



Useful to the Lord – Part 9

Midcourse Adjustments

Pastor Mike Fabarez

We have been studying through the Book of Acts and I want you just to grab your Bibles and turn there. We've reached Chapter 14. This is a sub-series of Acts that we started many weeks ago in Chapter 13. The reason Chapter 13 and 14 are all combined into one series, a 12-week series, is because this is one really long episode in Paul's life. Paul and Barnabas are on their first missionary journey. It starts in Chapter 13 with them being sent out on the missionary journey and we're going to see them come back. But in that process of going through this missionary journey, we've seen a lot of interesting things happen, things that were, from a human perspective, very unexpected.

And in this particular section, and we'll only be able to look at the first seven verses briefly this morning. But in Acts Chapter 14 verses 1 through 7, we see Paul and Barnabas responding to a situation like we've already seen in some form, and we will see it in even more dramatic form in the rest of the book. But I want to pause and step out of this historic scene 2,000 years ago and think about what they're demonstrating. What they're demonstrating in their commitment to Christ is something that, it really is based on a set of questions that they were able to answer sincerely and thoroughly and with great resolve. And there are questions that they feel very philosophical when you say them out loud. But as I studied this passage in prep for this morning's service, I thought they really seem to demonstrate an application, a living out, a fleshing out of three of the biggest questions that any human being could ever ask.

The questions that keep people who know the answers to these questions, they know the accurate answers to these questions, from being fretful and frustrated. And by the way, do you think that's on the rise in our generation? Yes, right? As Jesus said, "There'd be wars and rumors of wars, pestilence." I mean, we've experienced all that here in the last couple of years, and we have a lot of frustrated and fretting people in the world. But in the words of Christ, it ought not be among you, right? He said that about leadership principles, but it certainly applies here. That's not what he wants of us, right? The storms on the sea, he expects us to be calm because we can answer these three questions. They seem deep but I hope that if you're a Christian here this morning you can answer them. And that is where'd you come from, where are you going and what are you here for?

I mean, those are really the big human questions that every mature thinking person should eventually get around to asking. And some people say, "Well, I'm just a cosmic accident, and who knows where I'm going because I don't think there's anything beyond the grave. And if there is, I don't know what's there, and what am I doing here? I don't know. I'm just living to have a good time. I mean, I just stay out of trouble and get the most out of life that I can." But as a Christian, you step into this relationship with God. And if you're here this morning as a Christian, a biblically converted Christian, then you know that the answers to these questions, they shift to what I would say is a category of truth. And now you're ready to say, I know where I came from, right? And I know where I'm going. And the time between my birth and my death, I should be able to figure out by reading God's self-disclosure, his book, the revelation



of God's truth, his mind on paper, this thing we call the Bible, I should be able to say, "I know why I'm here."

I know we'd love to have increasing clarity about the specifics of why I'm here. But I hope as a Christian, you think, well, I know the general idea, and some of you even further, and I would encourage you, can get down to I know even more specifically why I'm here. And I just would present to you in this passage with all the change that goes on from the beginning of this passage to the end of this passage, only seven verses, here are two guys who know where they came from, know where they're going, and they know why they're here. And that allows them to not fret. That allows them to not be frustrated, even though their life is filled with a lot of stuff that I think may parallel a lot of what we feel in our world that we should respond to with fretting and frustration. But I encourage you not to.

So real quickly, let's look at this passage, and let's see if I can't save you some frustration and fretting if you are a Christian. If you're a non-Christian, I don't have any real hope for you other than for you to step into the truth of the gospel and have these questions answered in a very definitive way. You need to know where you came from, where you're going and what you're doing here.

Take a look at this text with me. I had you turn to Acts Chapter 14 verses 1 through 7, it says, "Now at Iconium they..." And again, I could preach this as one series because Chapters 13 and 14 really should be one chapter, and no one was asking me when they put the numbers there, you know, a thousand years ago. But the idea, 800 years ago, is that even the pronoun here doesn't give us Paul and Barnabas' names, we have to go with that pronoun back to the previous section, and we know that they've been thrown out of the city in Antioch there in southern Galatia in what is now modern-day Turkey and now they're fleeing. They're going on 90 miles southeast to a place called Iconium, and they, got to fill that in from context, Paul and Barnabas "entered together into the Jewish synagogue."

Now they've been kicked out of the synagogue in Antioch, the city in Antioch. I keep saying the city in Antioch if you're new to this because they left Antioch, but Antioch in Syria. There's Syrian Antioch, north of Israel and then there's the city in Antioch, which is in southern Galatia, a Roman province of what is now modern-day Turkey, Asia Minor they called it in the first century. So the city in Antioch, they're run out of the synagogue and then they didn't say, "Well, we're done with the Jewish people now." No, he goes back to the synagogue and he's going to preach. Matter of fact, he's going to preach in such a way, he "spoke in such a way," middle of verse 1, "that a great number of both Jews and Greeks they believed." Now there's a good verb, but we need to understand that that was about believing in Christ as the Messiah that was predicted in the Old Testament as the solution to our sin problem. They believed that, they trusted in that.

But a lot of people didn't. Verse 2. "But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers." So it wasn't a universal applause from the people there in Iconium. There were people who said, "No, this is wrong" and they were out there trying to counter. We saw that in Antioch, the city in Antioch. So verse 3 underline this. "They



left," underline the word "left." Do you see that in verse 3? What translation are you reading? I know this is not the interactive hour, although Nathan got you going there in the announcements or you got going in the announcements. So anyway, does it say that they left? Correct me if I'm wrong. No, they didn't. Thank you. Thank you. Extra point for you. They remained.

They didn't just remain, "they remained a long time." Does that not seem counterintuitive? They just had happen here what happened there, and that is, people were stirring up the crowds in terms of contradicting what they spoke. And then it says, "So they remained a long time." They saw it as a challenge. They saw this pushback as, "OK. I know what I'm here to do and I'm going to do it." And they were "speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace," the message of believing in Christ is grace. God forgives us graciously. You don't earn it. There's no penance. There are no stairs to climb on your knees or rosary beads to count. You are trusting in Christ and it's a gospel of grace. And God was attesting to that because he didn't have a New Testament document to say, "Look here, it's written right here in the New Testament." The New Testament hadn't been written yet. So God attested to the non-prescribed, there's no New Testament, message of Christ by "signs and wonders." That's the pattern.

Second Corinthians Chapter 12 verse 12 talks about the apostles come, they represent and preach the truth of Christ without a Bible, they don't have a New Testament, they only rely on the Old Testament, and to fill in what happened, God says these guys are telling the truth because they're able to do "signs and wonders." That means they're suspending natural law. We don't have any specifics here as to what they're doing, but we can assume healing people, right? Who knows what kind of miracles took place there, but a clear denial of the physics of how things are supposed to work? God through them breaks the rules of nature that he had made. So that's a miracle. They don't happen very often in the Bible but here's an example where they were happening in the city of Iconium in ancient Asia Minor.

"But the people of the city were divided." Does that bother you? Because you think, "Man, you know, if I could just get the pastor over to my skeptical, you know, brother-in-law's house, and if he could just do a miracle. Like, you know, maybe somebody there had been, you know, in a wheelchair from birth and had atrophied legs and maybe if Pastor Mike could just BAM. And then they stand up and walk out, and then my brother-in-law would become a Christian. He'd stop with all this nonsense about atheism or agnosticism or whatever." That's not how it works better. Matter of fact, Jesus said in the parable that he told about the rich man and Lazarus, if they don't believe the word even if a man comes back from the dead, they're not going to believe it. This is a moral issue of disbelief. They're disbelieving, they're rejecting the gospel, even with the evidence of someone breaking natural law, which is what happens.

"People were divided; some sided with the Jews," who were against Paul and Barnabas, "and some with the Apostles." This brings up the first answer to my question. Where are you from? The word "Apostolos," which is transliterated for us, much like the word baptism, "Baptizo," as we just phonetically just say the word baptism. Apostolos is now just transliterated here, "apostle." That means, if you were to translate it, that means a "sent one," a messenger.



We've been talking in this series about ambassadors, a representative. We're representatives in this world. We should know where we've come from. God has created us and put us on this planet to represent him, and they're called apostles here.

Now, of course, there were twelve apostles. Their names are going to be written on the foundation stones of the City. But then we have the apostles here, which I think Paul steps into that role of being that twelfth apostle, that's debated because it's never said explicitly, but he becomes one who does do the sign of the other eleven apostles, things like breaking natural law, but they're called here, "sent ones." And I like that because it speaks to the idea that they know where they came from. They came, I guess you could say earthly coming from, they came just like Pastor Evan came from this church to go there to that church. They're sent from Antioch of Syria to come through Asia Minor, and they knew they were sent there as missionaries. But they know beyond that. They were sent by God, of course, God created them to be messengers of the truth, the gospel.

"Some sided with them," some didn't. Now they're used to the opposition, we saw it up there in verse 2. Look at verse 5 though, "When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers." Now the city officials are involved, right? The city council has voted, the magistrates, whatever. Now they've got a bounty on their head. And what do they want? They're going to persecute them and they're going to murder them. "To mistreat them," which is not like calling them names. They've been called names. This is like, we're going to torture you and stone you, right? It has nothing to do with pot. You understand what stone means, right? Nine o'clock crowd. Those jokes don't work at nine o'clock. Note to self, no marijuana jokes at the nine o'clock service. Sorry. Stoned, I'm not preaching to junior highers, I should know that. Stone means what? Taking up boulders and throwing at them to kill you.

Now I don't recommend you do this, but I've seen people stoned to death with rocks. There are videos out there of this happening in the world today, and it's a horrific experience. Horrific. You get knocked in the head, you get dizzy, you get knocked again. You get people throwing rocks at your rib cage. You can't breathe, broken ribs, you get down on the ground. They want to kill him in a most excruciatingly painful way. OK? So we have a repeat of verse 3, "So they remained a long time?" No, no, no, no, no. Just like Jesus said, if they're going to "persecute you" and want to kill you, "thinking they're doing a service" to society or "to God." What did Jesus say of the 12 and the 72 he sent out? "Flee to the next city." Go to the next place. And it may be why Luke actually uses this word, right? "They learned of it and they," this seems like retreat, "they fled." It seems like, "Oh, now you're going to chicken out. Now that it's going to cost you your life."

Do you think Paul was afraid to die for Christ? Nope. We read that in Philippians Chapter 1, willing to be a martyr to die for Christ. But he's not stupid. There are a lot of other people here in Asia Minor who should hear and can hear the gospel. There are people who God has as an audience with receptive ears. There's good soil out there, so to speak to use Christ's analogy of the four soils. They need to hear what you have to say. So if they're not going to hear you here and he's already had this pattern back in Antioch of Pisidia, right? Just knock the dust off your feet and go. In this case, I don't even have time to knock the dust off your feet because



they're trying to throw rocks at you and kill you. So leave, leave quick, "flee to Lystra," which is about 18 miles away, and then eventually to "Derbe," which is about 55 miles away from where they're at Iconium and these are "cities of Lycaonia." A different region than we had in southern Galatia, "and of the surrounding country."

And there they said, "We need to rethink this preaching thing. Maybe we shouldn't be doing this because it's causing a lot of trouble for us." No, no, no. They continued to preach the gospel, "and there they continued to preach the gospel." Eight words in English. If you're a Greek New Testament reader and some of you are, you're taking Greek at our class, look at what this is in Greek. Three words. I just love that, three words. They're preaching the good news of the gospel, it's a long Greek word, and it's the verb "to be." They continued. They remained. They were. "There preaching, they were." I just love that, the way it ends. It's like unfazed. They're all about this. We know what we're here to do. We may not be able to do it here, but if we can't do it here we're going to do it there. We know what we're called to do because even if you were to kill us and though I'm smart about the fact that you want to kill me, I'll go somewhere else, but even if they were to kill me, Paul said, I know where I'm going. Right? "To be absent from the body, be present with the Lord."

Here's a guy who did not fear. He's willing to go to the next city and risk his own life there. But he knows what he's called to do. And I love that. And we've identified with Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey, saying, you're on a missionary journey right now and this is a cycle in your Christian life where you're here to represent God. You are an ambassador of Christ, in your workplace, in your neighborhood, in your family, in your extended family, in your kid's Little League team, right? You are a representative of Christ. To represent his righteous standards, to model his righteous standards, to speak the words of life. To be able to say to them, "You know what you need before your creator? You need a righteousness that you don't have, an alien righteousness to use Luther's term, and you need that applied to your life by faith in Jesus Christ. That's what you need."

We need that message. It needs to come through us. We need to know where we came from, that we're sent ones in our generation. We know where we're going. And even if we were to have the worst possible thing happen, it's OK. It's not about this life. We got a guarantee as to where we're going and we need to know what we're doing. Number one on your outline if you're taking notes real quick here, I just want you to be "Convinced of Your Assignment," number one, be convinced of your assignment. They knew what their assignment was. It starts with their assignment and it ends with their assignment. Verse 1, verse 7, they were there willing to say it didn't work out in that city, we're going to come to this city, Iconium. We're going to go into the synagogue and guess what we're going to. We're going to speak. We're going to represent, we're going to talk about Christ, and we're going to speak in such a way, and we know what that way is because in verse 3, it says it's a bold way. They're "speaking boldly for the Lord." They're not afraid.

And they had confirmation. God was saying, that's the right thing. Confirmation. Confirmation through those signs and wonders. Now you're not an apostle in the first century, you're not an apostle with a capital "A." You're a "sent one" in our generation in South Orange County, in



the 21st century with a small "a." And so you don't get to see the miraculous signs of you suspending natural law. People claim that, the charlatans in our day trying to raise money from your grandma. That's wrong. It's crime. I get it. And maybe you're not a Christian and you say I'm not a Christian because of those guys. Well, we're not for those guys either. Let's shut those guys down.

But we do have affirmation when we start to get serious about what God has called us to do. It's a supernatural kind of affirmation, not by doing a magic trick and suspending natural law, but I love the way it's put. Listen to this statement as Paul talks about the confirmation in Second Corinthians Chapter 3. He says, "Do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation from you?" Some kind of proof, some kind of resume that says, "Well, these guys will tell you they're legit." "You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, and known and read by all. You show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." You'd like to go to CHOC in Mission Viejo and up in Orange, and you like to walk through and see these kids with cystic fibrosis or, you know, with the spina bifida. You'd like to heal them. That would be great. That would be good and have a short-term benefit because they would live without that malady, that disability. That would be great.

But the miracle that you can perform as a representative of Christ that shows that your assignment is real and it's working is when hearts are changed just like this. When you look back and you say, "I have represented Christ, I've spoken of his gospel and I've seen lives changed," and you watch maybe the people who got baptized this morning. Maybe you had a hand in it, maybe your name was mentioned. You think those people's changed lives as God's Spirit indwells and they redirect their life, their priorities, they are used now in a way they never would have been used, that's the confirmation of God involved in that.

You need to be sure of your assignment. Start with the big picture, right? All of us as Christians are representing Christ in this world, and we're supposed to have our mouths filled with the message of the gospel. That's just the bottom line, every Christian. That's how it starts. When Jesus calls the apostles it's like the call to us. "Follow me and I'll make you fishers of men." You're going to replicate this. If that didn't happen with every generation of Christians we would not be here. You're supposed to be EVANGELICAL Christians. There's another transliterated word, the "Euangelion" of the Greek New Testament. Euangelion means that the message of the good news, it's coming out of my mouth and I'm speaking that to people. That's the word, by the way, that's in that last verse. One of the three words of verse 7, euangelion only it's used in a verbal form that they're out there giving that message. And I hope that you see that as your mission.

I mean, you want to speak philosophically? We can go back to, I suppose... I mean ask the philosophical question "Why am I here?" I could go to Romans Chapter 11 verse 36 for instance, right? Think of that doxological statement, the statement of praise to God. It breaks out in Paul's discussion of really tough topics about Israel, the Gentiles and all that. He says this, "All things are from him," speaking of God, "all things are through him and all things are to him." Think of the circle there. "All things are from God," right? We would not be here if God



did not create us. "And all things are through him." The Bible says very clearly he sustains us. He gives us life and breath and everything else to quote Acts Chapter 17. Colossians, that Christ upholds all things, and in him all things consist. "In him we live and move and have our being," to quote more Scripture.

So he sustains all things. All things are through him. And then all things, here's the problem for most of us, we're created by God, God sustains our life and then we do whatever we want. No, here's what Christians do. Now we know that all things are "to him." All things are "for him." All things are directed to glorify him. the first statement of every good catechism, right? Every confession. What is the chief end of man? Think about that, Westminster Confession. It's to glorify God. That's the first statement out of our mouths. What are we here for? We're here to glorify God. And we're here to glorify God by living a life that reflects his holiness, as imperfectly as we do, and to give that message that the perfect holiness that you need to be acceptable before your God is all bound up in the coming of Jesus Christ living in your place and dying in your place. We heard it testified to so eloquently this morning from our baptismal candidates.

That is a purpose that you have to... How do we glorify God? Do you represent him? Do people at work know that you're a Christian? Do people in your neighborhood know you're a Christian? Do they hear you talk about your faith? Do they see you demonstrate your faith? Are you representing him? Are you really an ambassador of Christ? And the answer is yes. The question is how good of an ambassador are you? How are you doing at your ambassadorship? And we've been talking about that for the last nine weeks in this series. But then think even more specifically, right? This is why I was made, and therefore I'm going to engage in it in a specific way wherever I might find myself.

Turn to Galatians really quick, Galatians Chapter 1. I only want to go there, not only because it says something so powerfully about what we're talking about, but Paul is writing back to the Galatians. When he writes to these people who he encounters here in Acts 13 and 14, he's going to write this letter back to the churches of southern Galatia. And he says this about his calling. And he says it in such dramatic terms. I just want you to feel it and to sense it. It's just so powerful the way he says it. Galatians Chapter 1. You could start with the first verse in Chapter 1 because he's always starting with "I'm sent by God." Right? "Paul, an apostle." An apostle. And it's not like I just decided to do this. No, I understand where I came from. I came from God. And God has called me. "Not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." I mean, I have the all authoritative one who has sent me and placed me on the planet. That's just basic theology, right?

Acts 17 again when Paul's speaking to the Athenian professors, he says God has chosen the "specific times and boundaries of their habitation." And as a Christian, I know I'm from God, he sustains me through God, and I'm supposed to live to God. Second Corinthians 5:15. I quoted it in the baptismal. I'm living FOR him, right? I need to understand that sense of, OK, that's my calling. How dramatically do I want to see this? As dramatically as this that the God of the universe has set me on the timeline, in this case, you're here physically looking to my eyeballs in South Orange County in this year and this month, you are HERE and God has set



you here providentially. And now you're supposed to represent him to the group that you have a sphere of contact with.

Look down to Galatians Chapter 1 verse 15. How dramatic does he get? "But when he who set me apart before I was born." I just want you to think about that. Did God set you apart before you were born to be here in South Orange County representing him in our generation? The answer is yes. You have to see that. Not until you align with that assignment do you really sense that profundity. That's why I'm here. I might be a plumber, I might be an architect, I might be a businessman, I might be a mom, I might be who knows what? You have a job in this generation, in this place with those people that you interact with and rub shoulders with all week long. That is your calling. Before you were born, God "set you apart, called you by his grace, and he was pleased to reveal his Son to you," like he was to Paul. He says "to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles." And then I wasn't sitting around going, "Ah, now what?" No, I see it. I get it. I'm going to do it.

Know your assignment. Be convinced of your assignment. It is so important. It changes everything about how you deal with issues. And when you start seeing people who are responding to the impact of your influence in their life for Christ, you will say there's the confirmation. Talk about signs and wonders. There's no bigger sign and wonder than a changed life, right? Hearts of stone that are turned to God and love God. That's just a miracle. It may not be the miracle you want, like to go through the hospital hallways and heal people. That's the miracle that confirms that you are the messenger God has called you to be in our generation. Don't blame all your whims on God. I'm not saying that, anything you want. "I'm called to the sail yachts for God," you know. You can put a lot of things that you want into that and use God as a cover. That's not what we're doing. We're talking about the fundamental calling of you as a Christian to represent him where you're at.

That's divine confirmation of the assignment God has for me. Look at verse 4 though real quick in Acts Chapter 14. A very simple statement here, and as I read it, I'm naturally drawn to the negative side like you are, I suppose, especially if you think people are speaking against you and they're poisoning people's minds about what you're saying, it says, "The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews," oh, no, they're against us, "and some with," the sent one, "the apostles." And I'm just naturally, because before it and after it, I'm seeing that there are negative things that come from people who don't align with Paul and Barnabas, they're against them. So I want to go there.

But then I thought, "Wait a minute." I looked outside of what's going on in this text and I thought how often does Paul focus on his adversaries? Now, he does sometimes. "Alexander the coppersmith, he opposed us, but God's going to take care of him." You do see that occasionally, but more often than not, he spills more ink talking about those who were with him. And he finds great, here's a word, refreshment in that. He finds great, to use another word that he uses, comfort in that. I'd say this: in a world that's difficult, in a world where you going to get some pushback, a world where are you going to maybe lose a job for standing up for Christ, in a world where it's going to get increasingly hard to stand up to even say basic things that the Bible says as you represent his righteousness and speak of his salvation, I'm



just telling you this: you ought to number two "Value the Human Affirmation." And I bet you got some. I bet you have some.

Only in rare situations did Paul never have anyone, and even when he had no one in Second Timothy Chapter 2 as he looks back on a season of his ministry and said the Lord stood with me at least. Right? But I'll tell you what, you probably got what he had. I got Luke. I got Barnabas. I got Titus. I got Silas. I got Aristarchus. Right? I mean, these are people who stood with him. And he said, "Man, I'm so thankful that you partnered with me," he says to the Philippians over and over again. And because of that, he said, my heart was warmed. I mean, it's a paraphrase, he says, "I yearn for you with all the affection of Christ." He says, "In every remembrance of you, I thank my God for you." Why? Because you stood with me.

At the end of that epistle, by the way, in Philippians Chapter 4 he said there were a lot of people who did not stand with me. You Philippians stood with me. When no one else stood with me, you stood with me. It's like you were standing in prison even with me. That's a prison epistle. He's writing from a Roman prison under house arrest there in Rome. And he says, "You guys were with me. It's as though you were there supporting me." It is the classic definition, by the way, when human beings say, I'm going to stand with you in your calling in your assignment. Hard at work, difficult in this situation, it's hard with your family member, your agnostic brother-in-law, whatever it might be. But I'm going to stand with you. I'm going to pray with you. I'm going to pray for you. When you encounter the difficult things, I'm going to feel those things with you.

That's the classic definition of the word that we translate in our text "encouragement." And I have many times described it because it's a great compound word in the Greek New Testament, right? "Parakletos" translates the word sometimes "exhortation," but it translates to the word "encouragement," like when Barnabas was an encouragement to Paul. He stood with Paul, which is poetic, because in this passage that's what he's doing. Paul is about to get driven out of town, but Barnabas is there and there are others who are there. I mean, some of the people, the town was divided. There are some that sided with the apostles. That's awesome. Encouragement "Para" means "next to," "Kaleo" means "called in."

I just want you to take a minute to value the people who have been called in to support you and encourage you in the midst of your calling and your assignment where you're at. Do you do have some? I hope so. I assume you do. And they're cheering you on and they're praying for the things you're praying for. And they want you to represent God well at your work. And they want you to stand up for Christ in your family. They want you to do the right thing in your evangelistic encounters. They're for you. Value those people. I think about First Corinthians 16 when Paul says these are the people who deserve recognition in my life. You need to recognize these people. They stood with me. Stephanas, the household of Stephanas. You have so many people that Paul said, "These were the people who kept me from just like losing my mind." Titus, for instance, Titus came and refreshed me. He brought me comfort.

We value the human affirmation, and you even respond the way that we see Paul responding with thanksgiving and prayers, and he loves them. And you ought to love that too. It's a good



thing, and I hope God's supplying it in increasing measure. If you stand up for Christ, you're going to get opposition but value those who side with you. That's a good thing. Acts Chapter 14 verse 5, "When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews and rulers to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, and they continued to preach the gospel." Here's what we saw even in the last passage. We talked about the undeterred nature of Paul when the venue in which he was called to do what he was called to do was shut down. We talked about closed doors and open doors. The door is going to be open because they don't know him yet in Lystra and Derbe, but in Iconium, it was shut. Why? Because they're going to kill me and it doesn't make any sense for me to be killed right now when I can go preach the gospel somewhere else.

And so it is for you. There are situations, I should say, there are entire industries right now where Christians are not going to be able to work there anymore. They're just not. You cannot stand for truth in certain industries and certain professions that your grandmother could have easily spent her whole career or his whole career, your grandpa, doing what you were doing and standing for Christ and living for the gospel in that place. There are certain things that are shut down now, and you just can't do it. And I'm saying, well, what do you do? Do you just shut up and be quiet for the rest of your career? Nope. You moved from Iconium to Lystra and Derbe. You find another place. Because it's not about where you do what God has called you to do. It's about what you're called to do. Know what your assignment is. What am I supposed to do here? Right?

It's not about me, but I remember I've told you my story, some of you. I had planned in the first church that I pastored to stay there for the rest of my life. I envisioned it, I thought it, that's what I'm here to do. I'm going to die here in my study, right? I planned it would be several years down the road, but I thought this is where I'm going to be? And then God changed everything. And I could have, I'm not saying I wasn't tempted to, say, "Well I'm done with this. It kind of stinks. I don't like it. I quit. I'm finished." And God said, "No, I just want you to do what you're called to do and you can't do it here anymore. I want you to do it here." OK. Right? That's a hard thing to do sometimes when you get fired. I mean, some of you went through a family that just disintegrated and you thought I never thought I'd be divorced. I never thought I'd be fired. I never thought I'd be run out of town. Right? I get that.

But you know what? You got to be unfazed by that. Those are redirections and as we've seen their providential redirections because God is doing amazing things, like guess who he's going to meet in Lystra, by the way. Timothy. How important does Timothy become in his ministry? Huge. We got books of the Bible because Paul met Timothy in Lystra, and this was all about Paul doing what God called him to do, even though he didn't know where he was supposed to do what he was called to do. Number three, you need to "Remain Unfazed by Redirections." Value human affirmation. Right? And if in a situation you find that your whole circumstance for doing what you're called to do is changed. It could be, I think about it, you're a mom. I'm supposed to raise these kids. Death of a child. Huge. How big is that? Gigantic. Think about Job, his whole family, all of his kids were killed. Is it like, "Well, I guess I'm done doing what I'm supposed to be? I'm fed up with this. I tried to be a good dad. I tried to be a



good, you know, leader and boss." No, just you got to transition and say, whatever the redirection is, I'm going to do it. I'm going to be unfazed by the redirection in my life.

I know this is kind of in the background of the last time we were together talking in the end of Chapter 13, but Proverbs 16:9 is so good. "The heart of man plans his way," and when you're a Christian you plan about having your life be directed to God for his good. That's such an important thing. I'm all for it, right? But that path that you're planning, as it says in the next line here, it's the "Lord that actually directs your steps." And so providentially and circumstantially, doors do close and you do get run out of town and you're Iconium may become Lystra and you go, "What am I even doing here?" Well, you should know what you're doing here. It's the same thing you were doing in the last place, in the last setting, in the last relationship. It's living for God, glorifying him, representing his righteousness and speaking his truth to those people.

You got to know what you're called to do, and you ought to be able to dramatically say if you can say it safely and biblically, as you're calling, based on biblical principles, you ought to be able to say I was born for this. And he says, that's what I'm going to do till the end of my days. I know where I came from, and I know where I'm going and I know what I'm called to do, even though I don't know the circumstances sometimes as to who I'm called to do it with. But I know what I'm called to do.

Let's settle here just as we close in a great psalm, and it's a psalm that I'm directing all of us who are participating in small groups to engage with, it's a long section. And you can do all you want in your study in the whole psalm, but turn to Psalm 37 as we close. Here is a passage of Scripture that is written by David, and if anyone knew about redirections, it was David. I mean, David was just, I don't know what his plan was as a shepherd boy, but it probably wasn't to be the king of Israel. And then he was called to be the king of Israel, and then a bounty was on his head and talk about being run out of town. He was run out of town. He's run out of Israel. And then he became the king and you think, OK, great, I finally arrived, I just I get to do what God's calling me to do. And then his son Absalom rises up in a coup d'etat to overthrow his kingdom, and he ends up leaving as a refugee with his son trying to kill him. I mean, talk about a guy's life that's just like all over the place. King David.

And yet a guy like King David could write this psalm by the guidance of God's Spirit, to minister to us when the topsy turvy, tumultuous life and world that we live in changes our plans and we can settle on this. Let's just read the first 19 verses here and it all starts with this first word, fret not. Fret not. "Don't fret because of evildoers." They may have slammed the door shut. They may be trying to pick up stones to stone you. Or look at the guys who compromise and they stay in their jobs or they get their paycheck or they get the promotion or they're able to stay long term in a place, but they're compromised. "Don't be envious of the wrongdoers." Matter of fact, the people that oppose, the people that compromise, they're going to fade, "They're going to soon fade like the grass, they're going to wither like the green herb." They look good now. It won't look good for long. You "trust in the Lord and do good."



Even the tense of that, "continue" to do it. Just keep on going. Unfazed. You need this word in the New Testament, "endurance." "Run the race that is set before you, do it with endurance." It's a great word, "Hypomone." I'm resolved to do this. Remain unfazed. "Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land," and I love this, it's a poetic way to say, "befriend faithfulness." My job is to be faithful. Some say, "If you're faithful, you'd stay there." "Well, I don't know. I couldn't stay there, I didn't stay there. God made it clear I'm not supposed to stay there." Great. I'm just going to be faithful to do what I'm called to do. I know what God has called me to do. I'm going to keep doing it. "Delight yourself in the Lord," focus on him. He's unchanging, his purpose is unchanging, and "he'll give you the desires of your heart."

And what is that? Do you know what I want? I want to be able to die saying I fulfilled my assignment. That's what I want. It may not be the way I planned it. "The Lord is going to direct my steps," but I know what I'm here for. I hope at the end of this, he can say, "Yeah, well done." That's where this whole passage is going. The last sermon in the series right before Easter is called that, right? We want to hear well done. And in the first missionary journey, they get to hear that at the end. We get to see that affirmation from God. Verse 5, "Commit your way to the Lord." This is what I think should be done here. Here's the next step. "Trust in him. God will act. He'll bring forth your righteousness as the light, your justice as the noonday." Do you want to fret? No, don't fret. Here's the opposite of fretting, "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him." We'll see this workout. "Fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! Refrain from anger."

Talk about the problem in our day, fretting and frustration. That should not be what we're doing, and we don't see it in this passage. It's an argument from silence, but Paul and Barnabas are not fretting, and they're not angry and they're not frustrated. They're going to do whatever comes next. They're going to take the redirection and keep going. "Refrain from anger, forsake wrath. It's not about revenge, it's not about payback. "Fret not yourself; it only tends to evil. For the evildoers are going to be cut off, and those who wait for the Lord, though they're going to inherit the land. In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there. But the meek," the meek trusting in God, committing their way to the Lord, doing what they're called to do "they're going to inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace." That's what I want. Not frustration.

"The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him," and they were doing that to Paul and Barnabas. "But the Lord laughs at the wicked." They think they won because Paul ran to the next city. You don't know what blessing you lost in having them run to the next city. "The Lord sees that his day is coming. The wicked draw swords and bend their bows," and picks up rocks, "to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those who way is upright; their swords will enter their own heart, and their bows will be broken. Better is the little that the righteous has," think about that now, "than the abundance of the wicked." Paul and Barnabas left like fugitives probably sneaking out of town at night. They fled. That's a weak word, it seems. "Better is the little that the righteous has than the abundance of the wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous. The Lord," verse 18, "knows the days of the blameless," he's involved in every detail, every step, "and their



heritage will remain forever; they are not put to shame in evil times; in the days of famine they will have abundance."

The University of Chicago does a survey every year, it's been doing it for over 50 years now, to gauge and estimate the happiness of our country. To flip it over, I guess you could say they're trying to judge the fretting and frustration of our culture. The last report they put out, I don't know if you heard the report. Some of the news channels did talk about it. We have hit in all the years they've been doing it an all-time high of people being unhappy. And I guess I'm thinking, "Well, that's no surprise. I guess I could have predicted that." Circumstances have changed. All the things that Jesus said would happen, there would be wars and rumors of wars, there are going to be pestilence. There are going to be all kinds of problems. But what does Jesus say after that? Do not be alarmed. Everyone else is going to be alarmed? Do not be alarmed. Don't fret. Don't be frustrated.

Because even if they shut our church down, think about the things that the government can do. Think about the oppression that can happen to you in your jobs in your situation just by standing faithfully for Christ, saying what he's been saying to us in his word from the beginning. A lot can happen that's bad. Don't fret. Paul is going to end up in jail in Philippi, in stocks at night after being beaten. We're going to see all of that and Paul? He's rejoicing. Paul's writing letters of encouragement to those who stand with him. We're going to see all of them. They said it's reached an all-time low, happiness, through every demographic. It's the worst report they've ever put out there at the University of Chicago. And I think to myself, OK, I think back to the words of Christ. It might not be among you. Why? Because we don't fret. It can go bad, it can get tough, it can be difficult, we can become the underground church, right? OK? Well, let's do it, because if we know what we're called to do and we know where we're going and we know where we came from. We're sent by God to do this in our generation. We're not afraid, unencumbered by fretting and anger.

We're grateful to the people who stand with us. I hope that doesn't change. I hope we continue to see this tribe increase. Fear is a problem, and it shouldn't be that way among us. I hope that a reminder of our purpose, our calling will get you to be free from a lot of the frustration and angst and fretting that we see in our world. Be different than that. Go rejoice this afternoon, if you know where you're from, where you're going and what you're here to do. And if not, today's the day to get that right. Figure that out. Repent of your self-directed life. You heard the testimonies. That's not going to work. "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world," get everything you want, "and forfeit his soul," because you will forfeit your soul if you're living by your rules, you just will. It's about you putting your trust in Christ, and I hope that maybe the voices, the harmonious voices you've heard this morning from a lot of different mouths might be what God uses to bring you to your knees to say I surrender because that's what it is, surrendering to the will of God. Can't do it, don't measure up. Not good enough. God doesn't grade it on a curve. God has no grandchildren. It's time for you to put your trust in Christ today and start living for him. Second Corinthians 5:15. And once you do, then you can be able to answer in increasing specificity where you're from, where you're going. You can join us in doing what we know we're here for, ambassadors of Christ.



Would you stand with me? Let me dismiss you with a word of prayer. God, we in our day continue to hear news, and some people here probably are too addicted to every bad headline that comes out. We don't want to stick our head in the ground, but God, everything that we're seeing should not make us gasp, it should remind us that you're faithful to keep your promises because you said between now and the end, there will be increasing trouble on this planet. And you have warned us of that repeatedly. But you've said, "My peace, I leave with you. Not as the world gives," I give you a different kind of peace, a transcendent peace. In this world to quote that passage right, God, you told us, Christ told us, "You'll have tribulation, but take heart," right? Be heartened. Don't fret. Don't be frustrated. "I've overcome the world," because you know where it's going to end. "In my father's house there are many rooms, many places, many dwelling places. If it weren't so, I would have told you," but I told you. And Jesus said he's gone to prepare a place, and we're so grateful that he made that promise. He sealed that with a historic bodily resurrection that should make this something that we never doubt. We await his return as the church has been doing for 2,000 years, and we want to see more people brought to repentance and faith and submission to Christ, we want to be representatives in our day, whether we become the outcasts of our culture, whether we become the oppressed of our society, or whether we continue with the freedom that our grandparents have had to proclaim the gospel and put it out on social media and stream it on YouTube. If that continues or it ends, we will not fret. We will not be afraid. But we'll continue to do what we're called to do, and I pray you'd help us to do that with strength, vigor and resolve.

In Jesus name. Amen.