



Useful to the Lord – Part 6

Prepared for Eternity

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Well, I weirded out this week on thinking about sleep. That sounds weird, but I did, I weirded out completely. I got into this mental, you know, rabbit hole just thinking about the fact that we sleep every night. Is that not weird to you that we, I mean, every night, it's like every night you just do it, you go unconscious for hours? That's just kind of strange when you think about it. I'm looking at you and only a few of you are asleep right now. (audience laughter) I suspect, though, by 3:00 in the morning, like all of these bodies that are looking at me right now would be like horizontally laid out, you'll be breathing heavily, perhaps snoring half of you and unconscious. Not very productive, not doing anything.

You'll do a bunch of stuff today, you get stuff done. You'll watch a football game, maybe, you'll eat a lot. You'll have conversations and then it'll get dark and you'll eat a little bit more and then you'll get tired and then you'll say, I got to lay this body down flat and then you'll go lay that body down flat and then just your eyes will shut and you'll go unconscious. And you'll do it again tomorrow night and again and again. I just thought, it's weird. I know you think I'm weird for thinking that's weird, but to me that was really weird when I think about it. It's inevitable.

You can do whatever you want. We could all say right now, all these bodies that are all active and looking at me, you could say, "Well, we're not going to do that. We're going to load up on caffeine and we're going to keep our minds active. We are going to say we are not going to do that. We are not going to do that." And all that's going to do is push my prediction back a handful of hours. Right? Because you'll be doing that. Your body will go horizontal and you'll start breathing heavily and your eyes will roll back in your head and you'll snore and sleep. It's just weird that we can't stop that from happening. It is an absolutely guaranteed eventuality.

Of course, the Bible says without much talk about the eventuality of sleep, there's a lot of talk about another big eventuality that says this is just reality and you can't avoid it and it's there and you got the appointment, I've got the appointment and it's going to happen. It's not going to be that you're sawing logs, but you're going to be pushing up daisies, as they say. You will have a different kind of sleep. It's called death. And as negative as that sounds, it's certainly an eventuality that we've got to sit back and say, "Well, I guess that is true."

Now, sometimes I like to think about my sleep, but I don't like thinking much about this death thing because that's pretty morbid and weird. I get that. I understand that. And I wasn't really thinking about the sleep thing because I was studying this passage about the death thing, but I do think about the reality that we have an appointment, a guaranteed eventuality with this thing. It is appointed that you and I are going to die. All the activity, all the productivity is going to be ended and you could say, "Well, I'm going to load up on vitamins and I'm going to exercise and I'm going to make sure I take care of my health." And that might push my prediction back a few years but it's going to happen.



"Well, we know that Pastor Mike. We don't like to think about that." I get that we don't like to think about it. But I think it's super-duper important for us to think about because I open up my Bible and I see that the Bible is a message to us about the problem that you have and I have with death. In the business world, the business gurus say that the main thing is keep "the main thing the main thing." You've heard that right? The main thing is for you to keep "the main thing the main thing." If you're going to be an executive or even a manager, you better make sure that you know what the business is and what the goal is and whatever the main thing of that business, you better keep that "main thing the main thing," and then you'll be effective. And that is important.

And for Christians, unfortunately, because of the morbidity of thinking about death, because our culture is saying we don't want to think about that, we don't want to talk about that, we're not interested in thinking about that, we start to follow along and conform. So we don't like to think much about that and so our focus shifts. Unfortunately, because it does, the church fails to make "the main thing the main thing." And I'd just like to remind you as your pastor talking about big issues of the Bible, that, hey, the main thing for us is keep "the main thing the main thing." And the main thing is not this life. The main thing is not the "here and now." If you've been around listening to me preach you've heard that before. But let me say it again. Christianity is not about the "here and now." Not primarily, at least. Does it affect the "here and now?" Yes, but Christianity is primarily about the "then and there."

It's about you being ready for the "then and there" and meeting that appointment that you have and then saying, "I'm ready to step across that threshold and I'm prepared for that." Maybe you looked at the worksheet this morning, you saw the subtitle and thought, "Oh wow, sounds like old-time religion right here - "prepared for eternity." And if it was the old-time religious saw, the old-time religious theme, then that's great, because then it seems like old-time religion had "the main thing the main thing." And sadly, when the modern church fails to keep the "main thing the main thing," we're talking about everything but this. Oh, at a funeral we will.

But maybe we could talk about this this morning in light of the sermon that Paul preached in the city in Antioch in Acts 13 and do it without all the drama and the grief of a funeral and say we better think about this, this is the main thing. I mean, Jesus really came to deal with this issue. This was the whole point of Christianity is that he would deal with this thing. The appointment that you and I have with death.

Let's take a look in our Bibles and figure this out from this great sermon that Paul has been preaching in the city in Antioch on the first missionary journey. It's found in Acts Chapter 13. And I'd love for you to look at it. You're not to get much out of the sermon, at least not as much, if you don't take the text of Scripture and look at it in a Bible there in front of you, or it's on your phone or your iPad or whatever you've got. Maybe you even brought one, the old Gutenberg-style Bible.

But please take a look at Acts Chapter 13 with me. We're going to look at verses 32 through 39. This is the third section of what we're dealing with. I'm going to read it for you. I'd love for



you to follow along and to understand what Paul is saying after we've been through this whole Old Testament history, which we've been through. We've seen all of these discussions about Abraham, right? The forefathers, the patriarchs. We've then talked about the exodus and Moses and then the conquest of Joshua. And he touches on these things. Of course, this is just a summary that Luke has of Paul's sermon. He talks about the judges, over 300 years there of history of the twelve to thirteen judges if you count Samuel. He talks about Samuel, he talks about Saul, he talks then about David. And so we cover all this Old Testament history, and we call that sermon the "imperfect previews" because he's all leading up to Christ.

Then Christ is going to show up 2,000 years after Abraham, 1,000 years after David. And then as Jesus comes on the scene, he comes to deal with the real issues. And all the deliverers, that's what the judges were, that's what the judge was, that's what the kings were, they were delivering them from the political threats of the foreign armies. And Joshua was dealing with the Canaanites and all the issues of threat to their security. And so he delivers them, all these people of the Old Testament, delivers them in some temporal way. Well Christ is supposed to deliver in some ultimate way. So we talked about those ultimate realities last week.

Well now he's going to get to the real point. I mean, the ultimate point of what Jesus came to do, and there's a real focus here. I want you to follow along as I read it for you. I'll read from the English Standard Version beginning in verse 32 of Acts Chapter 13. So take a look at this text with me, please. In the middle of this, really the big crescendo, he says, "We bring to you the good news that what God promised the forefathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children," the children of Abraham, "by raising Jesus, as also it was written in the second psalm," now he's quoting Psalm 2, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." Like what? How does that relate to any of that? We'll see that in a second, verse 34.

"And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' Therefore he says also in another psalm." By the way, that previous quote, it's a reflection of, a summation of Isaiah 55. Now he says, "'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' Therefore he says in another psalm, 'You will not let your Holy One see corruption.'" If you were with us back when Peter was preaching, he enlisted this particular psalm as well back there in Acts Chapter 2, referring to the same thing. The fact that Jesus came to solve a problem, a problem we all have, and that is that you're going to be horizontal and you won't be breathing deeply or snoring, you'll be dead. And so we've got to deal with that problem, and that's the real problem of mortal beings. How do we solve that problem? What's the solution?

Well when it comes to this ultimate one, apparently he's not going to stay dead. Then he says, well, it couldn't have been about David, even though that psalm seemed to be about David, verse 36, "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, he fell asleep," euphemism for death, "and was laid with his fathers," in the tomb, "and saw corruption." So he's just a pile of dust at this point. "But he whom God raised up did not see corruption.



Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man," this ultimate deliverer, "forgiveness of sins," there's the problem, the predication of the problem, of the problem of death, "is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes," apparently there's something, an onus upon us to respond to this, "is," here's the word, "freed," which, by the way, is the word redemption. It's the word being taken out of an enslavement. It's the word that you saw that was used in the description of the exodus when Moses leads them out of slavery.

Well, this is some kind of ultimate freedom, freedom from a real issue, not just subjugation by Egyptians, but freed ultimately from something that is a profound internal problem. "From everything," look at this final line, "from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses." Yeah, so there's an ultimate deliverer, and I just want to deal, as we start this, with the last two verses and just deal with verses 38 and 39 and kind of work our way backwards through this text, to say, well, that's the real issue. And I would venture to say, as I preach in the 21st century to an Orange County congregation that the Jews of the city in Antioch who were just reading the scrolls of the Torah, the Old Testament, the first five books of the Bible, and as Paul and Barnabas come into this synagogue and they start preaching there about Jesus, they're much more informed about this problem and had much more respect for this problem than we have in our day.

Not that we haven't all been fighting this from the beginning of time. We don't like to think about these issues. Look again at the passage in verse 38. It talks about the problem of sins. Right? Now there's a topic that's not all that popular. Well, it's never been popular. But I'll tell you what they're probably more informed in the first century in Galacia, southern Galacia, in the city here of Antioch than we are today in South Orange County. And the problem, of course, is they need to be freed, freed from the problem that has been set up in the context, the problem of death, which Jesus apparently solved.

So let's just stand back and say, I guess as moderns reading a passage like this, we ought to learn to respect something that the Bible says is the most important problem of all. So if you're writing down notes and I wish that you would, jot this down, number one, you need to "Respect the Problem of Sin & Death." That really is the issue. And we don't like to talk about it, I get that, but this is something that needs to be brought into the forefront of our thinking. Let's start with the thing I say is the predication, it's the foundation of the problem of death and that's sin. You've been to Sunday school, I assume most of you, and you learn a verse in Romans Chapter 6 that says that "the wages of sin is death." And you think, OK, well, that's a simple summation of what we saw in the book of Genesis Chapter 2.

If you're in a small group this week, you'll see on the back of the worksheet the first question is going to take you to Genesis Chapter 2, where God says, "If you eat the tree that I told you not to eat from, right? You can eat from any other place. Don't eat from this one. If you eat from this one then the day you eat of it, you will surely die." So this problem of sin and death is clear. If you don't keep my rules, well, then there's a consequence and the consequence is under the heading, under the rubric, under the banner of this word death. So don't obey me



and there's death. Well, that sounds pretty harsh, pretty, pretty severe. No, I get that. I understand that. And that's because we don't respect that combination that when God gives us a command and says, you can't do this and you do it, well, there's a penalty and it's a huge penalty, the penalty that is described with the word death.

When you do look at that first question, I take you to Ephesians Chapter 2, and I make you look at the way that death is describing a life that is alienated from God. And I guess I could have put Isaiah Chapter 59 verse 2, which we did look at last week, that reminds us that the problem of us disobeying God, it separates us in a relationship. It creates the problem. Then I take you back to the third passage I make you turn to is Genesis Chapter 3 when God shows up here, the manifestation of God in the Garden, and Adam and Eve hide. They hide because they're not copacetic anymore. The creator and the creature are no longer in sync. There's no more harmonious relationship there.

So I've disobeyed you. You're God, you get to make the rules. I said, "No, I'm not going to listen to you. I'm going to do my own thing," and God says, "Well, then we've got a problem." And so death is a state. Right? It's more than just something that happens. It's a state of separation. And there is a state of separation that's a really, really big deal because I was made to be encased in this thing called my body. And when my body and who I really am, my software, are separated, right? That's the idea of death. Well, then that's a problem, because then I'm dead. In fact, that's the definition, and we can't stop it. Ecclesiastes talks about the fact that man has no power to keep his spirit in his body. You at your death, you will, and this is the biblical definition of death, your spirit leaves your body. You no longer have the software governing the hardware and you are called dead. All the cells are still there. You're no longer animated. You're biologically dead.

Well, the connection of sin and death is not just biological death, which of course, is an outgrowth of that, that because of your sin, there's going to be biological death. But immediately on the day you eat of the fruit you're going to have a separated relationship with me. And that's the problem. Now the problem comes into clear focus in our day when people physically die. We go to funerals and everyone's crying because we liked this person. We didn't want them to go away and we had a lot of good memories and now all of a sudden, I can't create any more memories, they're dead.

Even in the old days we used to have the casket up here, which was a very common thing. I preached a lot of sermons early in my ministry with a casket open. Right? You look down at my notes and see the face of some congregant down there and everyone was crying. We don't even like to do that anymore. And then it was closed casket and then it was like, we don't want the casket in the room.

I'm thinking it's a good thing we didn't live a long time ago because a long time ago when we were doing things like we're doing now, getting permits with the city, we would not only get permits for the coffee bar and a nice big library or a bookstore, we would say, OK, and here, Aliso Viejo, this is where we want to put the cemetery. Let's float that, by the way, with the city manager. That doesn't... No, you're not going to put a cemetery out there. Yeah, I want to put



Awana circles and put a little coffee bar over here, maybe an outdoor area, we can do a little some activities. Oh, and then here's where we want to bury our grandparents. No, we aren't going to do that.

See, because in the old days, "the main thing was the main thing." You came to church and some of you know, you come from some old place and, you know, New England or in the South somewhere, or maybe you're from overseas and you see all these old churches, and around it you had a graveyard. It was called the churchyard. The churchyard was called the graveyard. We want bounce houses and sandboxes, but they had the bones of their decaying relatives out there. And the point was, you're going to church, we're going to talk about the main thing. And the main thing is this death problem that surrounds our church. The solution is inside, and it's going to be preached by the guy who gets up and talks from the Bible. Because the Bible is all about Christ and Christ came to solve the problem of death.

You respect the problem and today, we not only don't like the problem of sin. Listen, breaking God's rules, do your own thing. You get to choose who you want to be, you get to choose what you want to do. There is no problem of sin. Really, the only sin for people today is not agreeing with the rest of them that there is no sin. Right? That's the ultimate sin, right? They think they're really tolerant people. Well, they're very intolerant, right? They're very intolerant because they want you to make sure that you agree with them about the fact that they get to make the rules about what they think is right and wrong, and for them, it's like, I get to do whatever I want. And maybe there's a limit on it if I start to do things that hurt you. But you know, I don't know, I really should be able to be my own rule-maker.

Well, the Bible says you're not God, you're not your own creator, you don't determine the date of your birth, you can't determine the day of your death, God's in charge of this all, he gets to make the rules. He's the boss. You're not the boss. Probably like in your business. Probably some bosses here, but most of you are not the boss. And so you're stuck. And in this creation, talk about the boss, boss, boss, boss, King of kings, Lord of lords, he's in charge of all things and he gets to make the rules. So sin is a reality, we don't quite respect the fact that when you do what you want to do, if it's not aligned with what God says you ought to do, well then we're stuck with a consequence. And the consequence really is just manifestly clear when someone physically dies. It's a reminder of the problem of our separation between our maker and ourselves.

That's gigantic, and it's good for us to stop and think about it, and we've sanitized it. Now only that we deny sin, we've sanitized the problem of death. Think about it. We don't want, you know, our dead loved one's headstones out there by the car or I want donuts and coffee, but I don't want to see headstones. And here it's all I'm saying is we live in a world that has so swept this under the carpet, put it in the corners of our lives. We don't even think about these things. We try not to think about these things. Then when we have a funeral, we make it a joke fest where we try to stand up and tell as many jokes as we can so everyone laughs about this. We call it a celebration of life. Listen, man, they're dead. That's a problem. This is a big problem. We like to say, "It's natural." It's not natural. The most unnatural thing you can



do is die. Because guess what? You were made in the image of God, God, the living God, the immortal God, he's designed you to live, right?

Matter of fact, he's designed you to continue to live. And now, all of a sudden, he says, here's the imposition of the penalty of you not obeying me. You guys have to die. That's very unnatural. The most antithetical thing to life is death. So don't let someone get up or some scriptwriter in Hollywood who's going to tell you in the next movie you watch when the guy gets up with a Bible and says, "Oh, death is the natural thing, you know this is natural." It's not natural. How unnatural could you get than to have a human being that you love to interact with is all of a sudden now is dead? We can't sanitize it. We have to respect it. We not only have to respect, we have to stand up to this is a such a serious problem, and I'm going to face it? Yeah, you're going to face it.

And it will be an outgrowth, the Bible says, of the consequence of the fact that you and I are alienated from our maker because we are sinful and our forefathers were sinful and death came to us right from the very beginning in Genesis Chapter 3. So it's important for us to respect the problem. And when we respect the problem, we can stand back, and now certainly if we're going to talk about Christ, who is Christ?

Well, Jesus Christ is the solution to this problem. I'm going to now solve the problem. I'm going to solve the problem that causes the ultimate problem, which is death. And I'm going to do that by dealing with sin. So sin that we're supposed to respect and death, that we're supposed to respect, we start to look at that and then we start to crave a solution. And Muhammad doesn't bring it, and Confucius doesn't bring it right? And you're not going to find it in Buddha. You can't find someone in history, they may talk about the afterlife, who is going to say, I'm going to show you that the afterlife has been dealt with because I'm going to pop my body out of the grave. You kill me, and in three days, I'll rise again. I'll raise it back up. Jesus said that it's all about this bodily resurrection.

So let's look back up at the things that he says in our text. Go back up to verse 33. "He's fulfilled this," this good news to the descendants of Abraham, "by raising Jesus." You know, this is the most important aspect of Jesus' life that's discussed in the book of Acts. More than anything else, more ink is spilled by Luke talking about this one issue. Not about his death on a cross, not about his miracles, not about his life, not about his teaching. It's always about his resurrection. Why? Because the Acts of the apostles is about evangelism. It's about people learning to get right with God. To get right with God, we appeal to the problem of sin and death, and we say we've got a solution. The solution is put on display with a risen Christ.

So the solution is here that he's been risen, he's raised from the dead. In the second psalm, he says, "You are my son; today I have begotten you." Now I said that's a strange thing for him to say. And it is a bit strange. I want you to think about the fact that this is a bit of a strange thing to say because everyone says, "Well, OK, I can think about the connection between Christ being God's Son, but if I'm going to think about it I'm going to think more about it when I think of his birth. And we do see passages like in Hebrews where this passage is enlisted to speak of the fact that Jesus came into the world and it's like, "Hey, here's the Son



of God." And then the quotation of Psalm 2, which was originally focused on David, is now seen to be, "Oh, it applies to Jesus, and Jesus is begotten as God's Son."

Well here, we're not talking about his incarnation, his birth. We're not talking about the incarnation. If we were to go back to when in Nazareth within the body of Mary, Jesus was physically manifest. Right? Nine months before he was born. We're talking about his resurrection. "Today I've begotten you." So I don't understand. Well, let me read a little bit from Psalm Chapter 2 verse 7. I'll quote the verse that he's quoting, "I will tell of the decree of the Lord," here we go, "the Lord said to me, 'You are my Son; today, I have begotten you.'" Here's the next line. "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession."

Here is the picture of a king who was going to be in charge, in this case David in Psalm 2, who's going to conquer foreign armies, be a deliverer for the people, all the Philistines, the Amorites or whoever is after them, he's going to give them and establish them peace and David did expand the borders as large as they'd ever been in the Old Testament. Right? I mean, since the conquest of Joshua 1,000 years later, 600 years later. And so David did that, and he expanded the nation and foreign kings bowed down to him and they gave up territory and it's like, "See there. God, who owns the earth is expanding the borders of the king." But you think, well, there were limits to it. Of course there was. Egypt was still there. Syria was still there, right? You had all of these surrounding nations that still kept their borders. They were pushed back.

But what's this about the ends of the earth being the possession of the king? Well, this, obviously, like we see in other aspects of Psalm 2 has to do with the ultimate King. David was simply, here's the word, an "imperfect preview" of the king who was coming, who would establish his rule over the whole earth. And he would do that, really, ultimately by the resurrection. Because he would purchase for God people who he would pay their problem of sin. And then he would then show that they are now freed from the problem of the enemy, not of a foreign army, but the enemy and the problem of sin and death. And they would be his as they respond to him by my faith, they trust in him.

That's an important thing. The idea of "begotten," if that gives you trouble, it's not as though all of a sudden Jesus became God's Son when he was incarnate or became God's Son when he was born in Bethlehem or became God's Son on the day that he was resurrected. But he was revealed to be. It was like everyone started to see the alignment of God who's in charge of the world and now we've got this anointed leader, this king who now is showing that, it's like today he's been revealed to be. It's like everyone sees now this is the Son of God. This is the regent of God. This is the one who rules on his behalf.

So the resurrection made that clear because he conquers sin and death, and now people who are going to have their sin problem cancel, they are now in favor with their creator and look, people from all over the place. And that's where the book of Acts is going. Matter of fact, that's where this is going, because in the city and Antioch, they're going to run him out of this town because they don't like what he's doing and a bunch of Gentiles are going to start to get



saved and from this point on in Chapter 13 to the end of the book, all these Gentile nations start turning to Christ.

So now we have people from every nation of the ancient world putting their trust in Christ. Here we are on the other side of the planet, 2,000 years later, some of you, most of you I would hope trusting in Christ, saying, "Well, yeah, I have my sin problem solved and I have eternity secured because of Christ. And I know that it's true because of the empty tomb, which proved that the problem of sin was canceled out because the problem of death has been reversed."

You have to, number two, "See God's Solution in the Risen Christ." That's the whole point. To see the solution. God has fixed this problem. One passage on this, I want you to turn to this text with me real quick. First Corinthians Chapter 15. I want you to see how this resurrection is so vitally important to the idea of the solution of the ultimate problem that I have. If Christ was not risen from the dead, then this whole fixing of my problem, I have no real hope, I certainly have no validity of it. And that's what this text is going to say as clearly as any text in the Bible.

Look at it with me First Corinthians Chapter 15 verse 12. Let's start here, "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead," which of course is the central feature of the preaching of the New Testament, he's a risen Christ. He was killed. He was executed. Then he pops back from the grave three days later. "How can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?" Why are you acting like this is all there is, you going to die and then it's over? "If there's no resurrection of the dead," well, then you're saying, well, "then even Christ hasn't been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then all of our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." Why are you trusting in Christ if he's dead? And he's going to go on to say, well, eat, drink, be merry, tomorrow we die. There's no future to this.

And then "We're found to be misrepresenting God, because we did testify about God, that he raised Christ," from the dead, but if he didn't Christ from the dead. "If that's not true," then we're liars, "the dead are not raised. If the dead are not raised," verse 16, "not even Christ has been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you're still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ, euphemism for death. The people who have trusted in Christ when they died, your grandparents perhaps, my grandfather. Right? Well, "then they perished. If in Christ we have hoped in this life only, well, then we're of all people must be pitied." You ought to pity us.

Really, this is just about that, this life and trying to kind of through some moral teaching of a Jewish rabbi 2,000 years ago, in the Paul's case a few years ago, just kind of rearranging the furniture on the deck of a sinking ship, but it's going to sink. There's no way off of it, so we're all going to die and no one's ever rescued anyone from this. Well, then what good is it? I mean, really, "If it's just about us hoping in Christ now, you ought to pity us," because really, we should be done with all of us. Free yourself from this. Go free up your Sunday mornings, go do something else. It makes no sense. So Christ has to have died and risen again, which



is the point he makes in verse 20. "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, and he is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep."

Verse 21, "For as by a man came death," it all started in Genesis 3, "so also by a man came the resurrection of the dead." Of course, he is man but the only way he could accomplish the salvation of our sins was to be perfect. He had to be God, all God, all man, represents us, rises from the dead. "So also through a man comes the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each to his own order." Do you know that because Christ rose from the dead, it was the purchase of humanity for God, every tribe, tongue and nation, everyone is to be resurrected? Does that mean universal salvation and forgiveness? No. But it does mean that everyone's going to be resurrected.

Every dead body will be reconstituted with the software of the human spirit, every single person, whatever's left. God's going to reassemble that because of the resurrection of Christ. But then there's going to be those who belong to Christ, and they're going to have a different experience than the people who don't belong to Christ. And the difference there is the word that we saw at the end of the passage, "faith," we're trusting in Christ. This, by the way, is good for your theology just to clear it up. If you think only Christians are going to be resurrected and live in bodily bodies, tactile physical bodies, well, then you need to rethink your theology.

Even as Paul says as he stands before King Agrippa. "There will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous," or to put it in terms of the Old Testament, Daniel Chapter 12 verse 2, right? They're going to be, "In the dust of the earth." and the people are going to rise and "some are going to be risen to glory," and good and an experience that Jesus talked about of being entered into a kingdom where all God's favorites are. Then there's going to be those who are going to be raised "to contempt and scorn." And there's going to be judgment for them.

So we got to deal with the sin problem. Everyone's going to have to deal either with a sin problem that has been solved afterlife or a sin problem that has not been solved afterlife. And so you're going to have to deal with your sin problem after you die. So all of us can be resurrected, but I want to be in that group that says, bottom of verse 23, "I want to belong to Christ." Well, once that happens, verse 24, "The end is going to come and he," Christ, "is going to deliver the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule, every authority and every power." Can you see how this aligns with Psalm 2? "For he must reign until he's put all enemies under his feet." Look at this, verse 26, and "The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

If you want to say the main thing has got to stay the main thing. Here's the main thing. Jesus came to solve a problem, give his life as a ransom for many to solve the problem of death and the last enemy to be destroyed on the day of the resurrection is going to be our death. And everybody who's ever lived is going to be reconstituted and they will have their bodies back to live in the way that God designed them to be enmeshed in human biology, to live immortality, just



like they were designed in the Garden to live immortally, but you're going to live in one of two places. The solution is in Christ, I want to belong to Christ.

The keyword in our passage is we have to trust in Christ, and that's a very different experience for you if you're a Christian than for you if you're a non-Christian because as you sit here today as a non-Christian, you're hoping that you're going to be good enough to stand before your maker one day. And here's what I would just caution you against thinking that the preaching of the resurrection is some kind of fanciful, miraculous fairy tale that we can dismiss and still keep the shell of Christianity.

Let me take you back 140 years or so. The end of the 19th century. We had a movement within Christianity that started to look, Herbert Spencer in the wake of Darwin's writings, you had Christians saying, "Well, I'm kind of embarrassed about all this miracle stuff in the Bible, like, you know, Jesus being born of this virgin, which is proving that this is the creation of a body by God for this preexisting Christ. That he lived and then he died on a cross as some kind of transactional solution to my sin and then he rose physically from the dead.

And so these people started to say, "Well, I like the Jesus thing, and I've always gone to church, I kind of like the church thing, and I like the potluck. So let's keep all of that. But let's gut the Bible of these things. So the Bible is not really true-true, right? It's just kind of like true and in a kind of a moralistic way and there's no real divinity of Christ, no virgin birth. There's no substitutionary atonement on a cross. There's no empty tomb. He's certainly not coming again." Why? Because there are no miracles. This was, by definition, in the end of the 19th century something was called liberalism. We're going to liberally understand our Christianity in light of modern thinking about the fact that, well, there are no miracles. God could never step into time and space.

Matter of fact, we tried to take the atheistic, naturalistic view of philosophy, apply it to Christianity, mix the two together and hope that we still had something worth going to. And there was a response to that. And the response was many Christians said, "Now, wait a minute, if this isn't true, what's the point? I don't know why I would ever want to even invest in this. If this is really just about kind of rearranging the furniture on the deck of the ship, why have to follow some ancient code from 2,000 years ago? Can't I just arrange it however I want? Then why do I need this book? Why do I need this leader? Why do I need this ruler from 2,000 years ago who really died in a really tragic martyrdom and he's still dead? What do I need that for?"

So others countered with, "We've got to affirm the fundamentals of the faith that the Bible is true." Like, I mean, true-true, like the things that it says actually happened. That there really was a virgin birth and God invaded space and time, that there was this transactional problem of sin being dealt with on the cross, they call it the substitutionary atonement that my sin was seen on that cross so that I could be forgiven. That Christ in bodily rose from the dead because that's the whole point that there is an afterlife where I'm going to bodily live in a place where God is going to create this earth, it says, Second Peter 3, where righteousness dwells.



And I'm going to have this all inaugurated when Christ comes back. Those were called the fundamentals of the faith.

Now if I say, "Are you a fundamentalist Christian?" And you respond, "Well, I don't know. I've been to movies and, you know, I occasionally have a glass of wine or whatever." Listen, that's not what fundamentalism was. In the early 20th century fundamentalism was we have to get back to saying that Christianity means something. And it means something, for instance, the topic today, that Jesus literally biologically was fully physically, medically dead, and three days later, he was physically, really biologically alive. There was an empty tomb. He was dead and he's alive. We believe that. We affirm that. Is that weird? It's super weird. It's a miracle. It's weird, but God does what he does to accomplish and transact our salvation and we believe it.

Reuben Archer Torrey, who was the second president of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, came out here to the West Coast to Los Angeles and he connected with a church, and he took on the job of leading at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, which is later known as Biola. And they said we better reaffirm the fundamentals here, which was the whole point of the Bible Institute movement, by the way. Bible Institute, those words together, they reflected this outgrowth of saying we've got to certainly affirm the fundamentals of the Bible or this doesn't mean anything. It doesn't make sense. And while they were in the Ivy League schools teaching divinity at Harvard and Princeton and other places, they were saying, "Well, we want Christianity, but we don't want that stuff because that's embarrassing."

And so the fundamentalist movement, which was expressed in training people through the Bible Institute movement, they got very serious about this. Matter of fact, they had a bunch of articles, over 90 articles that were written by fundamentalists who believed in these things and put them in a four-volume set of books that Reuben Archer Torrey was the editor of.

And then there were two businessmen up in L.A. who were running Standard Oil who said, "We want to make sure this gets out to everyone." So not only the Bible Institute movement that was training people to lead in the church, but they wrote this four-volume set of books of articles and essays that then these two wealthy businessmen who were running Union Oil said, "We want a fund to get these books everywhere. We're going to send them for free to every pastor, every missionary, everybody who works for the YMCA, YWCA. We're going get them out everywhere so everyone can see that we better get the fundamentals of Christianity and we ought to get it right."

By the way, if you want a little history on this and see it with your eyes when you're flying out of LAX next time over the ocean, when in the normal direction, look out on the left side of your plane, you'll see the big oil area there. That's Union Oil. That's where Lyman Stewart and his brother owned that. Well they started that company and they, because they cared about this, though they weren't the theologians, right? They were the guys who helped fund this to make sure we would have things like Moody Bible Institute or the Bible Institute of Los Angeles and have books that would remind us that, listen, if you gut Christianity of its core you got nothing.



And by the way, what happened to all of those churches, these liberal churches? Well, they tanked. Why? Because all they had left was trying to rearrange the chairs on the deck of a sinking ship. And so, "We've got to deal with social issues. We've got to deal with the poor. We've got to, you know, we just had the financial collapse and the Great Depression. We got to make sure that everybody gets everything the way they ought to."

Why am I going in the history lesson here? Because history repeats itself. Matter of fact, the reason we started the Compass Bible Institute and not many Bible Institutes are being founded anymore. Right? I mean, in the scene and the flow of history from 140 years ago, we're saying what we really need to do is make sure that we don't lose sight of the fundamentals of Christianity.

We believe that there was a virgin birth. We believe that Jesus was God in human form, living in our place. That he died in our place in a transaction where my sins were judicially seen as being paid for on a cross, that three days later he physically biologically rose from the dead and that he promised to come back and he will come back. And we're looking forward to the "then and there." That's a reality. And we said, it's funny because in modern churches we get a lot of people losing sight of that. And really, it comports with this whole problem of sweeping death under the carpet. And if we only see Christianity as the "here and now," guess what the church is going to be functioning and focused on? Social issues, equity, making sure nobody's feelings get hurt, making sure everyone sees this as nice and kind and affirming. And you know what? Christianity is really good at that right now.

I'm just saying, you got to join us and I don't mean just us, us here at this church. I mean, all the churches across the country that are going to say, "No, no, no, we affirm the fundamentals." And whether you're helping to fund it as a wealthy businessman or whether you're a student who is going to learn to propagate it through teaching and preaching, or whether you're someone who is in the ministry now saying, "Well, we got to be scholars, back to the Bible. What does it say?" I'm just telling you, if you don't see the solution in a physically bodily resurrected Christ, we got nothing. And we will continue to see in the modern evangelical world what we saw in the late 19th century of churches becoming, by definition, irrelevant because you are irrelevant. There's no reason to be here. What's the point?

If you really just want to make society better, there are lots of organizations out there that will help you do that. They're better funded, right? They don't have all the strictures of a book that has a lot of offensive things in it about the rules, and I can just go and do what everyone else does just like the churches that bailed in the early 20th century because all they cared about was the shell of Christianity and the name of Christianity, but didn't care about the truth of Christianity.

That was a bit of a soapbox. But it's all based on the fact that we've got a risen Christ here. Verse 32, back to our text, Acts Chapter 13, "And we bring you good news," we bring you good news. That, by the way, is the word "evangelicalism." If evangelicalism, hey, we're going to make the world better by having more mosquito nets in these malaria-ridden countries and people who don't have clean water and we're going to bring them filters and dig them wells



and you know, people that feel, you know, marginalized in our culture we are going to make sure that we affirm them in the name of Jesus. If that's the good news, it's a different good news than this good news, because this good news is all about the fact that, you know, if you are subject to death because of sin, Christ came to deal with the sin problem, he reversed the death problem and we have a risen Christ. That's the point. And it was promised from the beginning. We bring you that good news.

And that good news, by the way, in terms of its present reality, that's why I tied this to the end of the passage. Look at the end of the passage just to kind of pick these concepts out of here in verses 38 and 39. Two words. One word is "forgiveness." We focused on the word "sin," but it's forgiveness of sins. "Aphiemi" is a great Greek word from 2,000 years ago that translates into our English word "forgiveness." It's gone. It's letting go. Something that sticks to you and you let it go. It's a lot like the picture in Isaiah 1 of having a stained garment and those stains are released.

I think of the detergent commercials that you see. It's all computer animation or whatever, but it's like the stain, it lifts away, it goes away. That's the idea. I have a stain, a problem, God looks at me and says, "You ate of the tree that I told you not to eat from." But "Yeah, and you're right. And I have and I got a sin problem just like all my neighbors and coworkers have, but it's been removed from my account. So you look at me and it looks like I've never done it." That's called justification. That's called forgiveness. That's called being "freed" to use this word here in verse 39, "Freed from everything from which you could not be freed from the law of Moses." Because Moses is dead, just like Buddha is dead, just like Muhammad is dead. Like Confucius is dead, right?

So the only living Christ that we have to solve the problem of death is Christ, the Christ of Christianity, and that's good news. And so we preach that good news because it means that your sins are forgiven. Which, by the way, is the present thing we rejoice in, even though the world is going to hell in a handbasket right now and we recognize that we're an increasing minority, and it feels like we're on the losing team. And it seems like the bad guys are winning and the good guys are losing. I get all that. I understand that. But it's about the "then and there." What we do now is we occupy. We not only occupy, we try to advance as best we can the gospel until it's over. But what we do is celebrate with a kind of vehemence, a kind of tenacity, a kind of determination, the fact that we are forgiven people.

And you know what? There is an appeal that I can share with my neighbor, my coworkers, my friends. You need to see how valuable this is. But the thing that your conscience continues to communicate with in terms of God's law, your conscience that says you're guilty, as my dad used to say, "You feel guilty because you are guilty." Right? Put it this way you feel bad about doing bad, and you think that something bad should happen to you because you've done bad. That feeling of guilt is something that I can have removed, even though I have done bad. That's forgiveness. Modern experience between now and the time I meet Christ, one of the most precious things that I should say, "Wow, this is the most important thing is that I am forgiven of my sins." That's what makes me eligible for this kingdom that's coming.



That's why my maker and I now are, here's the word, reconciled. We were at odds. And just like Adam and Eve hid in the shadows because God was coming, I don't have to hide. I can, as Hebrews says, "drawn near to him." That's why I pray to him. That's why I worship him. That's why I draw near to him, because I don't have a sin problem anymore. "You don't sin Pastor Mike?" I didn't say that, but my sins are forgiven. And as a child of God, I confess my sins, "He's faithful and just to forgive my sins and to cleanse me from all unrighteousness." You ought to reassess the value of that. That's huge.

Number three in your outline, "Reassess the Value of Forgiveness," because when it comes to us being qualified for this thing that's going to happen, the reversal of the problem of death, that's the thing you've got to treasure the most. What does it mean to be a Christian? Well, it means I follow Christ. As Jesus said, "If my word abides in you, you are my disciples, and you'll know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Set me free from what? Well, from the problem of sin. And not only the problem of sin, the consequences of sin. But I need to have your word abide in me and when it does, I say I believe that you are the solution to my sins.

When Jesus, he said, "I came to give my life as a ransom," a payment, "for many." The payment that I deserved to be punished has been laid on Christ. And he says, I'm going to take it upon myself. Therefore, someone could live, like the thief on the cross, a completely debauched life as a criminal and as he's dying he can transfer his trust to Christ, and Christ can say, "Hey, you're fully qualified." How did he say that? "Today you'll be with me in paradise." That's forgiveness. And guess what, the world doesn't like it.

I guarantee you the world doesn't like it, because take any infamous killer, any rapist, any child molester, anybody in prison who then has a prison conversion to Christ, I guarantee you the world doesn't like that. Especially you Christians are going to say, "Yeah, welcome brother into the family." The world says, "What are you talking about? Bad. He deserves punishment." Well, that's the whole point. Christianity is freeing us from the consequences of our sin.

You have to reassess that like you never have before. Colossians Chapter 1, a great two words connected with this. You ought to have joy and thanksgiving over the fact that you've been freed from the problem of sin, "transferred from the domain of darkness," where you're going to suffer for your sins after your death to the Kingdom of Light. It says, "You have been fully qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." And all I'm saying is that that happens transactionally in a moment where God takes the credit and merit of the cross, applies it to your sin, and you then are forgiven. That's huge.

How valuable is that? Huge. And yet, if I said to you, "Hey, Christians believe their sins are forgiven, you go, "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, (yawn) yeah, I believe that." I'm just saying, you can't yawn your way through that. That should be the most precious thing in your life that you sit here today, whether you've had a good Saturday night or a bad Saturday night and you say, "I'm forgiven." Huge. And non-Christians, if they know anything about your sin, they're not going to like that because they have got the onus of responsibility of being right before God on themselves. We've taken the onus of responsibility and we place it on Christ. Now does



Christ want us to sin less than we do now? Absolutely. He's working on that in our hearts. And you ought to be committed to that in your heart. But the onus has been transferred to him.

I went up into my attic last week. I don't recommend that. It's hot up there, dusty, dirty. My wife had said, "You know, you need to get those books now that we have grandkids, you're going to get those books out, you know, that we kept the good ones, the kids enjoyed, bring it down because you know the kids are going to come over." And I'm thinking, "They can't read yet." "Yeah, but still get them." So anyway, I'm not saying it was an argument, but I didn't want to go up in the attic, but I went up in the attic because I knew it was in the attic. My wife never goes in the attic. I don't think she's ever been in the attic. I don't want to go in the attic. Because she knows they're up there somewhere in a box, right? Well, OK.

So I'm like, I got to go. So I went up in the attic. And start looking around, and I found a lot of weird things in the attic. Cool things, things I had forgotten that I had. And one thing is a bunch of pictures, a lot of pictures. And I couldn't help but think about a story I read after I went up in the attic about this attic in southwest France, where some guy went up in his attic and he pulled down a painting and they say, "Now go, look it up." The CNN, NPR, all the news sources say it's worth and will go to auction soon, and they're hoping to fetch between 131 to 171 million dollars for the painting. After I read that I want to go back up into the attic just to double-check. I saw a lot of pictures in frames up there like what's up there?

This Caravaggio, which is a 17th-century painter. The painting, it's an amazing painting, by the way, a way that painting in that era, the Trenten era, the post-reformation era. They were focusing on a lot of things, including the A. This is a scene of Judith. It was a fictional story, Holofenes, the fictional commander who comes in to try to take the city. And Judith is so wise and beautiful, and she's cunning, and she is able to turn this thing around and save her city. And it's a picture of her cutting his head off. So it's a gruesome picture, but it's worth a 150 million dollars. So it's a good thing. And I thought to myself, well, look at this picture that if you pulled it out, you'd think, "Oh, that's gross. I know my wife wouldn't want me to hang it on the wall." Right? This girl cutting a guy's head off. "Honey, look what I found in the attic." She says, like, "Put it back."

And yet that bloody scene is way more valuable than my wife could ever imagine. If I took it down and said, I've just found a Caravaggio. I'm going to put it up and I want to have the electrician come out, we're going to put in some spotlights and get a frame, go get a frame with it, put a \$1,000 frame on it, put in the living room and it will be great. Everyone will see it. She probably will have no sense of what a good decision that was by her intelligent husband until she finds out that it's worth a 150 million dollars. Like, "Ah, I guess I could get used to this." Right? She'll probably want me to sell it, but you get the point, it's worth something now. Now she cares. "Call the insurance company, get it insured."

Forgiveness is something that really non-Christians look at and it's a bloody mess. The centerpiece of our theology is a crucified Christ on a Roman torture rack. Forget the wooden cross from a minute. Think about someone being appended to a wall, a wooden wall of a barn, hung there naked bleeding after being beaten. It just happened to be on a stake, on a



cross. But I mean, this is difficult. "This is what you guys celebrate?" It's what I celebrate. And it's not just that I celebrate that, but I celebrate the fact that because he rose from the dead, it showed that that was a transaction that God accepted.

The best-selling book in America has always been the Bible. The second, certainly in colonial America, the second most read book in the English language was Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan. And if you've ever read that there's a scene where he comes to the cross, the bloody cross. And the picture of him as a non-Christian is depicted by this burden of what Bunyan calls the load on his back. He's got this backpack, it's his sin.

Let me read this little sentence out of Pilgrim's Progress that I just think is so wonderfully written, and some of you know the story, you might remember the first part of it, which is Christian, that's his name, this fictional character, this allegory of the Christian life, he comes to the cross. His burden was loosened when he came to the cross and from his shoulder it fell off and the pack fell off his back and it began to tumble. This picture is up this hill and here's the cross. It begins to tumble and you remember that? Oh yeah, I remember he comes to the cross and he loses his weight of sin.

Listen to this though. "And so it continued to tumble, and it did so until it came to the mouth of the sepulcher," the tomb, "where it fell in and it was seen no more." That's a good line. I just love the way the book of Hebrews puts it, he atones for our sin on the cross, and we are justified by his resurrection. There's a sense in which the completeness of what we're trusting and the centerpiece of our theology is a crucified Christ who's risen and says to people like you and I who have an appointment with death as sure as you're going to be sleeping tonight, and says, "You know, I can deal with that problem. So come to me, confess your sins, admit your sins, trust in Christ. I'll take care of that load of thing on your back that we call sin and transgression and give you complete forgiveness." I hope that's true for you.

If it's not, I hope that God might be working on you, even in this sermon to think, "Yeah, I've got to get serious about the problem. And I'd like to incorporate the solution. Well, what do I do? Are you going to make us walk an aisle, raise my hand, fill out a card?" None of that. Matter of fact, I don't have to guide you at all if God's working on you because you're going to be here broken, saying, "I know I'm a sinner. I need God's solution." And you're going to take the onus of the responsibility of why in the world God would ever accept you and you going to transfer it from your own life and performance and you're going to place it on Christ and you going to leave a different person, I guarantee you. And you are going to hunger for the word of God. You're going to want to be with God's people. Maybe that's happening to some of you. I hope so.

And if you're a Christian and you know you're forgiven, I just want you to think about how valuable that is and maybe reassess that, reappraised that. It needs to be on display in your mind regularly. Put it on display even now.

Pray with me. God, we want to have forgiveness as a more central feature in our thinking, knowing that that's the only thing that makes me qualified. To know that what Christ did on



that cross is the first fruits of what's going to happen to me, those who belong to Christ, to each in his own order, we'd like to be in the order of those who belong to Christ so that when he marches into the kingdom, when everything is made right and he sits on the throne, that we're a part of that blessed kingdom there where we have a place in it, not a place in some see-through transparent, ghostly body, but in a real, tangible body with fingernails and taste buds and earlobes.

God, we look forward to that day when my body is made like his glorious body, transformed by his power, believing that because that is the fundamental of the Christian faith. And for those who are here pressured by their culture to think that there is no God or if there is a God, he certainly can't get involved with his creation, he could never break the rules that he made in physics, I pray that they might reconsider all that, just the folly of thinking that way that a God who created everything and created subatomic quantum quirks that this God could not get involved in what he has made and to know that he needed to, if we are ever going to be saved, if we're ever going to have the freedom of guilt removed from our back. So God, help us to pursue you, pursue you intellectually with all of our strength, our might. Just learn to love you in that way that we might experience the full blessing of what it is to be your child.

In Jesus name. Amen.