and make our way back to Antioch and then Perga, then back to Antioch. But that's for next time or two or three times from now. John Mark goes back and it's sad. All I know is it's bad because in Chapter 15 when they're going to go on another journey, kind of visit the places that they've set up these churches, Paul says I am not going to take John Mark. The guy abandoned us, he deserted us. "He withdrew from us and he wasn't willing to go and do the work." Right? So whatever this was, it wasn't good. And Paul said, it's not good and I'm not taking him on the second missionary journey.

Now, much like wondering why he blew through Perga and ran to the city in Antioch, people have sat around and thought, "Now why did John Mark leave? What could be the reason for him leaving?" And a lot of ink has been spilled on that, and commentators love to write about that. Why would John Mark leave? And they speculate, this is the first passage, by the way, where Luke starts calling it "Paul and his companions." Now remember who is John Mark? He's the cousin of Barnabas. Barnabas was always listed first, Barnabas and Saul, Barnabas and Saul. Now, all of a sudden, we have "Paul and his companions." Right? I mean, Barnabas is like the senior missionary here and now all of a sudden he's like the associate missionary here, and Paul has taken the lead. Some speculate he wasn't real keen about all Paul's emphasis on the Romans. That maybe it was this Gentile emphasis. He didn't like that, and so he bailed out.

Some think that just like Paul got malaria, some would theorize, I think John Mark probably got sick on this 170-mile sea voyage, and he gets there and he says, "I need relief. I'm going back. I got to go back home." Maybe he left because he got ill. Maybe it was the 3,600-foot elevation climb through the forest of lower southern Turkey, we call it today, up that path and he goes, "It's just too much for me." Maybe he was weak. Maybe he was lazy. Who knows what the reason is? He redeems himself later. More to come on all that. But right here he deserts them and we do not know why. I don't want to make an argument from silence. I don't want to make too much about the fact that there's no reason there, but it is helpful for me to



get a lesson out of that. And that is whatever the reason is, it ain't good. Whatever the reason is.

Whatever reason there might be for you not talking Bible and not representing Christ as an ambassador, whatever that reason is, it's not good. Why ever you would give in to not letting your light shine, whatever the bushel is that's trying to encapsulate and capture the photons of your voice talking Bible in your corner of the world. Whatever it is that makes you back down, whatever makes you give in, it's not a good thing. So I'll say this: you want to be useful to God this ought to be your perpetual commitment. Number three, you need to "Never Give In." Never give in. I'm never going to give in. I'm going to keep on going. I will do this and I will do it even if it gets hard. No matter what the concern might be, whatever it is that makes me want to sit down and shut up, I will not.

Remember the speech back there in the 40s? 1941 in particular, where Winston Churchill gave that speech "Never Give Up. Never, never, never give up." You remember that? He never gave that speech. Not like that at least. It's one of those things that's often misquoted, "never give up." That's not what he said. Churchill, the consummate statesman, but he used the English language like few other people. He knew with the threat of Nazi Germany and Hitler on the rise that if they were not going to become a slave state to the Germans, they had better "never give IN." Never give in. Here's his speech, he said. "Never give in. Never, never, never. Never give in." Listen to the rest of it. "In nothing great or small, large or petty -- never give in."

Now what's different between "never give up" and "never give in." Well, there is a difference. And if anyone's going to care about the difference in the preposition, it's going to be Winston Churchill. He knows that there's a reason to say never give in. When we say never give up, even think about the gesture that might come with that. Give in is different, isn't it? To give in gives you a sense of like I'm holding a door back, right? And to give in is it's like, "OK, go ahead." Giving in demands an identification of the object. Never give in. And you're going to say, as I said when I started studying this passage, "Hey, John Mark gave up. Do you know why I said that? And I said it that way in my own mind. I even developed this point in my thinking initially, never give up. We should never give up because John Mark gave up.

But it's more than that. And I think I learned this even inverted in the thinking of my mind because there was nothing here that described why he gave in, because here's the point. I don't think it matters why he gave in. But there was something. And whatever that something was, that's the thing in the lesson that we learn 2,000 years later, you don't let that thing make you give in. He goes on to say, Winston Churchill, he says, "Never yield to force. Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy." It's the identification of the problem. And Churchill was great at that, right? You know, here's the problem. Hitler's the problem. Nazi Germany is the problem. There it is. Don't give in to them or you'll become a slave of them.

See, when Jesus started to talk about things, he didn't just say, don't be ashamed. He said, "Don't be ashamed of me before men." There are going to be people who you're going to want to back down from. Fear. He didn't just say, "Just don't be afraid." He said, "Don't fear



the ones who can kill the body." I mean, it's always this sense of identifying the problem that wants to push me back. I know you can say it without an object. Don't be ashamed. Right? Don't fear. Don't be afraid. You can say that. But I do think there's something very important. If I could identify what the problem was with John Mark, it might affect this little portion of the congregation. But if I can't identify it, I think all of us have to say, "Well, what is it that would make me sit down and shut up?" Is it fear? Fear of who? Fear of what? Fear of losing a job? Fear of losing a friend?

Oh, Paul had fears. He says, I came to Macedonia with "great fear and trembling." Think about that. And yet what? To the Corinthians, "I resolved to know nothing among you except Christ Jesus." I wasn't going to give in to fear. I wasn't going to give in to the trembling of that fear. I'm going to do it anyway. He had that mentality, and apparently John Mark didn't and I don't know what it was. I don't know if it was fear. I don't know if it was exhaustion. I don't know if it was trouble. I don't know if it was opposition. I don't know if it was jealousy over Barnabas. I don't know what the reason was, and I don't know why you have given in. But if you've given in and you're not talking Bible as much as you used to, if you're giving in and you used to think like a spiritual pioneer and a missionary, but now you don't, you think like a settler and all that matters now is just getting another meal at the weekend church service. I'm saying something made you give in.

I'd like you to identify that and then to take that thing that you're identifying, as Jesus said, and think of the person that can kill your body. I know that's scary. But after they kill your body, "there's nothing else they can do." Fear, though, "I'll tell you who to fear: fear the one who after he kills the body, can cast your soul into hell." In other words, he's taking the thing that might make you get to give in and saying compare it to the thing you're giving in and giving up on, right? In other words, I have a mission to be an ambassador. I have a role to bring the Bible to the world. The themes and topics of the gospel and Christ. That's my job. That's your job. And the point is, whatever it is that's making you stop, I want you to compare that to the person who told you to do it. I want you to think of the thing that makes you sit down and shut up and I want you to compare it to the authority or the greatness or the love or the compassion or the grace of the one who tells you to stand up and speak up. And you got to compare those two and say is it worth it? It's worth it. You just think about that. Never give in, never, never, never, never give in.

Now if you know the Bible, some of you can throw a flag on the play, maybe just a few of you in the room. You say, "I know what happens after this sermon. I know what happens." They kick him out. Paul and Barnabas get kicked out. And guess what? They give up. No, they don't give up. They get redirected. There's no doubt about that. They say if you don't count yourself worthy of the word, that's fine. We're going to move over here then. John Mark just wants to go back home. But Paul and Barnabas said, OK, a door may close, you might get fired, you might have someone say, "Don't talk about Bible stuff anymore with me." You might have a closed door. It doesn't mean you never give in with any particular project, any particular person, but you're not going to give in to the role. And that is always going to be as Christ's ambassador. I'm always going to talk Bible and I'm never going to stop.



If your heart's desire and I know every real person in the room, this is your heart's desire, "I want to please God. I want to make my life count. I want to be useful to the Lord." Then you need to think like an ambassador. You need to be ready, willing, able to talk Bible. And you got to never give in on that. Matter of fact, that's one of the virtues of the Christian life is to endure, "to run with endurance," that great word "hypomone," stick-to-it-ness, "the race that is set before you." And you've got a race set before you. Paul had a race set before him. He was in the city in Antioch as a missionary. You're in South Orange County as a missionary. That's your job. I write the questions before I'm quite done with the sermon, sometimes that shows. But the questions on the back of the worksheet this week, I asked the question that I thought was where I was going to end in terms of like, what would happen as a church if we took two steps back. Right? If all of us started just kind of lean that shade over the light that we're supposed to shine and we start just getting a little less salty and the salt becomes tasteless. Like if we just get... What would happen and the fear that I have of what would happen to the church if we're not the ambassadors we're supposed to be, if we talk Bible less. And that was motivating for me.

But the more I studied this passage and as the sermon developed late, late in the week and the weekend even, I thought, you know what? What encourages and motivates me more is what would happen if we took two steps forward? I mean, what would happen to our church? What would happen to you as a Christian if you really shifted in your mind from settler to pioneer, spiritual missionary, ambassador of Christ? I'm going to talk Bible more and all of us notched it up two or three notches. If every single Christian in this church took it up two notches, thought more like an ambassador, talked more Bible and just was enduring the race that set before them and never going to give in, I just wonder what would happen?

Here's what would happen. Right? Every seat would be filled. We would probably accelerate our church planting process because we need to kick out another 200 people to go somewhere and plant a church. We would have this place full of people who are reaching people for Christ. We would have more baptisms, we would have people who are excited about their new faith in Christ. We would have people so spiritually proud as spiritual parents leading more people to Christ. This place would be just a radically different place. I can fear what might happen if we are ashamed and afraid and backed down, or I can get excited about who we will become as a church. You want to talk about a bright lampstand. Let's just take it up a notch or two. May God empower us to do that in these days, because this mission field needs it.

Let's pray. Please, God. I know this is hard, be fear-inducing, but like Paul, who said "I came to you with much fear and trembling." I'm so grateful that he was not willing to give in to that. May we not give in to whatever it is that we are tempted to give into. To mute our voices, to attenuate the lumens of our gospel light, of our testimony. God, I know it sounds odd for us to always try to turn conversations back to eternal matters, but I pray we'd see the importance of that. As you put us on your chessboard here in our little geographic location we're now given a great opportunity and responsibility to represent you here. And God I know before any country declares war on another country, they pull their ambassadors out. I know one day we're going to be pulled out and then all hell is going to break loose on this planet. Book of



Revelation. The wrath of God poured out on this planet. God, we want to do our work while we can still do it. As Jesus said, "let's work while it's still day because night is coming." So, God, I pray we'd step it up if for no other reason, not just for the healthy, strong, vibrant church we'd be a part of, but just for the sake of the opportunity. Let us not fritter that away. Let us be passionate about that and give us great success and encouragement on it. So God we commit ourselves afresh to this cause as your ambassadors in this world, speaking your message without fainting or turning back.

In Jesus name. Amen.