

Enduring Opposition

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Date: 26 October 2025

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. It's amazing how God works, and they were the same words that we sang as we came over to Hong Kong.

I mean, if you really think about those lyrics, I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back. And not just believe in Jesus. We've always talked about that.

There's a difference between believer of Jesus and follower of Jesus. He's called us to follow him. We believe and have eternal life and won't perish, but we should follow him. But so many of us in the church are stuck at that stage of believe him, right?

■■■■■■■■ And so how can we be followers of Jesus? I've decided to follow him, no turning back, no turning back. And as I was praying this morning, I was looking through Acts.

You know what? This whole series on Acts has been doing something to me. Because I look at the way these people are responding, and I'm just like, I'm not there. I look at Philip in Acts 8, where he goes.

[1:19] He's kicked out of his own home in Jerusalem. He goes to Samaria, where he shouldn't really be going, and continues to spread the good news. And then his church's ministry builds, and then boom, the Spirit says, you, go into the desert road and hang out there for a while.

Meet an Ethiopian and run beside the chariot. And he just does it. He leaves his thriving ministry and he just goes. I'm like, man, I don't have that. Saul, just going on his way to drag people to prison, to kill them, ends up meeting Jesus, gets blinded, and completely does a 180 and goes the other way.

Peter, in Acts 10, doesn't really want to hang out with the Gentiles. Not him personally, I guess, in some way, because he's built up that way. He's been taught all these years to stay away from those people, and yet in a prayer he says, boom, the Holy Spirit says, go, you must go and reach these people, and he does it.

And to see, how they react is just so different to how I react to things. And last week I shared with you, talk about homework, and after, last week I shared with you one of my favorite books, which is the boy, the mole, the fox, the horse, and one of the quotes I gave was, one of the greatest freedoms in life is how you, anyone, react.

How you react tells you where you're at. Husbands, if I may extend a little bit of sincere advice to you, how your wife reacts to the seemingly most small and trivial things, but in the most strongest kind of way, will tell you where she's at, will tell you that she's bad.

[2:48] Not about the thing that she's reacting to, but about many other things that she might be thinking of and remembering. How you react tells you where you're at. I find myself, Christina and I have this terminology, it's like, how big is your inner space right now?

Because if your inner space is large, and you come home from work, and you have a large inner space, it means you can tolerate a lot. So you can see the toys on the floor, you can see this there, and your husband left the toothbrush on the wrong side of the sink, all these kind of things, you have a large inner space, you can tolerate it, and you can react in a kind, friendly, gracious way.

But when you come home and you have a small inner space, then the smallest thing, the air conditioning not being on at the right temperature, will trigger you into a different space.

How you react tells you where you're at, and thank you, Queenie. So I quoted that book last week, and then she, so kind, said that, told me about his second book, the sequel that's come out, which is The Boy, the Mole, The Fox, The Horse, and The Storm.

So it's taking a lot of self-control for me to have this right here, and not want to read it immediately. But highly recommend, and if you need to know where to find it, Queenie is the person to go to. How you react tells you where you're at.

[3:59] How you react and how you respond to the gospel will tell you how you respond to the mission. Some of us are struggling with responding to God's call to go, to scatter, to share the good news.

Why? Because I think maybe we haven't responded accordingly to the gospel itself. I think we haven't really truly understood what the gospel actually means. We haven't truly understood that this is genuinely good news.

We don't realize that we are actually living in bad news, and because we don't truly understand the gospel, we're not reacting to that appropriately, and therefore we're not responding to the call of the mission of God appropriately.

Does that make sense? And you see here in the book of Acts, people are constantly just reacting in a way that I look at this and go, I don't know if I'm reacting this way. Last week we talked in Acts 13 about the Holy Spirit.

No one else, not some uncle with a great eyebrow idea, the Holy Spirit himself, whilst the church are praying and fasting, he says, set apart these two people to go on this mission.

[5:00] I don't know. If I was sat in that prayer meeting, and I heard the Holy Spirit say, these two people are going to go and do this thing, I would be like, well, that's going to be a really important thing.

That thing is going to take off, and it's going to succeed, and it's going to be great. But what happens? Mixed results. Mixed results. Some people like it.

Some people don't like it. Sometimes I find, even when it comes to ministry, I'm doing these things, I'm like, some people like what we do, and some people don't like what we do, and then I find myself reacting in ways that I'm like, I don't think that's how Paul and Barnabas would have reacted. That's not how Peter would have reacted. Why? Because Christ is enough for them. Nothing else. He is all they need. The question that we're going to look at today is, how are we actually reacting to different things?

More specifically, I shared a little bit with our leaders last night, which is, how do we react to praise and criticism? Because in this next chapter is this fascinating thing, where within the one chapter, Paul and Barnabas are told that they are gods.

[6:08] And in the very next passage, they're stoned nearly to death. Isn't that crazy? It tells you a little bit about just the fickleness of the human heart, and how people could just turn on you.

They'll crown you one moment, and then cancel you the next. But how do we respond to either of those things? It will tell you a lot about where you're at. How I react to different things will tell me where I'm at.

And so we're going to read Acts 14. I've invited my dear friend Matthew to come and minister to us with reading the word of God to us. So can I invite you to stand for the word of the Lord? Acts chapter 14.

Alright, Acts chapter 14. Now at Arconium, they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the people of the city were divided.

[7:15] Some sided with the Jews, and some sided with the apostles. When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers to minister to them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lyakonia.

To the surrounding countries. And there they continued to preach the gospel. Now at Lystra, there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked.

He listened to Paul speaking, and Paul, looking intently at him, seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, stand upright on your feet. And he sprung up and began walking.

And when the crowd saw that Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lyconian, the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men. Barnabas, they called Zeus and Paul Hermes. But he was the chief speaker. Sorry, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garland to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

[8:18] But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out to the crowds, crying out, Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of like nature with you.

And we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heavens and the earth, the seas and all that is in them. In the past generations, he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.

Yet he did not leave himself without witness. For he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

Even with those words, they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them. But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and having persuaded the crowd, they stone-palled and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city. And on the next day, he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. When they had preached the gospel to the city, they had made disciples, many disciples, they returned to Lystra and Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God.

[9:31] And when they had appointed elders for them in every church with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia.

And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Italia. And from there, they sailed to Antioch, where they had commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that the Lord has done for them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles and they had remained no little time with the disciples.

This is the word of the Lord. Praise be to God. Please take a seat. Thank you, Matthew. You did well with all those hard words. Whenever it's hard words, I always like to make sure someone else reads it for me.

So you did really well. How do you react when things are going well? Like when work is going well, when someone says, hey, well done, well done. You did a really good job there.

[10:29] How do you feel? And when someone says, oh, it's not so good. How does it feel? Last week I talked about Acts 13. Some people were so ecstatic and happy about the sermon. They came and said, please come back.

Thank you for the few of you who actually listened to my subtle cry for affirmation. Janice, I remember you. Thank you for coming to say that my sermon was good. You didn't invite the whole city to come back though. That's what I hold against you.

But how do you feel when people do these kinds of things? I find it's really interesting. I mean, I'm not saying you should do this. Please don't do this. If you, a hundred of you come up to me straight after this sermon and go, well, James, that was such a good sermon.

By the way, and people like J1 know this, if you come and tell me that that was a good sermon, what's the next question I'm going to ask you? Well, I was like, why did God speak to you? What did God speak to you about? Don't just come and tell me that it was good and that you liked my jokes and my passive aggressiveness.

But tell me why it was good for you in terms, because the only way it is good is if God speaks to you. That's it. If you take something away from God, that's why it's a good sermon. A mentor of mine, she doesn't care when she goes to speak.

[11:29] She has no, she has complete disregard for how people felt it went. She doesn't even ask about it. You know, sometimes we do this. We do something, well, hey, how was it for you? And you're kind of fishing for compliments. Like I played basketball with Trevor yesterday morning and he could have come up to me and say, hey, how was it?

How do you think I played? He doesn't fish for compliments because I wouldn't give him any. But we do that, right? But these guys, just zero, zero regard for how people are responding.

They know that one of the greatest freedoms that we have is how we react to the gospel. But how other people respond, none of our business. None of our business. I can come here, I can preach the word of God, I can stay as faithful as I can to the text, I can speak to the people that I think is what you need to hear, and then I should be able to be at a point where I don't need any

compliments, I can just let go.

God has done his work, I can move on. That, though, is predicated on how I'm responding to the gospel, to the good news of who I am. In my Bible study group this week, I'm going to put him on the spot, Nathan does these great reflections when he looks at scripture.

We've been going through the book of John and one of the things he said, and actually we're going to hear him speak a little bit next week, him and Jay actually, is actually he realizes sometimes he doesn't respond to Jesus' sacrifice in the most appropriate way.

[12:45] We kind of just take it for granted. Someone died for you, Teresa. Whoa, what? And we say, yeah, cool, cool. It's a cool story.

But he actually died for us because he loved us. We didn't have to do that. He took the place on the cross where we should have been. And if you don't let that seep into your heart, then you won't really respond in the appropriate way to who Jesus is and to what he did.

And you won't really live out the way that he wants you to live. These guys. So they start. They go to Iconium at verse one and two. Now at Iconium, they enter together into the Jewish synagogue. Remember, that's their MO. They go to the Jews first and then they speak. And a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed, yes, the ministry is growing. They're doing well. They're good at doing what they're doing. The ministry is growing.

But then the very next verse, but the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. There is always, there is always opposition. As you share the gospel, there will always be people who say no.

[13:45] There will always be people who say I disagree. There will always be people who say I don't really care. I'm not that interested. And yet, they just keep going. It's funny. That happens. So people are being poisoned against them.

So they remain for a long time. In case you haven't noticed, a long time in the book of Acts could be a long time. We're talking actually since Paul's conversion in Acts 9 to now, it's probably been about 10 years already.

There's been a few chapters for us, but it's been 10 years for him. So in light of that mixed success, that mixed response, they decide we're going to stay. We're going to stay and we're going to keep teaching.

But the people of the city were divided. Verse 4. Some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. Isn't that interesting? That in a room like this, there would have been a group of people who say, I agree with what they're saying.

This makes sense. And there would have been another group that would be like, nope. And actually, Greek culture at that time would be a lot of discussion and philosophical debate. So there would have been people who say, I disagree. And they're actually talking about these things. It would have been a pretty tough crowd to be in.

[14:48] And yet, they decide to stay continuing to engage. And then what happens after that is, well, they try to kill them. Let me just stop there for a second. As we're wondering, how do I scatter?

How do I go out and go to my office and share the gospel? What happens? What's the worst that could happen is what I want to ask you. Like someone would look at you and go, oh, okay.

Who was it? Shigala last week said, Shigala is just that person who talks a lot about Jesus. That's the worst that could happen most of the time. Right? That's it. These guys got stones thrown at them.

Stones. Has anyone had stones being thrown at them before? Stones. And yet we're scared of the smallest thing.

We're scared of just someone going, oh, you're weird. We're scared of someone saying, oh, don't talk to them. Don't invite them to that thing because they're a Christian. Happens every time when I, okay, so I admit I don't look like your typical pastor, especially in Hong Kong.

[15:52] I'm about 20 years too young. It's really funny. Bless her. This lady in my apartment block, we went into the lift together and she started to say, oh, what floor do you live on?

I haven't seen you. I've been here 20 years and this is my first time seeing you. I'm on the second floor. She's like, oh, I don't say for people outside they don't.

I'm like, she's like, oh. I was like, at ease, your sins are forgiven. I'm like, I'm like, of course, on the basketball court where I don't always play with holy and righteous people like Trevor.

I play with all kinds of different people who use all kinds of different language and I've shared this all and sometimes I play with them for many years and they use many kind words and many unkind words to themselves and to everyone else and as soon as they find out I'm a pastor, I shouldn't have sworn when I was playing.

I was like, it's okay, it's cool. I sometimes swear in my head and then ask for forgiveness afterwards. We can't control how people really respond to us but we can control how we respond to the gospel and there's really only one way to respond to the gospel.

[17:03] This is good news and I must share it with you. I don't know whether you're going to take it or not and I know because I can see the best, the most prolific church planter in the history of the church got a divided response, got a mixed response.

So if we even go into our office, go into our family, go into our friendship circles and go, hey, I might even be able to only just get one person to have a decent conversation with me, then that's it. I'd encourage you that would be all that is enough.

Now, after that, verse 5, when an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews with their rulers to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and they fled. So they did leave. Sometimes it's okay to go and sometimes it's okay to stay.

You see this in the book of Acts where some people are called to leave Jerusalem and some people are scattering and staying. All that really matters is actually wherever God tells you to go, you go. Now, and I did say last week that actually, more often than not, he tells you to leave your comfort zone.

He rarely, rarely ever tells you, hey, just stay at home. Continue to watch Netflix. The show's really good. Stay on that couch. It's so rare. And if you've heard that call from God, please come and talk to me.

[18:08] That's a good call. I'd like to share in that call. But on the most part, whether it's Jerusalem or Samaria, whether it's to stay or to go, discomfort is part of the package.

Just FYI. So, they leave and they go to another place. Verse 8, now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. That was an understatement. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking and Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, stand upright on your feet.

So, this has happened before. Jesus had this happen. Peter and Paul had this happen. Where there's a guy who knows of his own weakness, knows how helpless he is, is looking and going, I want that power.

I need that power. That's all. That's the only thing I can hope for. And then Peter and Paul, sorry, notices and says, hey, stand up. And this miracle happens in front of everyone's eyes. And then the response is something new.

So, we carry on here. And when the crowds, verse 11, saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lyconian, the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men.

[19:14] Barnabas, they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance of the city, brought out oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

Their impact, their teaching, that moment there where they brought that guy up to his feet was so incredible. Something that people had never seen before. They're like, that is a god. And they try to, they start to worship him.

They get all the wild adulation. Now, there's a little bit of context here, actually. Bearing in mind, they've just stepped into a very pluralistic society. Okay? The gospel is going out. It's not in Jerusalem anymore.

It's not with the Jews anymore. It's with people who believed a whole ton of different things. And one of them is just actually the Greek legend. The legend would go, and actually the people listening and seeing this would have known this, that actually Zeus and Hermes had actually become humans and walked among the people of this town.

This is the legend. Okay? So they would have all known this. And that time, they all walked and no one would let them into their houses. They were not welcomed by this town, apart from one modest elderly couple.

[20:23] So what happened is these two gods ended up basically killing the rest of this town, but giving this couple a palace to live in. And so that's how the legend would go. So now you know that story.

Now you know what they were thinking. They see these two men perform this miracle. What's your response if you were them? This is part two.

This is the sequel. We best learn because we don't want to die and we really want a palace. Let's worship these two. These two. That line there, and later we'll come back to it.

The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men. Sometimes when people see us doing things that are, oh, that's really impressive, we get the praise, almost the adulation that maybe even Paul and Barnabas get here.

But their reaction, their reaction says everything. And I sit here and go, I don't know if I would have the same reaction. What's that reaction? Verse 14.

[21 : 27] But when the apostles, the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, men, why are you doing these things? So their response to this wild adulation was to tear their clothes, which, stay calm.

This isn't happening today. But they would do this because they're saying, they're distressed, they're devastated. This is not the point of why we are here.

You've missed the point. Can you see how precious it was for them to share only one name, the name of Jesus? And so the moment they saw that people were led astray, almost by this act, they were just devastated.

They would tear their sackcloth, is the term that would be used here. And they were just completely shocked. I wonder whether actually our response when we get praised actually is nothing like this either.

Sometimes when we get praised, what happens when someone tells you, when someone tells, Sam doesn't do this, he's actually a fairly humble guy. When I tell Sam, that was the best piano player, right?

[22 : 31] And then Sam just does his thing just kind of, but others are like, but we've also seen, I mean, we're all Chinese people so it's a safe space where we all play the piano. You play really well.

They say, oh, you're so good on the piano. It's like, oh, no, no, no. Not really. I'm terrible. False humility. No, I'm terrible. Terrible.

Only got 96% in the test. They are genuinely devastated that people had missed the point. How do we respond?

And maybe if I have time at the end, I don't know if we will, I'll come up with a few tips that I've learned over the years of what we should do when we respond to praise. But for now, let's keep to the passage here.

You see Paul and Barnabas, they're just deflecting. This isn't about us. Now, these are courageous people. You wouldn't think gentle and humble immediately when you would have looked to these two people because they were pretty brave to do what they do.

[23 : 27] Bearing in mind, people had just tried to stone them. Okay? So these are pretty brave and courageous people, yet there was a humility that was so fierce that was underlying. Reminds me of John the Baptist in John 3. Just the way he talks, wearing the clothes that he wore, living out in the wilderness, shouting the way he would have done.

And he's like, it's not about me. He must increase. I must decrease. I'm filled with joy now because the main character is here and the main character isn't me. My joy is complete, is what John the Baptist would say.

Paul and Barnabas here know that actually no human can bear the weight of the glory that is only reserved for God. Don't, do not, please do not even think that I'm God.

I've met him and I was blinded by him. Don't associate me with him. I am not him. What does John the Baptist say? I can't, I'm not even allowed to untie Jesus' sandals.

Is that ridiculous? When you catch sight of who God is and you react appropriately and accordingly, it will change the way you react to praise and criticism on earth. It will completely change it.

[24 : 32] And then he jumps into a sermon, a very short sermon. There's four verses, which maybe some of you are hoping mine is a very short one too. And so, actually this is a different kind of sermon though because up until now Peter's sermons and Paul's sermons were to the Jews.

So what they would do is they would cite the Old Testament and they would say, hey, you guys know the scriptures. You know Psalm 2 and you know Psalm 16. You know that he said that Jesus, that actually God, we're waiting for the Messiah who is God's son and he won't die and he will save

us all.

And so he's citing things that they would know. But this sermon is different. This is the first time he tells a sermon to a group of people who don't know the Bible, the Old Testament. And he goes on a completely different tangent.

He goes in a completely different direction which tells me one thing. When you speak to people about the gospel, you do need to speak in the language that they understand. You do need to speak, most importantly, to where you think is the heart of the problem.

As leaders yesterday, we were talking about just the idea of false narratives that we have all experienced in our lives, whether from childhood, just this one voice that we've heard someone say at some point to us that's just been ringing in our ears this whole time, whether it's, I am not enough or whether I am alone, whatever it is.

[25 : 44] We need to be able to listen out carefully, genuinely caring for these people, going, actually, what is it that's really holding on to you? Paul seems to know because he jumps into this sermon and maybe I'll read it first and then I'll break it down afterwards.

Verse 15, Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men of like nature with you and we bring you good news that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

In past generations, he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways, yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

Such a different kind of message to one we've just been more accustomed to now as we've been looking through the book of Acts because what Paul knows he's gone into new territory here. He's not talking to the Jews anymore.

He's talking to a bunch of Gentiles who believe in all kinds of different gods. It was a pluralistic society because it was basically anyone can believe any God because there will be different gods, one for fertility, one for farming, one for money.

[26 : 43] So he's saying, hey, don't hold on to those things. He's like, why are you thinking that I'm God? I'm just like you. I am just like you.

I am just the same as you. We are of like nature with you and we bring you good news. You should turn from these vain things to a living God. He realized the biggest problem in their lives, in their hearts, were idols.

What's an idol? What's an idol? Jay, on our call recently, you quoted, paraphrased Keller's quote on what an idol is. Do you remember what it is? What is an idol?

It's when your mind automatically wanders somewhere when you have nothing else to think about.

That thing that your mind goes to, that essentially is the thing that you care the most about.

That is your idol. Paul knows that they have idols here. Why do you think they responded to them in such a way? Is it because they genuinely wanted to worship these two gods, Zeus and Hermes?

[27 : 47] No. They wanted the things that come from these two gods. They wanted to not die. They wanted to not be destroyed. They wanted the palace. This world is driven by idols and he knew about the idols in those days.

I quote Keller all the time because Keller, I think, is one of those pastors in the modern day who was so good at speaking into the context of cities and context of looking at the cities and going, these cities are all made or filled with idols.

What are the idols? Idols are the things that control you, that you worship. Now, of course, we live in a pluralistic society here. Just go up the roads to, what road is Union Church on?

Kennedy Road. Has anyone been to Union Church? Beautiful, beautiful building. What's across the road from Union Church? The headquarters of the Freemasons.

Another beautiful church just down the road that way towards Wan Chai, Methodist International Church, MIC, on Queens Road. Queens Road. If you keep walking down towards Queens Road to the end of that Kennedy Road, what is it?

[28 : 54] Just this beautiful Sikh temple. We live in a place where people have all these different kinds of gods and obvious ones with beautiful temples but very subtle ones that don't have temples but have shiny buildings all surrounding in Central and Quarry Bay and Taikoo and Kowloon Bay now.

Money. Capitalism. That's an idol. Beauty is an idol in some cultures. Has politics become an idol in some places?

These things that our minds just effortlessly wander to when we have nothing else on our minds.

That is your God. That is our God. And Paul says, hey, don't hold on to those vain things.

Why? Because those vain things have no... They won't help you. But you and I both know we love holding on to those vain things. They're the things that give us comfort. They don't have to be super sinister.

You don't have to go into a Satan worshipping temple. You just need to doom scroll on YouTube.

That's enough. We can zoom.

[30:06] We can just scroll ourselves to death. And that is our idol. John Calvin says that the human heart is a factory for idols.

We just create them constantly. We churn them out. And you see, it's interesting here because Paul calls it out but in a really gentle, loving, positive kind of way. He's saying, hey, don't focus on these vain things.

They're not going to come out any good. And it's really interesting because we are all on this rat race. We've all heard about the rat race. We're trying to climb this ladder. Those of us sat here, more than likely is that you know that this rat race doesn't head anywhere.

And we see time and time again, people who reach the top of the ladder, they end up falling off and they realize nothing's there. And so it's just crushing. And all of us at the bottom of the ladder, we actually know this. And yet somehow, we subconsciously still keep climbing the ladder because we still have those idols in our hearts.

And so you see, Paul's saying here, don't follow them. So in a negative way, what he's actually saying is, hey, there is a futility as you follow these idols. And they won't lead you anywhere. They are vain things. But in a more positive sense, he's not just rebuking them for their idols.

[31:12] He's actually pointing them to the living God. And he's saying, hey, I know you are chasing these things and they are vain. And I am not it. I am not he. But the living God. And it's really interesting how he basically emphasizes this living God is he talks about something called, what I think is called common grace.

He's saying, actually, you've known this God. You have experienced this God. Why? Because you've experienced rain. You've lived on this earth. You are living and breathing because of this God. The fact that you are living is because there is a living God that is sustaining you.

He says, I have good news for you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea that is all in them. Yet he did not leave himself without witness. How is he proving that he's here and he's good? For he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

He's feeding you. You are the reason why he's alive. Paul is pointing them away from the futility of idolatry, away from the vain things that are meaningless that won't actually satisfy you.

And he's saying, there is a living God right here, right now, who has been providing for you all along. That's a positive message. That's the good news.

[32:19] Of course, he doesn't just finish there. He continues likely to talk about why is it so offensive because this good God actually, you talk about, hey, you think I'm God that came in the likeness of men?

Well, actually, funny you say that because there was God. There was a moment recently where God really did come and become the likeness of men. He really did move into our neighborhood and he really did come and show you how good he truly is.

And his redemptive work reaches its divine climax in Jesus. That's the good news. That is the good news. He reminds them of his humanity, actually.

He said, hey, I'm just like you. You may have just seen me do this when I'm actually just like you. He actually appeals to them saying, hey, you and I are not different. I think that's beautiful considering what he just did.

He's like, we're the same. You could do this too because it's not me that's doing it. It's the power that's working through me that's doing it. How exciting is that? So he reminds them of common grace. He shows them humility.

[33:21] He calls them away from the vain gods to this living God. And you think, oh, what a great message, Paul. They finally get it. And actually, Luke says here, verse 18, even with these words, they scarcely restrain the people from offering sacrifice to them.

So basically, they're saying, okay, okay, cool, cool, cool. I get it. I get it. I get it. Okay, is this God here? He's the one who gives, he's the reason why we're alive. That's good. But actually, we still want to worship you. Would you take my yuju and let me worship you?

And we're kind of just sat there going, well, guys, how stupid can you get? He's made it so clear to you that he's not God. He's made it so clear to you what grace really is. And he's made it so clear to you about who Jesus is.

And yet, here you are still worshiping him, still trying to appease them, trying to give them everything that you have so that they will give you even more, like that old, modest couple in the legend.

And just before I go too far in going, they are so stupid, I'll ask you the same question. How stupid are you? How long have you been in church listening to the gospel of Jesus?

[34 : 25] The good news of grace that is undeserved, that there is nothing that you need to do to make God love you more. And there is nothing that you can do that will cause God to love you less.

And yet, you and I, still trapped in the same places of bondage where we are thinking we have to prove ourselves, we have to show that we are good Christians, when there is no such thing as a good Christian, only a Christian who recognizes that they are bad and they are in need of a savior. How long have we sat and listened to messages about the gospel, the good news, but not really let it seep into our hearts? And so we still focus on how do we become better?

How do we serve more? How do we become enough? How do we belong? Do you still have that? I still have that, which makes me just as stupid as these people here.

Because I am still trying to appease God with my sacrifices. And God is saying, it is not about your sacrifices. It is like my daughter Alicia continually trying to draw me the best picture that she can draw.

[35 : 29] She is unable to draw me a picture that I will not like. Parents, do you agree? when your kids come up to you with a picture that you have no idea what it is?

Oh, so beautiful. What is it? But am I proud? Yes. Thomas Merton says, the very desire to please God is what pleases God.

You being willing to believe in Him. That God, I am nothing. That in you, I have everything. That is the only thing that we need. That is the only message He wants to tell us and yet time and time again we keep thinking, what can I do?

What can I do to be better? Or, I can never be good enough. I think it is just the same here. So then, they move on.

Verse 19, but Jews came from Antioch, so things are going kind of well, I guess, but the people still aren't getting the point. But then, it gets worse. Verse 19, but the Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

[36 : 35] I mean, that's just such a casual line there, verse 19, supposing he was dead. That means, he was left for dead. That means the stones actually hit him. And that means he's actually lying there and they thought, okay, we've done it, we've killed him.

Isn't the crowds, seriously, at this point, you're like, okay, some of you really got it and then another of you could just be turned just in an instant, going from crowding to cancelling just like that and hurling stones.

But what's Paul's reaction to this near-death experience? It's just as ridiculous as him being told that he's a god. Verse 20, so they suppose he was dead, his disciples, well, they all drag him out of the city.

Verse 20, but when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city. Hold up. Paul, they tried to kill you, you're lying on the floor, bruised and bleeding, they drag you out of the city, we're trying to hang out and just see if you're still alive.

By some kind of miracle is all I can really assume here. At some point, he manages to come back to consciousness, stands back up and the next thing you do, are you kidding me?

[37 : 42] Is you're going to run straight back into the city and continue to spread the gospel. In face of the most extreme kind of persecution and criticism, he runs straight back to the problem, which is the exact opposite of what I would do.

If you come and say, hey James, that message wasn't really too good. Yeah, I thought this was wrong, this was wrong, this was wrong. Yeah, I'm probably going to try and avoid you next week.

I'm probably going to, I can see them.

Paul runs straight back in to the place that tried to kill him. How we respond tells us where we're at. How we respond to criticism tells us where we're at. How we respond to praise and compliments tell us where we're at.

And we've all been there, probably, where a hundred people tell you that you're really good, but all it takes is that one person to say, meh. They don't even have to say anything. And suddenly you think of all these other things, they're things that they're trying to be critical of, right?

And it ruins everything and you forget the 100 compliments you get because you're only focusing on that one. And that's what Tim Keller says, if you live for praise, you will die from criticism. If you live for praise, you will die from criticism.

[38:49] If you let praise inflate you, when criticism comes, it will crush you and it will tell you what your idol is. Your idol is self-worth. If everyone tells you, every time someone tells you something that you've done well, it puffs you up, it makes you think, I am so worthy.

I am as a God. But the moment someone tells you something bad, you're like, I am worthless. If you live for praise, you will die from criticism. But if you have the heart of Paul and Barnabas, despite the praise, despite the criticism, they run straight back in to do whatever the Lord called them to do. That is it. There's something else that I find really interesting here and those of you who may be in ministry, I know that Young Life talks a lot about this, is how do we raise leaders? How do we have it so that it's not just about us doing everything?

And it's fascinating because in the next few verses, you see that actually one of Paul's greatest traits isn't actually his preaching, isn't actually his courage. It's the way he raises up people around him.

There are disciples that are surrounding him, gathered about him. He rose up and entered the city. And by the way, if I was one of those people, I'll be saying, Paul, let's not do that again. Like some of those stones that they threw at you, they nearly hit me.

[39:59] Can we not go back in there? Let's just move to the next place, just like we did earlier in the chapter. Let's show people that it's responsible to stay safe. I would have been one of those people.

I'd say, that's not a good idea. And yet he raises disciples who just had so much faith, they were willing to follow. Verse 21, and when they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, note, they had made many disciples, not disciples of Paul or Barnabas, but disciples of Jesus.

More and more people were willing to not just believe, but to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Now, of course, following Jesus is hard, which is why at another point in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul says, hey, imitate me as I imitate Christ.

If you can't quite see Jesus yet, like I've seen him, don't worry. Look at me. Because I am so confident that in my own gaze is focused on him. If you follow me, you'll end up following Christ. How beautiful is that?

And so you have these leaders that he raises who are then strengthened. So he goes there and he goes to, returns to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch and then he does a few things. Leadership development right here. One, he strengthens the souls of his disciples.

[41:01] He encourages them in their faith. He reminds them that actually, in order to get into the kingdom, there will be trouble. So please don't be shocked when you spread the gospel because just like me, you might be stoned or at the very least, you will have divided response.

That's okay. And then he appoints and commits elders and he prays for these people because he realizes his job is not to build his whole empire. His job is to simply do whatever the Spirit asks him and what the Spirit is doing is raising people.

That's our prayer here. That's our prayer and I've cited a few times what we spent some time as a small group of leaders yesterday. That's, that's the heart. That you wouldn't come in here week in, week out and you think, okay, well I'm here to just hear a sermon, sing a few songs and then leave. But that actually you would be ignited and that I could disappear and then you would do whatever God's called you to do. And if this closes down tomorrow but you have received from the Lord what he's, the next marching orders, the next instruction, that that is, that is it.

That's all that's needed. Christ says enough for me. everything I need is in you. I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back. The cross before me.

[42:13] The world behind me. And so he appoints these leaders and he goes. But just for a second there, just imagine the emotions of the people who are getting prayed for.

These leaders who have chosen to follow Paul. They know that he was just stoned and left for dead. At some point they'll know that actually their leader has been killed. Just imagine this. Imagine here, here we are living in a place where actually you being here is actually quite dangerous. And imagine then, I say imagine but I also want us to know deep in our hearts and souls that this is happening in places around the world.

Okay? So this is not just a hypothetical mind exercise. This is actually happening. Imagine you've been coming week in, week out and you're wondering okay, I believe in Jesus.

I'm going to try and follow him. And the next week you show up and I'm not here because the authorities have taken me away and I'm actually, I've gone. What's your next reaction then?

[43:21] Well you, I've not passed away yet. Maybe I'm in prison and I'm stoned and I'm not as good looking as I currently am. And then we're like we need new leaders. In that moment what's your response?

It would be completely understandable if they've taken him down like I'm going to lay low. Actually I, you know what, I feel the Lord calling me back to my couch and then I'll do church online.

But imagine some of you say alright, the church needs leaders, I'm up.

Imagine Danny saying okay, well I guess James is gone now, I'll do it. Imagine how Grace would feel. Imagine what he has to go through regarding Grace and Audrey.

the courage. I don't think we're anywhere near. As I said at the beginning, I look at the book of Acts and I'm like I don't know if I'm anywhere close to how these people are reacting.

[44:28] And I pray in my heart that I would respond to the good news of Jesus in the appropriate way. Because these people clearly are. So I'll finish here with this.

What's your biggest idol? It might not be explicitly I want to be a God. With that said, are you trying to be the God of your own life?

Isn't that what really Adam and Eve were doing? Did he really say that? Why don't you just take over the reins? Why don't you have the apple and then you'll know what's best? Isn't that essentially the original sin of I want to be God?

I want to know as God knows. Isn't that the first mistake? Isn't that the original sin? Isn't that what we carry when we go to work and you say I want to try and keep my job.

I want to try and impress my boss. If we're being honest we're just trying to take control of our own lives. If we're being very honest we're just trying to be God.

[45:33] God. So I lovingly hopefully gently call you out like Paul did here with the people that he knew. Empty yourself of those vain things.

Cue the spooky music because this is important. Who is your God? I think there are idols in each of our hearts that we need to surrender.

Most of that might be to do with how addicted to praise we are and how crushed by criticism we get. John Piper says this and I love this quote When you're praised let it pass through you to God.

When you're criticised let it pass through God to you. When you're praised let it pass through you to God. I'm saying if you praise me this all goes to God. I boast in only one thing I'm only alive because of him.

it's all God. But when you are criticised let it pass through God to you. What does that even mean? What that means is remember the cross. Remember the cross.

[46:44] Remember the work of Jesus. The cross sets you free from the approval of man.

Galatians 1.10 It sets you free from it because you realise someone died in your place. You realise there was one who did come.

A God who did come in the likeness of man and took our place on the cross. And so when we get criticism we can go straight to the cross and go he did he experienced worse.

It allows us that we can take any offence from anyone because Jesus took on the ultimate offence for us. That's what it means. So you won't be crushed by criticism because you will let that flow through the cross to you.

And when you get praise you'll just pass it straight through to God. Let the cross be the thing that anchors us. When we're praised remember the cross and his grace.

When we're criticised you swap your shame with the crown that is now yours with the robe that is now yours because of what he did for you. So now you are not an orphan. You are not isolated.

[47:43] You are not alone. You are a co-heir with Christ member of the household of God. That changes. I challenge you this week whenever you get praise check your heart how am I reacting to this because that will tell you where you're at.

And then don't feel guilty of where you're at if you're loving the praise and just acknowledge okay whoa God I have that in me. When someone compliments me I get inflated. Acknowledge that and go okay but I'm going to try and pass it through to you.

And then it will be really fun when you get criticised when you can do the same thing. When you can let it pass through God to you you can't put shame on me. You can't put guilt on me.

You can't strike fear into me because the cross already dealt with all of that. How you react to praise and criticism will tell you where you are at. The idols that these people were holding on to demanded everything but would give nothing in return and yet we have God the living God who gave everything to us.

That's the difference. That's why he says worship me. Don't worship money because that will control you and corrupt you. Worship me and I will complete you.

[48:53] is what he's saying. So would we come now before him and say God I'll trade you.

I'll give you my empty vein idols and living God Holy Spirit would you come straight through and fill me. Fill me with courage. Fill me with faith that you truly are living that I am sat here because of your grace because of what you did on the cross for me.

And so actually whether it's praise or criticism it really matters not. There's only one name that matters. The name of Jesus. A few quick tips before we respond in worship.

If you're in that space you'll get I struggle with praise and I struggle with criticism. Just a few quick things that I think have really helped me. First of all confession. These are not new things by the way. Confession.

If you're able to even articulate that out and say that's the thing that's holding on to me. So when someone criticizes you and you're like oh I've got all these feelings and if you say I realize what this is. I'm actually trying to seek the approval of this person.

[50:05] God I repent of that. I surrender that. That's huge. And find someone to deal with. That's even better. The book of James says confess Your sins And be healed from that. So you no longer be under that bondage of trying to appease that person.

That's number one. Number two is solitude. This doesn't seem to be a direct link but I promise you I swear it is. And I quote this all the time there's a French philosopher Pascal who says all of humanity's problems come from man's inability to be alone in a room on their own.

What does he mean? When you are alone on your own you actually shrink back to the right size or you come back up to the right size.

When you sit alone and you sit under the weight of who God is if you have any pride from the praise that you've had you will shrink back to the right size there's no other voices there's no other noise get yourself into that place where I'm like I have nothing else that I care for God apart from you I promise you that will shrink you back to the right size that helps me solitude and if you're struggling not with pride but maybe of insecurity even though last week I said they're kind of the same thing go into that solitude and be with God and say God let me only hear your voice may you be the only one that's enough for me confession solitude and Sabbath rest those of you who struggle with rest it's so so important remember rest the Sabbath is not reward for finishing work that's not the rest the rest the real rest is rescuing from unfinished work so many of us I will rest only when I die

I will rest only when the job is completed that's not the rest that God wants for you the rest that God wants for you is that he would rescue you from the unfinished work recognizing that actually you will never finish the work there was only one who finished the work so would you pull yourself away from that and stop because if we're honest when we say we're busy when we say we can't stop it's because we're trying to work for the approval of man we'll work ourselves to the ground to please our boss we will struggle to rest because we're trying to show our parents that we're hard working our idol shows up once and again I'm going to spend just a few moments now I'll invite the team to come back up what idols do you have and I'll spend this time asking myself what idols do I have I look at my life I look at how I if you still don't really quite know what your idols are again how you react to things will tell you where you're at how do you react when things go well how do you react when things do not go well that will tell you exactly that is the most honest way to assess where you're at when you lose something that you you've been caring for when the thing that you're holding on to gets threatened pull on that thread and you'll find your idol continue to pull on it more

and you'll see that it is vain you'll see that it is empty you'll see that it is meaningless and then point yourself back to the grace of God the goodness of God the one who's provided for you since the moment you were born because he is good he is living and he completes us and he is the only name the only voice the only one that matters

[53:41] Christ is enough there is no other name let's pray Jesus we come before you the living God the only God and declare that there is no other name because no one else did what you did no one else of divine nature emptied themselves becoming the likeness of men and being found in human form humbled yourself even to the point of death even death on the cross therefore there is now no other name in heaven and on earth and we know that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess at that name because you did what no one else could do you defeated death you paid the price and so we swap our vain idols we swap our yearning for the approval of man and in exchange we ask for your approval and just even as I say that

I'm reminded before Jesus did a single thing God you said this is my son with whom I am well pleased and what is true of Jesus is true of us some trust in horses some trust in chariots some trust in work some trust in connections but as for us we trust in the name of Jesus Amen.