



Gospel Impact – Part 7

When It Requires Courage

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, I'm assuming that most of you remember the 1990s. Do you remember the 1990s? You don't have to be an old-timer to remember the 1990s. Well, let me just append this to the 1990s. According to general surveys in our country, in the 1990s 90% of the people would choose Christianity as their religious preference. Right? Whether it's Protestant or Catholic or whatever denomination they would say, "Yeah, I'm with the Christians." 90% in the 1990s. That's a pretty high number. It doesn't mean they're Christians obviously, it doesn't mean they're devout, it doesn't mean they read the Bible but I mean they were generally favorable toward Christianity, at least in the surveys that were given in the 1990s.

That number, as you can imagine, has precipitously dropped since that time. I mean, it has continually gone down and with it going down has risen the increasing hostility that you see and hear against Christians in our culture. Matter of fact, what is really interesting about the stats during this period of time, 70% of the people who were raised in a church who checked out of church, 70%, didn't choose to be conservatives or moderates. They chose to be progressives and liberals when it comes to issues about the sanctity of life or gender or sexuality. It was always like "we are now going to have a set of views that sees the other side, the side that we came from, well, they're bigoted, they're sexists, they're racists, they're, you know, they're ignorant.

They became the group that has targeted people like, I assume a lot of you here and myself who still hold to biblical values. Those who say "we're just... we don't like religion at all." Right? It has gone through the roof in our culture. I mean, it's phenomenal. It continues to rise and the disdain for Christianity continues to rise. But the kindness toward Christianity, the palatable cultural acceptance of Christianity, has gone down and down and has continued to plummet.

Listen, I don't want to get up here and you immediately think, "Oh, yes, here it comes, it's a doom and gloom sermon, you know, here he goes again." All the forecasts about the present situation in Western culture in America in particular are never meant, as I often try to remind you, to scare anyone. We're not enjoying the stats that show how embattled the Christian faith is. We're not trying to do that. We're trying to actually prepare you for what is coming because the church of tomorrow is going to look very different than the church of your grandparent's generation or even the church in the 1990s that you were a part of. Things are changing and you need to be ready for that.

It is, as Jesus says, at least in our day, it's going to look more like in the first century when he warned his followers in Luke Chapter 6 verse 22 that they're going to "hate you, they're going to exclude you, they're going to revile you and they're going to spurn your name as evil." And that's what he said would happen to those who followed him. Now, that's a pretty disturbing, disquieting list, right? They're going to hate you. They're going to exclude you. They're going to revile you, and they're going to spurn your name as evil. That is increasingly happening.



That's all I'm saying by the statistics and continues to ramp up in our generation. And we need to be ready for it. And how do you get ready for that?

Well, the natural response to that is concern. It's fear. It's distaste. We don't want that. No one, if you're a normal person and I hope you're a normal person, you don't want that, right? No one is happy about that. And yet, if I remind you of where I found that list of things in Luke Chapter 6 verse 22, it begins with the words "blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you, when they revile you, when they spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man." Now that's weird that I'm supposed to be considered blessed? Actually, the next verse, verse 23, in that passage, Jesus goes on to say, yes in that day, "Rejoice," and here's something weird, "leap for joy." "Yay, I got fired at work. They hate me because I'm a Christian." Think about that, that is so counterintuitive.

How do we get there? How do I keep my mind in obedience to Christ trying to somehow not be completely like steamrolled in my emotions when people don't want to work with me because I'm a Christian, or I lose my job, or my profession that I trained for now, I can't even engage in my profession because I cannot stand for Christ with the principles of God's word and still be employable in this. I mean, this is the kind of thing that is happening in our generation, which is nothing new by the way. As a matter of fact, what's good about reading the New Testament is it's read in the context initially, at least, when not only does the Greco-Roman world see itself as an enemy of Christianity, but even the group from which this sect, as it was called, grew up, the Jews themselves were opposed to it.

And it was obvious that if you're a Christian you're going to be excluded, you're going to be hated, you're going to be reviled, you're going to be seen as an evil person. And so when Jesus talks about these things, I suppose they'll become increasingly more and more relevant to us in our day. And I just want us to say, okay, how do we maintain this kind of counterintuitive response and not be fearful? Because here's the thing, the way I respond, and you I assume naturally respond, is when people hate me for something, well, I want that to stop. I want it to be mollified and somehow mitigated. So if I can just kind of stop doing the things that invoke that response, that would be good. But that's not an option for us.

As a matter of fact, there is a passage that we've reached in Acts Chapter 18 that I think gives us the key for this in a scenario that's a lot like ours, at least in the progression of our culture, where we can look at these verses and say, right here is the answer to us making sure that we don't get to the place where our fear has us withdraw from the things that God has called us to be and to do in our generation. If we can just understand and process these things we can maybe start to be obedient to Christ's words in Luke 6:22.

So turn with me to this passage in Acts Chapter 18. And if you remember where we were last time we were together studying this, we were looking at Paul in Corinth, a familiar city, because he writes two letters that we have extant in our Bibles and those two letters written to the Corinthians, we don't know a lot about the Corinthians just by reading those letters, but we see the origins of the church in Corinth right here in this particular part of Acts.

But we split it up because now we've got a different thing taking place in Corinth that Paul, if we think back and even glance back to where we've been in reaching the kind of opposition that has now happened in Corinth, you would see Paul normally, whether it's Berea or whether it's Antioch or wherever it is, you would see him leave, right? In Thessalonica things get hard. They run him out, basically, and he says, well, now I'm going to move to other places. And that makes sense for a traveling evangelist, a traveling missionary. Well, if the heat's been turned off here, I'll just go somewhere else.

Well, what happens in verse 9 is that God breaks into the scene here and says, listen, I don't want you going somewhere else. I need you to stay put. And I can't have you run away to another town, which may have been strategically okay previously, but now I've got a reason for you to stay here, but I can't let fear creep into the equation. So let's take a look at what the Lord says. And if you want to define who the Lord is in the tri-unity of God, look up at verse 8 and you'll see when it talked about Crispus becoming a Christian, the word "Lord" is describing Jesus Christ.

And that's the pattern, by the way, when Jesus appears to Saul of Tarsus, who becomes the Apostle Paul, of course, in Acts Chapter 9, and we'll see it later in the book of Acts, where Jesus himself comes to Paul in a vision and has a message for him and he's got a three-line message here in verses 9 and 10 that we can learn from and the surrounding verses help flesh it out. So let's understand what Christ has to say to Paul when the heat is getting turned up and perhaps we can see how we can avoid the kind of mitigation to our voice in our culture and in our workplaces due to the temptation to be fearful.

So look at it with me, Acts Chapter 18 verse 9. We'll read through verse 17. Paul and his team are in Corinth and Paul here gets this vision, "And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision." Here are three lines. We need to get every line of this and understand what's being said, because you'll find it's so applicable to where we're at today. Here it is, line number one. "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent." There's one thing I want you to leave with today. That's it. There is the summary of everything I need us to catch from God's word this morning. "Do not be afraid, do not stop speaking and do not be silent."

Verse 10, here's the explanation, "for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you." Another "for" here comes in verse 10, "for I have many in this city who are my people." So two explanations for this don't be afraid and keep on working. Verse 11, he obediently responds. "And so he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them." Very good. "But," verse 12, "Gallio was proconsul of Achaia." Remember Achaia is the southern part of Greece. He'd been in Macedonia, the northern part of Greece. So here's Gallio from Rome, he's there in charge of this area, it was all under the jurisdiction of Rome at this particular point.

"And the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal" of Gallio. And what were they saying? Verse 13, "This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law." Now, who's concerned about that? The Jews are. They don't like what's happening. They even had their ruler of the synagogue, Crispus there in verse 8, he's



become a Christian and they're messing everything up, Paul and his companions, and the Jews want it stopped. And so they're going to say, "Hey, Rome, you don't mind Judaism being taught in your Roman province. How about you get rid of this new thing, this new sect? We don't like it. You shouldn't like it. You should outlaw it."

"They're persuading people to worship God contrary to the law," not just because God, the invisible God "who dwells in unapproachable light" is being worshiped by the Jews. But they're now saying God has come down and is in human form. And we have this person named Jesus and he died and he rose from the dead thousands of miles away in Jerusalem. And here's the deal. You got to put an end to this. This is a threat to the Roman Empire." And so that was the charge. And Paul's about to make his defense, and we see many of those in the book of Acts and we're going to see more of them in the rest of the book of Acts. When he hears this accusation and he's brought before the tribunal and Gallio is there, "Paul is about to open his mouth, and Gallio says to the Jews, 'Hey, guys, if it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint.'"

Verse 15, "But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourself." Deal with it yourself. "I refuse to be a judge of these matters." This sounds like a theological debate between you Jewish people, because here's a guy who's a Jewish seminary grad and he's talking about this Messiah, and that's all embedded in your Scriptures. You guys figure this out. This is theology. This is not law, this is not legislation. This is not something that should concern Rome. You guys work it all out. So "he drove them from the tribunal," had the big, burly Roman soldiers get him out of here. "And they all," the people who wanted to stop Paul from preaching, they "seized" a guy named "Sosthenes." Now he must be the guy who's taken over now as the ruler of the synagogue, because Crispus had vacated that position and he lived next to the synagogue you might remember the last time we were studying this passage, and Paul had converted him to Christ.

So Sosthenes steps up as the ruler of the synagogue, and in his new test of leadership, he couldn't even lead a charge against Paul and his companions by going to the proconsul and claiming this has got to stop and it all failed. And so they're mad at their leader, the new leader, Sosthenes. And so they beat him in front of the tribunal as they're trying to push him out of this tribunal, this place where he's there in the magistrate's open space where they're going to have this trial. But Gallio? Don't care. He just put his cape over his shoulder and walked back, went to his own, you know, his digs, his municipal digs. He paid no attention to any of this. So that's what goes on here. That's the concept of what's happening in Corinth.

Three lines from Christ that get Paul ready for all this and they gear him up, they steel his courage. They give him a kind of courage to face what's about to happen. And it starts with these three lines. Let's take them one line at a time. Number one, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent." Don't be afraid. I want you to keep on speaking and not be silent. And you think, well, of course, you're a preacher, you're a missionary, you're a teacher, you're a seminary grad. That's what you do. You're a speaker.



Well, I just want to remind you, any time we read passages of Scripture about evangelism, about people caring about the souls of their fellow citizens in their generation. People that look around and they see people who are like sheep without a shepherd and they say, you need Christ. You know there are people who do that full time that are professionals, if you will. But that's something that is really saddled on the shoulders of every Christian and in every generation. You just need to remember that.

And we can identify with this passage because we feel fear and we think, well, maybe it's okay for me to keep silent because it's not my job to stand up in the workroom at work and preach or in my neighborhood and speak. That's not my job. And yet you look at Christianity from the very beginning, and every time we see Jesus calling someone to follow him, he turns around and commissions them to tell other people, go tell people. Right? "Go be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth."

So this is something we need to start to at least adopt, that we can see ourselves in this passage, that maybe you're not a seminary grad and maybe you're not a preacher, but you certainly represent Christ in this generation. And you know that the reason we'd want to mute that is because I don't want to invoke the hostilities of my coworkers or my neighbors or the fellow, you know, parents on my kid's soccer team. I just want to get along with people. I just actually want to be known as the Christian who loves. I don't want to be controversial. I don't want to speak about all this stuff. And yet this passage, I think, does apply to all of us because we are all tempted to be afraid. And to mitigate that, we just want to be quiet and we don't want to speak up.

And I think that's a concerning problem. And before we get to the two reasons he gives at the beginning of verse 10 and the bottom of verse 10, I just want to look at the juxtaposition of "Don't be afraid, do your job." Don't be afraid, do your job. He is saying, listen, I don't want you to focus on the fact that you have these emotional responses that are fearful, which, by the way, are very normal. As a matter of fact, jot this reference down. First Corinthians Chapter 2 verse 3. First Corinthians Chapter 2 verse 3. Paul says, when I came to you, I came to you "in weakness, in fear and in much trembling." So Paul is just like you and me. He's not a weirdo. He doesn't like, you know, people attacking him. He doesn't like people hating him. He doesn't like people reviling him. He doesn't like people spurning his name as evil. He doesn't like it any more than you like it.

He came afraid and the heat got turned up. And Jesus says, "You got to stay there." But he says, You have to "not be afraid." You have to do your job. And your job is to "keep speaking and not be silent." And I just want us to think about the choice we have in terms of how we focus on what we are called to do and whether or not we spend more time thinking about the costs involved or whether we spend more time thinking about the responsibility that we have. You got a choice. Do I focus on the fear or do I focus on being faithful to what God's called me to do? And I would say in this text clearly it's not focusing on the fear, even though that's natural.



If you're taking notes jot it down that way. Number one, "Focus on Faithfulness Not Fear." That's the first thing we do. We focus on the job, the task, the commission, the mission, and we say this is what I'm called to do. This is what I need to focus on. I don't want to spend time thinking about, oh, man, this is a scary thing we're doing. If I were a football coach and you were on my football team and we were about to go down the tunnel onto the field and we're about to play a team. And it's not our home stadium. It's the opponent's stadium, and it's filled with all these cheering fans. It's college football and they hate us. There are signs, there's derision, there are people spurning our team name and maybe even our name as evil. And we're about to go down there and play this game.

If I'm in the locker room focusing on the fearful things, the cost of this thinking, "Ah, guys don't forget, this is being televised. If you fumble the ball in this game they'll replay that on ESPN. You don't want to fumble the ball. That would be bad. And, you know, when you go out there, you break through the shadows of the tunnel into the sunlight of the football field, you know, everyone's going to be watching you. And, you know, I just got to remind you, those people don't like you. This is hard, you know? And I mean, you could even trip coming out of the locker. Don't do that. That would be humiliating. I mean, if we lose this game, can you imagine? Oh, yeah. It's going to be terrible. They'll mock us forever." I mean, I could do that, but I would be a bad coach. That would be my last season, would it not?

I mean, my whole point as a coach is to encourage you to go out there and accomplish the task. I'm going to look right past the costs. I'm going to look right past the fears. I'm going to look right past your apprehensions and your anxieties. I'm going to say, "Go, go, go. We have a job to do." And I hope we do this all the time with our friends. Right? You got a friend and maybe they got a new job, and it requires him to travel to go do some big deal on the other side of the country. And you're sitting there as his friend in a small group and you could talk about, "Oh, you got to go on a business trip. That's so hard. I mean, you got to sit in that... I mean, just the flight alone. Sometimes there are kids who are screaming and then you sleep in some lousy hotel and it'll be hard. What if you didn't even get the contract? What if you couldn't even sell? That would be bad. This is rough. I mean, terrible."

What kind of friend would you be? Right? No, you got a job. You're providing for your family. It would be great if you got this contract, this client. Go out there and sell this thing. Get it done. I would be a good friend to encourage you to focus on the job, be faithful on the job, get the task done, and look past the concerns and the costs. Right? We do this naturally if there's a crisis, right?

You're out there, maybe you're up in the mountains and you got your kids out there, and one of them falls into the icy creek that's still, you know, fluid. The kid falls into the creek and I'm your friend and I'm sitting there and you're the dad. I don't say, "Oh man. Are you going to jump in after him? You are going to be freezing cold in there. Do you have a change of clothes with you? You don't? I don't have a blanket. Do you know how cold this is going to be? You can get hurt. Are you sure you want to jump? Maybe you should take your shoes off." I mean, I would... What a terrible person I would be. I want to encourage you to get him.



Right? Get him out of there. There's a crisis. There's a need. You're the dad, the responsibility. You go and jump in and save him.

I'm going to focus on the task. Be a faithful father. I'm not going to focus on the costs. I'm not going to focus on the fears. I'm not going to focus on the apprehensions or the concerns. Here's the problem. You know if you think about it and you're a normal person, I could lose my job, I could lose my friends, I'm going to be ridiculed, I could be betrayed, I mean, what am I going to do for an income? I mean, you could think a million things about what it would cost you to be faithful to Christ at your job and in your neighborhood and in your extended families and your circles of friends.

Yeah, you're right. We could focus on that. But if your mind focuses on that, you're going to stumble. And you will. You'll feed your fear by your imagination focusing on what could go wrong. What if? What if? What if? And it may be and it may happen. And occasionally Jesus even wants to spell it out so that you're not surprised. People will hate you. They'll exclude you. They'll revile you. They'll spurn your name as evil. But rejoice.

In other words, you've got to look past all of this. And what is our responsibility? "Well, I'm not a preacher. You said I'm not a preacher. I guess I'm off the hook." Three things. I know you know these passages, but let me have you write them down. First one, Second Corinthians Chapter 5. I know you know this text, but this applies to all of us and I hope you know it applies to all of us. Second Corinthians Chapter 5 verse 20, Second Corinthians 5:20, do you know this verse? "We are ambassadors for Christ." Let's just think that way. Let's start with our mindset. What is it you're supposed to be faithful to this week? You were supposed to be faithful if you're a repentant, trusting follower of Christ, you are supposed to be thinking like an ambassador. I am representing heaven. I'm representing the King of heaven. That's my job.

And in my mind, I'd like to be faithful to that. I'd like to get to the end of the day and say the ultimate concern I had was not even providing for my family. It wasn't even protecting my family. It wasn't me being the employee of the month. It wasn't even me doing the things that I'm called to do on my job description. Ultimately, at the end of the day, I am supposed to put my head on the pillow and ask myself how did you do as an ambassador of Christ today? Did you represent him well? That's got to be our mindset. And it's true of every Christian. If you're a follower of Christ, you represent Christ in this generation.

Secondly, and I know you know this verse but I'm going to have you turn there. You could probably quote it, but turn with me to Matthew Chapter 5, because I want you to soak in every line of these words from Christ, verses 14 through 16. Jesus said this, Matthew 5 verse 14. Ready? "You are the light of the world." Have you heard that passage? "Yeah, I heard it since I was a kid." You are the light of the world. Now this is all an analogy, but think about this: "You are the light of the world." Look at the next phase. "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." I think about that even today. Flying on a plane at night. Look out the window. There's a city. There it is. All the lights. You can't hide it. It's there. It's exposed.



In the ancient world in the middle of the night, you're traveling into a city, you see it on the horizon. There it is. It's lit up. It's got torches, it's got candles, it's got lamps. You're going to see it. You can't hide it. Well, when it comes to light, even in someone's house, verse 15, "Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Well, they put it on the stand and it gives light to all that are in the house." The point of lighting a light is to let the light shine. And he says, "You're the light and I've lit you up so that you can shine." That's the point. You don't want to hide it. And sadly, if you invited me to your workplace this week and I went around to everyone you rub shoulders with, if I were to ask them, "Tell me, is this guy a Christian? Is Linda a follower of Jesus Christ who believes in the Bible, who trusts in Jesus?" Right? What would they say? Would they know that that's true of you? Would they know not just that you claim Christ, but that you seek to live out all that Christ commanded? That's what you're called to do.

You were taught when you were discipled to obey all that Christ commanded. I just want you to think about that. Would they know it? Would they see it? Would they know that you're different and that your values are different than their values because you're shining the light of the commands of God lived out and fleshed out in your everyday life. And they know that's what it means because the next verse, verse 16, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see," now, finally, we get past the analogy to the nuts and bolts of it, "that they may see your good works." Your good works. And your good works are different than their works because your works are light and righteousness and virtue and good and things that correspond to the holiness of God. He is holy. You're seeking to be holy also in all your behavior, to quote Scripture. And I'm saying, as you live that out, do you publicly live out the commands of Christ?

There's the second thing. The first thing is I identify as an ambassador. I'm an ambassador of Christ. Secondly, I'm called to PUBLICLY live out the commands of Christ. If Christ says, "Hey, I created them male and female and I join them in marriage and what God put together, let not man separate." OK. My life understanding this thing of the sis-gender thing was God's idea. Marriage was a man and woman for the rest of their life. Am I like living that out, publicly living that out and unashamed, shining, not putting it under a bushel? That that's what I adhere to. Those are the kinds of weddings I go to, people who understand what this is all about. I affirm that. That's what I teach. I represent a living example of the commands of Christ, albeit imperfect. I get it. But we do what we know God has called us to do. And we, here's the keyword, publicly live it out.

If I go to your office will they know you have a different standard of humor than they do? Will they know that there are things you will not participate in because you follow the publicly displayed commands of Christ? I mean, they should know that because that's your job. And I need you to say that's what I'm all about. I'm an ambassador of Christ. That's the mindset. I'm living publicly the commands of Christ.

And how about this? Thirdly. Go to Acts 17. When Paul was in Athens in Acts 17, he talks about the God of the Old Testament to all of these Athenian professorial types. They're all the intellectuals of the day. And he ramps up into this statement in verse 30. Look at this in Acts



17 verse 30. This is such a helpful passage. "The times of ignorance God overlooked," right? There were times when people didn't know and he overlooked it. "But now he commands all people everywhere to repent." I want you to read that verse and think about the implications of it. "He now commands all people everywhere to repent," all people everywhere to repent, to turn from sin and to turn to God in penitent trust. That's what he's calling everyone to do. Everyone.

My question is how does he do that? How does he command all people everywhere to repent? How does God do it? He doesn't do it by sending clouds that spell out Bible verses. He doesn't do it with sparrows lining up and tweeting a certain tune that translates into the words "repent and turn to God." Well, how does God do that? He does it by calling you to follow him and become fishers of men who have the message of repentance. And that message is to go to, look at how it states it, "all people everywhere." Think about the people you rub shoulders with every single week. The people in your office, guess what? They qualify for this phrase. All people everywhere. Right? They're somewhere and they qualify for all people. And God is now commanding them via your mouth to repent.

Do you want to know what your job description is? Wherever you live, whatever you do, whatever your weekly schedule looks like, it's to think as an ambassador, that's my identity. It's to live out publicly the commands of Christ. And it's for me to speak up about people repenting and turning to God. I got to speak up about it. I have to tell them you need to repent and trust in Christ. You need to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. And all I'm saying is the reasons you wouldn't do any of those things, one is very private, it's your identity in your mind. But the reason that would never flesh itself out in being distinctively righteous or being vocally evangelistic is because I'm afraid.

It's not for lack of knowledge. I mean, if you've been to this church more than five times you know clearly we're being called to speak up in our generation to represent Christ. It's not for lack of knowledge. What's stopping you? If you're not convinced, well, that's one thing. Let's convince you of the truth of the Lordship of Christ. But if you're under the Lordship of Christ and you trust in Christ, well, then we have a responsibility. We are ambassadors, mindset. We're living out publicly the commands of Christ. We live a contrasted life. It's different than theirs. And we're telling people why? Because we follow Christ and you ought to follow Christ because God is commanding all people everywhere to repent.

Here's what he says in our passage. Don't be afraid. "Don't be afraid," verse 9, "but go on speaking and do not be silent." Some say, "Well, I'm not a preacher." You are an ambassador living out publicly and calling people to repentance. That's what you are. And I'm going to say, if ever there was a time for us to heed this passage, it's now. "Don't be afraid, go on speaking, do not be silent." Explanation, verse 10, "For I'm with you, and no one will attack you to harm you." I am with you. No one will attack you to harm you.

I don't know if when I read this at the beginning of the message you stumbled over my reading of this text. Well I hope someone did. Because when I read that, "for I am with you and no one will attack you to harm you," I didn't get two more verses down the list until I read



this in verse 12. "But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack upon Paul." Wait a minute. Verse 10, "I'm with you, no one will attack you to harm you." No one will attack you to harm you. No one will attack you to harm you. Verse 12, "They made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal." Ahhh, Jesus, I thought you said I wouldn't be attacked to be harmed.

Go to the last chapter of what we have from the Apostle Paul before he was executed. Second Timothy Chapter 4. Turn to this text and let's understand what's going on in this passage. How in the world does Jesus say you will not be attacked to be harmed? And yet, two verses later, there's not one guy attacking you, there are not five guys attacking, there is a united attack against you and they're dragging you before the proconsul of Rome. How in the world is Jesus being honest when he says you're not going to be attacked to be harmed?

Do you know a little bit about Paul's life in Second Timothy? This is the last extant letter of the Apostle Paul that we have. And he is already said up in verse 6 of Second Timothy Chapter 4, "I'm already being poured out as a drink offering." This is, by the way, his second Roman imprisonment and he's saying this, "I know that the time of my departure has come." Right? He's not talking about release. He's talking about death. That's why he says in verse 7, "I fought the good fight, I finished the race, I've kept the faith. Henceforth there's laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day." I'm going to die. It's going to be done. This is what's happening. This is the end of my life. This is the last letter you're going to get from me. I'm about to be killed by my Roman captors.

Okay. With that in mind drop down a verse 18. The last thing he says before the final greeting is this. "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed." Was it righteous or evil to put the evangelist in prison and execute him? Evil. And he says, "I'm going to be rescued from every evil deed." "The Lord will," future tense, "rescue me from every evil deed." And I'm thinking, wait a minute, you just told me you know you're going to be killed. "And he will bring me," here's a keyword, "safely into his heavenly kingdom." Safely into his heavenly kingdom? You're about to die. Your head is about to be lopped off by a sharp iron utensil of the Romans, and your head is going to be put into a basket or into a sack, or it's going to lay there in the dirt on the ground. You are about to be beheaded and you know it. The time of your departure from this earth is now ready to happen. You're being poured out as a drink offering. They're already beating you. They're starving you. They're doing whatever they're doing, and they're going to kill you. And you're using words like this "rescue" and "safely." Uh, I don't think you know what those words mean. Right?

When Stephen was being stoned to death, Luke adds this phrase, "He had the face like an angel." And I remember preaching that passage. Some of you were here back then, and say that was kind of an interesting thing to say, right? "Face like an angel." There's something about his visage, his face, that Luke says, the historian, this was like he was just like at peace. I mean, you look like an angel. Angels are privileged beings. They have access to God. They serve in the presence of God. And here's Stephen. He's dying like an angel when he's being stoned to death. Stoned to death.



And I told you when I preached this passage I actually that week watched a video of a stoning in this other country. And it's not what I thought of when I was a kid. Right? This is a horrific thing to have people taking like baseball-sized rocks and throwing them at you until you pass out and you are killed under the weight of a pile of rocks as 30 or 40 people throw rocks at you. It's a horrific way to die. And yet here is Luke saying he died and "his face looked like the face of an angel" And he's saying to the Lord, "Lord, receive my spirit." That's a weird way to... So my question is, is he being attacked? The answer is yes. Is he being harmed?

Well, he's not being attacked so as to be harmed. I guess if you want to think big picture and let's think about the words of Christ, he says, "Do not fear the one who can kill the body and after that, there's nothing else he can do." I'm thinking, well, that's a lot. Killing me is a lot. I don't like that. Especially if you're going to kill me in a painful way like maybe throwing rocks at me until I die. That seems like something worthy of being afraid of. And guess what? We naturally are afraid of that. And I get that. But he says, don't fear that one.

Here's the one you should fear. Yes, I'll tell you who to fear. "Fear the one who," after he kills the body, "can cast your soul into hell." Yes, I tell you, fear him. But here's the thing. That's an evangelistic statement of sorts, because I'm turning that one into my redeemer and my friend. Right? So if I have peace, peace with God, is there anything that could ever take me outside the realm of words like "safety" and "rescue" and "peace" and "security"? And the answer is, as Peter would say, "No," who died a torturous death? He says no. I mean, it's there stored up for me and protected by the power of God an "inheritance in the saints in life." And nothing can touch you. You're guarded by the power of God. Guarded? That sounds like safety and security. It does.

But it doesn't seem like safety. It's like Jesus on the cushion in the boat on the storm in the Sea of Galilee and everyone else was saying, "We are perishing, Lord, and you don't care." And he's asleep. My question is, were they at peace or were they not at peace? Well, they weren't at peace. And 12 of them said we're not at peace. But one of them was at peace because he knew something that they did not know. Right? There was a sense of security and peace. And here's the deal. When Jesus comes to Paul and says, listen, you stay in Corinth, it's going to ramp up, it'll be hard, but "don't be afraid, keep on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and there'll be no one to attack you to harm you."

Two verses later you're going to be attacked. But it isn't an attack, a kind of attack that is ever going to really get at the things that ultimately matter. Therefore, let's put it this way in your outline. Number two, you've got to "Redefine Peace and Security." You've just got to redefine it. Peace and safety needs to be fully redefined. You got to say, okay, wait a minute. I may live in a culture that ramps up its hostility so much so that knuckleheads like Jane Fonda can say this week that she wants to murder pro-lifers. Okay. Did you hear that line? She tried to walk it back, but, you know, she said the quiet part out loud. And I'm thinking to myself, okay, this is the culture we're living where the elites and the movie stars and the professorial types in the university, they hate Christians who stand for Christian values. I just want you to think about this, right?



Am I safe? Am I secure in this culture? Well, it depends on what you mean by safe and secure. Oh, I am if I'm a redeemed child of God, preserved by God's power and grace, and my destiny is secured. If I'm tortured and killed, beheaded or stoned to death, the Bible says you are exactly in the presence of a God who has protected you and you cannot be ultimately harmed. You just can't be. That's a big deal. I mean, that's a super big deal.

Let me show you what this looks like with the biblical terms in Isaiah. Go back to Isaiah Chapter 41 with me. I want you to look at how this is put and this is the way we need to think. And now I'm going to shift from the attack and what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean you're not going to have tribulation in this world. But I'm supposed to somehow "take heart because he's overcome the world." I'm supposed to have some kind of peace. "My peace I leave with you. Not as the world gives," Jesus said, because they base it on whether or not there's a storm going on. I base it on something else, right? "My peace I leave with you. Not a peace like the world." It's a kind of peace that takes you through the trials and the joblessness and losing friends and being betrayed and stabbed in the back and being picketed or having people throw eggs at your house or whatever it is that makes you feel horrible and afraid and say you don't have to be afraid because ultimately there's something that roots you in an eternal, transcendent kind of protection that God says is ultimate peace and safety.

Which, by the way, as I'm about to read in this passage. Let me put it in New Testament terms. You do know that there are people who feel very safe and secure right now. I mean, the people that sit there and espouse all this hatred toward people like you and me, do they feel safe and secure? Oh, man, the culture is totally in their favor right now. They feel safe and secure. But as Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, the people who are saying peace and safety, "destruction will come upon them suddenly." Here's the deal. They're not safe and secure.

Did the people who sat there and ridiculed Noah, did they think they were safe and secure? Oh, absolutely they did. I mean, they ganged up on Noah and said he was ridiculous and yet they weren't safe and secure. And it may have even been that Noah didn't feel safe and secure, but was he safe and secure? He was safe and secure. He didn't feel like it. People might have even thrown things at him as he sat there and told people why he was building this ark. In Jeremiah's day, everyone was going around saying, "peace, peace." And God says, you know what? You know, they're saying, "peace, peace." But there is no peace for them. They're about to walk into my anger and wrath.

God does not immediately bring his judgment on this world. And they can sit there and say things like they want to murder people who believe that we should have protection of pre-born people. I get that. That's just a basic extension of Christian thought, Christian theology. And they feel very smug and protected in that. But in reality, let's just think about that. Are they safe? Are they secure? We feel like we're the underdog and we're not... We're the embattled people. We're being attacked. We are safe and secure. You just got to get the redefinition in your mind of this.

Verse 8 in Isaiah 41 might help you. Let's just look at this section of Scripture. Israel - embattled at this time. He says, "You, Israel my servant." Oh, you may not look like with the Assyrian attack and the Babylonian attack like you're anything special. You're the underdog, you're the embattled people. But here's the deal. "You're my servant, Jacob," another name for Israel, "whom I've chosen, the offspring of Abraham," here's a word for you, "my friend." You're my friend. The God of the universe, I'm friends with you. Verse 9, "You whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from the farthest corners, saying to you, 'You are my servant.'" I hope you are, by the way, his servant, ambassador, living out his commands. Right? Telling people that they need to follow Christ. I hope you're his servant. "I have chosen you. I haven't cast you off; fear not."

Why? Same exact logic that we see in Acts Chapter 18. In 33 times in Scripture we see this starting with Abraham in Genesis Chapter 15. "Fear not Abraham. I'm with you." I'm with you. I'm with you. Gideon is afraid. Fear not, I'm with you. Jeremiah says, "I'm too young. I can't speak to those people about turning from their sin." Fear not. I'm with you. Joshua going in, leading the armies in. Fear not, I'm with you. Here it is. First Chronicles. "Fear not," I'm with you, "do not be dismayed." Don't fret. Don't bite your fingernails. Don't be anxious. Don't have ulcers. Don't be afraid. I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you. Look at this picture "with my righteous right hand." When you're called in and fired, when you lose your social standing. Picture that. The God of the universe who now is saying, I'm your friend, "holding you up by my righteous right hand."

Verse 11, "Behold, all who are incensed against you all," and who they're seething at you, all those people who hate us, "they shall be put to shame and confounded; those who strive against you they shall be as nothing and shall perish. You shall seek those who contend with you, and you shall not find them." Where's Babylon? Where's Assyria? And where are all the intellectual, cultural elites who are banging on Christians and their view of sexual ethics or sanctity of life or whatever it is they hate about us? Our call to the exclusivity of Christ as the savior of the world. They hate all that. They're incensed about it. But one day, like where are they? "You shall seek those who contend with you, but you shall not find them; those who war against you shall be as nothing at all. For I, the Lord," Yahweh, "your God," your Elohim, your powerful one, "I hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, 'Fear not, I am the one who helps you.'"

Who's going to help Paul when he's standing before the proconsul, Gallio, and everyone's there chomping at the bit to have him run out of town, to have him arrested for preaching a message he shouldn't preach? Well, here's Christ saying, "I'll be with you." He says it to you, by the way, too. If you're out there really seeing yourself as an ambassador, living out his commands and you're calling people to follow Christ, he says this after the last line of the Great Commission "and I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Those eleven who stood there on that mountain did not live to the end of the age. But you're still here in this age, and it may be fast coming to an end.

But the reality is, he says, "I'll be with you, I'll be with you." And whenever he says that it's clear, eschew the fear. Get rid of the fear. Displace the fear. I can't let the fear dictate what I



say at work. I can't let the fear dictate how I act in culture. I can't let the culture shut me up just because I'm afraid and I'm timid. God is with me. He's going to "uphold me with his right hand" and everyone who contends against me. This is not a prosperity gospel. You understand that, right? I'm not talking about you having every door open. And this is some kind of, you know, business seminar where you get all the accounts. No, you may lose everything in this world. But you win because God is upholding his servants "with his righteous right hand." He calls you his friend and himself is your helper. These are gigantic concepts.

You've got to redefine peace and security. You know a lot of people telling Israel, "Wow, you guys are not in good shape right here," in Isaiah 41 and God says you are if you just are my servants, cling to me, I will uphold you. His presence means everything.

Back to our passage, Chapter 18 verse 10. I'm with you even though all that in verses 12 through 16 is going on and we just read it, all the complaints, all the trials, all of the united attacks on Paul and yet he was not going to be harmed. Not if you understand what harm means. No profound harm comes to Paul. Not even when he is beheaded and killed and martyred.

Here's another "for" another reason for you not to be afraid, "For I have many," bottom of verse 10, "in this city who are my people." For I have many in this city who are my people. And many in this city who are my people. Now, that's an interesting statement. I want you to stay in Corinth, because we're not done yet. You got a job to do. You're going to "speak up and you're not going to be silent." And you got to keep speaking up and not being silent because there are people in this town "who are my people." They're not yet a part of my congregating people, but they are my people and you need to get the message to them and call them to repentance. And then they will visibly in time become my people. But they're my people now.

As it said earlier in the book of Acts, "those who were appointed to eternal life they believe." There are people in Corinth who are going to become Christians. Remember the guy who was leading the charge against Paul? Crispus now becomes a Christian. Sosthenes in verse 17 he's now leading the charge and he does it so poorly that the people who had him as their new leader, they were now beating him up, you know, in the courtyard of the proconsul. And we think to ourselves, "Wow, that guy." I mean, you'd think he would totally redouble his efforts at this point. But here's the interesting thing about Sosthenes. It's a weird name and it's a unique name.

But in this name that you read, you may say, well, I feel like I've read that elsewhere in the Bible. And if you have read the whole New Testament, you have read that elsewhere. You've read it in First Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 1. First Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 1. And Paul doesn't say, "Here I am writing you from Ephesus," that's where he was when he wrote this letter, "and I'm writing you now in the shadow of some, you know, opponents and antagonists of Christianity who have followed me from Corinth to Ephesus."



Let me read for you the first verse of First Corinthians, First Corinthians Chapter 1. "Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, and our brother Sosthenes." Sosthenes becomes in the opening line of the book of First Corinthians the guy he puts his arm around and says, "You guys all know Sosthenes, you Corinthians, because he used to be the Jewish leader of the synagogue, the ruler of the synagogue. Now he's my brother and he's with me now in Ephesus, not as an antagonist chasing me down like they did from Thessalonica to Berea. This guy's come with me because he's part of the missionary team now, and we're writing back to you and I know you all remember Sosthenes, don't you?"

Think about that. In this particular point in Acts Chapter 18, Sosthenes in verse 17 is not a follower of Christ. He's actually, by implication in this passage the leader of the antagonists against Paul. But later, within a matter of three or four years, Paul's writing back with his arm around Sosthenes saying, "Now he's a brother in Christ." Was it true that God had many in this city who were his people but had yet to become his people? Of course. And Sosthenes is one example and there are many others. And he writes about them in the book of First Corinthians.

I'm just telling you this. If you want to be encouraged, you need to think the way that Jesus was no doubt getting him to envision. And what he's envisioning is there are people I'm passing in Corinth, I cannot leave this town yet because there are more people here that will be in the church. They will be Christians. So you need to envision, number three, just like he needs to "Envision Evangelistic Success." And the reason you need to at your work not stop speaking and not giving into your fear to be silent is because there are people there that you've got to think God's got you in that place, as his ambassador, because he's got people who he's going to bring to faith in Christ. And if you don't think that way, you've missed the whole point of why you are on this earth in this corner of the world, calling people in the corner of the world he set you in to become Christ followers. That's a big deal. You have to think optimistically.

We opened our kid's wing here next door a couple of weeks back, and I hope you're enjoying that if you have kids checking in. This is a great brightly colored and lit up, it's so good. And the old building used to be, that building used to be our offices. And it wasn't so bright and clean and well-lit. It was our offices for years, for 15 years. And I had an office over there in the corner of the 140 building. And when I moved in, I had so many books, even though I had nice windows there, I had to put bookshelves in front of the windows and books all the way up to the ceiling. And so I lived in a cave with no sunlight. I didn't see the light of day for years.

And we went over there and toured it just before it opened up after the contractors were done and as I walked into the place where my office used to be, I stood there literally at the place where I spent, you know, thousands of hours in like a three-foot square where my desk was and my chair was and I thought of the thousands of hours I had studied and worked and prepared sermons and done all the things I had done. And I thought about it. And then I looked up thinking of all the thousands of hours I had sat right there and I looked and I saw the windows and I saw it was great. It had trees and cars and buildings. It was like beautiful. I got a view. Secretly, I'd always wanted an office with a view, but I've always had too many



books, so I solved that problem in part when we moved across the street to the 145 building, I donated a good chunk of my library to Compass Bible Institute, so they have room form downstairs with no view.

But upstairs where my office is, I actually made it my point when we moved there, I got to have a window. I want a window that I'm not going to impede with books or anything else. I want to look out a window. I want to sit in a place, where I now am racking up the hours and one little three-foot square piece of real estate, but I lift up my eyes and next to my computer is a window and I get to look out the window and I'm so glad. And I secretly, I didn't even tell my wife this until yesterday. I've always secretly wanted to have a window that overlooked the freeway. That's weird, isn't it? But I've always thought about that. If I could see, like, Interstate 5 or the I-405 or the I-605, if I could see a really well-trafficked freeway, I would love that.

And I would love that as a pastor because I want to see the buzzing of the people like thousands and thousands of cars that remind me of why I'm here. I want to remember why I'm here because I want to look out and see the people. And what's interesting now that I have a window and it happens to be next to Aliso Creek Parkway or whatever it's called, we got a lot of Aliso's and it's like spaghetti, the way they plan this town. But whatever, half of them are called Aliso something. So I got Aliso out there and there's like six lanes of traffic, seven lanes, whatever it is. And I get to see a lot of traffic every day. And I think about there are thousands of cars that go by my window every day. And I often think as I'm studying and planning or doing whatever I'm doing to get this church going to the next level, I'm thinking, you know, this is why I'm here for the people that God has in this town, that are his people who have yet to become his people in time. And I get excited about that.

And every now and then I'll see, especially as they slow down and make the left turn into, you know, the Columbia loop here. I'll see that little sticker down there on the back of some of those cars and go, "Well, there's one, right?" And I think about how many other people stickerless going by. I wonder if one day will they have a sticker on the back of their car. And again, it's not about the sticker. You don't have to put a sticker on your car to be a Christian. It helps. (audience laughing) But you don't have to have it. You don't have to have it. But I think to myself, that's a sign for me of someone who has gotten to the place of realizing the importance of Christ and the Bible and expository preaching and I think, "Man, I want to see this whole place. I want every last person who is called to follow Christ to get saved." It doesn't have to be our church. It could be any Bible-teaching church in the area. I don't care.

One day I brought my binoculars in, it's pretty new, I'd gotten into the office, I got settled in, and I got my binoculars. I still have them on the shelf in case, I don't know, something goes on. I can see the top of, you know, Santiago Peak up there which has been covered with snow lately. It's crazy. But I found out one day and I didn't know this until I got my binoculars out, I looked out my window next to my computer and I looked out there, and guess what I can see from my office? A little tiny chunk of the I-5 freeway. I see it. God's made my dreams come true. I have to get my binoculars to see the I-5. But I can see it all day long just going all those cars. And then I looked down at my local mission field here, and I look at Aliso and I see all those cars.

And if I don't have an optimistic, positive evangelistic concept of what God is going to be doing here, then I really have no reason to go through all that we go through here, and we go through a lot. You can imagine, we get plenty of criticism and all that. But here's the deal. Like the Apostle Paul, I want to say, not just for the present, but for the future, he says, "As I endure all things for the sake of the elect." I just want to say there's more out there that we've yet to see saved. And if you adopt that position, I guarantee you this: you can power through the fear by focusing on the task, by knowing that what it means to be in peace and security with God doesn't mean the temporal things all have to go well. And ultimately, I know we're here because our job is not done yet. I want you to get excited about making some progress on that. Even this week, as you power through the fear to speak up for Christ.

On the back of your worksheet every week I put books to read and think. Sometimes you'll see books come up a lot because they're classics and this week's no different. I'm assuming I put Fox's Book of Martyrs on there, did I not? Will someone confirm that? Yeah, I did. And I always do that when I get around to a sermon that's going to deal with people who have suffered. And I want to be willing to just stand up and be resolute and be willing to suffer if I have to. You know, I thought of Luke 6:22 immediately out of the gate when I started thinking about this passage. So I put that book on there.

Well, this week I started to read it again, right? I've read it a few times, but I read it again, just kind of getting refreshed and thinking it will help me prepare the sermon and I just quit. I mean, I was like in chapter two, in like the third-century persecutions of Diocletian or whatever. And I finally just stopped. Because one of my jobs as a pastor in preparing sermons, I want to get in your shoes, I want to think about your work week, I want to think about how you do what you do, and I want to get you ready for it. And I kept reading story after story after story after story.

Here's the last sentence, by the way, I read this week in Fox's Book of Martyrs. A guy named Quinton. Quinton, and I love how he's described here, he was very zealous in his ministry. That part made me lean in, it was like, yeah, I was sitting there in my reading chair reading this as Quinton is very zealous, I want our people to be zealous in their ministry, to not be fearful to speak up. And then it says being seized upon as a Christian, he was stretched with pulleys until his joints were dislocated. His body was then torn with wire scourges, boiling oil and pitch were poured over his naked body. Lighted tortures were applied to him and put in his sides and under his armpits. And after he had thus been tortured, he was remanded back to the prison and he died there by the barbarity that he had suffered on October 31st to 287. And his body was buried in Somme.

And I think to myself, I read that and I said, I'm done. I closed the book and I said, all I'm trying to do is get people to put up with some insults at work. That's what I'm working on, right? I was like, this is like varsity, like Christianity. People that were willing to have their bodies torn limb for limb. And it's story after story after story. Not just men. It's not just preachers, it's women. It's young teenage girls. It's chapter after chapter of people when it wasn't 90% Christian. These cultures hated the Christians. And these are the people that I



think man, no matter what I put up with, if I lose privileges, if I lose friendships, if I have people hating me online, I'm thinking about this, right? It's not even close.

So, listen, I don't know if you should be reading Fox's Book of Martyrs this week. I just want you to say I'm willing, to use the words of Christ, Luke 6:22, "I'm willing to be blessed when I know that I'm hated, excluded, reviled, and my name is spurned as evil because of the Son of Man! In that day I'll rejoice." And I'll know this: "as I leap for joy," I'll know this, that "So their fathers treated the prophets" that went before. So we can put up with some grief this week. Let's just be faithful to our task and not be silent.

Stand with me. Let me dismiss you with a word of prayer. God, we stand in need of courage and strength. It is helpful, I suppose, to know that even those I read of in Fox's Book of Martyrs, they were scared. They had natural fears, but they were able to conquer those and even vanquish those in moments of great courage because they knew who they were following. They knew the God who upheld them by your "righteous right hand." And so I know that, God, we can look past the pain and the struggle and the difficulty of standing up. And the costs they can be made very small in light of how big it is to be your follower, to be your spokesperson, to be your ambassador in our age.

So God steel our courage, root us and ground us in what's most important that we might not be ashamed of you this week because we know the message we have to offer to our coworkers and our friends and our neighbors is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. So God get us ready this week, even as we spend time fellowshiping after the service and thinking about this sermon and thinking about this passage as though you've come to us yourself and said to us, "Do not be afraid." So, God, we trust you. And we look to this week with confidence and evangelistic optimism.

In Jesus name. Amen.