

Contextualizing Christ

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Date: 16 November 2025

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[0:00] Why are you here? Why am I here? I think that's been a question that I've been asking these last few days.

! I've been asking the Lord, why did you bring us here to do what we need to do? And what is it that we need to do?

Thank you.

He wants to stay in Asia, because probably that's where the best food is. But then the Holy Spirit says, no, you have to go here. Don't go here. Don't go here. You must go here.

And we're beneficiaries of that, because eventually it went to Europe. Then it went to carry on to the West. And I've always been really envious of that, because I, too, want to be told by God, exactly where do you need me to go?

[1:26] Right? Don't we want that? When you hear that voice saying, okay, go to this street corner, find the person who's wearing a red T-shirt, and tell them this secret word, and they will convert, and they will accept Jesus and live eternal life in heaven.

And I wish he would close doors for me. Sometimes he doesn't close doors for me, and I keep going through doors, and I don't even know if they're the right one.

And on Friday, Christine and I had the most interesting experience. Friday afternoon, we got news that my uncle was on his last few hours.

And a dear uncle, because he's probably, I'm not going to be here if his family weren't around us.

And my cousins called me, and they said, James, we don't know anything about the faith.

We don't know anything about the Bible. What do we need to do? What can we pray? Thank you.

I'm going to try not to. What can we do to pray for him so he's more comfortable? They know who we are.

[2:36] They know that we came to Hong Kong to serve God. They don't know God. But then they kept saying, but don't come. We know that you're very busy. Don't come. We know you have work to do.

And I was like, screw that. So anyway, I said, I'll try and come as soon as I can. They don't know Jesus. I'm like, Lord, if there's something that you can do with them, then please, I'll go.

So they're in China. So they're in Guangzhou. So I said, let's go. I'll go. Of course, I look online, trip.com. The tickets are all sold out already. I think it's just a busy week in Hong Kong.

So I said, OK, well, I can't get up then. And then I sat down on the bed. I was like, is that it?

Because the doctor said there's only a few more hours. I said, Lord, if you want me to go and share the gospel with them, just tell me and I will go.

I'll walk up there. I'll figure it out. I sat down and couldn't find the tickets. And then I was just reminded of my auntie, whose husband this is, who's just outside of our parents.

[3:40] It's probably one of the most nearest and dearest to us. I remember when our dad passed away at 17 in England. This auntie had never even been to Japan. I called her when I was 17. I said, Dad's gone. And she was like, I'm on my way.

And I remember she just flew to England. And I sat on my bed on Friday. And I was like, she did that for me. I must go. So I was like, forget it.

I'm going to go to West Calhoun Station. So I went to West Calhoun Station, tried to get a ticket.

They said, no, it's sold out. I said, well, I don't even need to sit. I can just stand. I'll just hang on the train. Just let me hang on the train.

They said no. And then I had to go home. And I was like, I think that's how it feels. You want to do something.

You feel that this is the right place to go. And then God says no. Anyway, I told Christina, I don't know. I think that might be it. I don't think I can go and pray for my uncle anymore.

[4:40] And then she, who actually, funnily enough, she was planning to go to Shenzhen herself with a group of ladies. And she got turned away at the border because her visa ran out. And that was completely our fault.

That was our neglect. So she had to come back down. So in the same evening, both of us were turned away from China. And she just said, I think he'll still be around tomorrow.

The doctor said 3 p.m. Friday was when he was going to go. I said, well, Lord, if you want me to share anything, something, then can you keep him alive till tomorrow?

And, of course, in the evening, once we found out I couldn't go, my auntie called me and said, yeah, they're actually going to switch off the machine now. And I said, well, okay. I'm still coming tomorrow morning, and I know he's still going to be there.

And she was like, well, okay, let's just see. I wake up in the morning, and actually, he is still around. And so I go straight up. By this point, he can't actually hear me.

[5:41] But I'm just praying for him. I'm just praying for him. I'm reading John 14 over him. I'm just doing everything I possibly can. Do I think, just to be aware, this is, I don't know if this is a good ending.

But I want you to know I'm trying. I want you to try to share the gospel. Because I was like, actually, it's not going to be me who converts him.

Only God. Only the Holy Spirit. But I have to do my part. So, God, I'll try and knock on every door and see if you will open it.

So I got there, and of course, part of me is like, actually, I'm not going to even just think about him. I'm going to think about my auntie. I'm going to think about my cousins. Because they're like, oh, I've been trying to pray for him.

I've been trying to get him to say the words. I believe. That's all. But sadly, because it's China, they've already set up the funeral arrangements. There's not going to be a Christian one. And she's like, oh, what's going to happen to him?

[6:41] I said, I don't know. That's out of my control. I'm here just to obey. I'm here just to follow, to do whatever I can. So it doesn't feel nice.

And that's where the story ends. And the reason why I'm a mess this morning is because he passed this morning. But I hope that my failure is an encouragement to you.

That there is a news that needs to be shared. The question is, are we willing to hear? Are we willing to obey? Are we willing to follow?

Each of us has people in our lives who need to know the love of Jesus, need to know the good news of Jesus, need to know that Jesus is the only one that can do it. And maybe the Spirit is speaking to us and saying, well, sometimes it's going to work.

Sometimes I'm going to close the door. Sometimes you won't even get a ticket to get on the train. But you do what the Lord asks you to. And that's all you can do. That's why I loved Acts 16.

[7:49] So I guess when I was praying, I've always been praying, God, can you give me an Acts 16 experience? And I guess he did. He closed doors for me. And it's at that point, then I go, well, okay.

How am I reacting to this? Because how I react will tell me where I'm at. How I react will tell me whether I really do care about sharing the good news or whether actually I'm still just doing it just for my own comfort.

When you follow the Spirit, as Gabe shared so well last week, it's not about comfort. It's not even about your own pleasure and your own luxuries or even your own impact for the kingdom.

It's for him. How do you know it's the Holy Spirit? Well, if the Holy Spirit is pointing you to share Jesus, if he's pointing you to Jesus, that's the Holy Spirit. John 16a, when it says, the Holy Spirit will come and convict the world of sin and righteousness.

Would we be a people who are willing to follow his Spirit and that is actually it? What if the Spirit was our only strategy? I was talking to Caleb the other day. We've been talking a lot about the Holy Spirit because we're in the book of Acts and you see how the church was born.

[8:59] And it's all about, it's Holy Spirit, would you follow? Would you lead me? I'll follow you anywhere. Just tell me where to go. Tell me what to do. Tell me what to say. Because I can't bring people to you myself.

I never have. Well, I didn't come to you myself. You came to me. Last week, weekend, we went around because we were at a conference to talk about stewardship and generosity and how Christians should use their wealth.

And I was just so inspired by this one person. I won't say the company, but he's a big, big, big tech company in China. The first name that comes to mind is probably the one, that's the one. And he's the chief strategy officer who's a Christian.

And as he was sharing, he was like, actually, I'd be very open about my faith up there. And he told me about one of the daily practices and habits that he has, which is every day before I go to work as the chief strategy officer of this company, but as a personal follower of Jesus Christ, I say, Lord, I need your help.

Tell me where to go. And every time he goes into a meeting, every time he goes into a big strategy meeting, he goes, God, what do you want me to say? What do you want me to do? I was just blown away. I mean, for him, he said it so casually, but I'm like, we are so engrossed in this world in the way that we go about things.

[10:14] We always need to have a plan. We always need to have a strategy, a three-year plan, a five-year plan, a 10-year plan of what we need to do to succeed, to bring impact. And yet I have sitting inside in front of me, a chief strategy officer of one of the biggest companies in the world saying, I'm reliant on the Holy Spirit.

That's it. I was so inspired by him saying that. It just hammers home the point once and again. It's about what God is doing, and we simply follow.

I've been inspired, actually, by some stories here. Kelly shared with us a couple of weeks back about just her being able to share the gospel with people around her. And in our group, Steph, I think I saw her somewhere, she said the same thing.

She managed to speak to just people. Can we just go to work? Can we go to our next family dinner and go, Holy Spirit, can you just do whatever you want to do? And can you show me who I need to talk to and what I need to say?

Can we be people that are so in tune with that, to asking him to lead us? Because I think that's all that's necessary. And once we get there, we do have to then learn how to speak to these people, because you can't speak to everyone in the same way because everyone is different.

[11:24] That's why Paul here is the chosen instrument by God because actually he contextualized so well. One of my favorite passages in the scriptures is 1 Corinthians 9, where it says, well, it's actually the final part is actually I discipline my body, training it to do what it should, lest after preaching to others, I myself might be disqualified.

That's why I hold myself to this book to such a high level, because I'm saying I can't preach here if I'm not following this, because I might preach to you, but if I'm not doing it, if I'm not disciplined, then I myself might be disqualified.

But that chapter is majestic because earlier in the chapter, Paul says this, hey, to the Jews, I'm a Jew. To the Greeks, I'm a Greek. I become all things to all people in order to save some. That relentless mindset of going, I will adapt myself to whatever it is, whatever language you need to speak, whatever culture you understand, I want to bend myself to you so that you would understand the gospel.

And even then, I become all things to all people in order to save some. We see here today, as we look at this scripture passage, that Paul is exercising that stretching muscle to the full.

You see him talking to Jews in one way, and you see him talking to Greeks in another. My prayer as we leave here later is you'll be inspired to go, actually, what's my context?

[12:47] What's the language I need to speak to these colleagues, to these friends, to my family members in a way that they will understand, but that the name of Jesus still pierces through into their hearts?

So with that, can I invite you to stand? And we're going to read the word of the Lord together. Sorry, Aaron, I wasn't organized enough to ask someone to read. Would you mind reading for us? Sorry, the passage is a little bit long, but as I, but you guys, you guys, I know that you guys can do it.

Acts chapter 17, this is the word of the Lord. The whole chapter. Why don't we do, why don't we just do 16 to, I think.

Acts chapter 17, verse 16 to 34. Now, while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him, and he saw that the city was full of idols.

So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him, and some said, what does this babblers wish to say?

[14:01] Others said, he seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities, because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Arapagus, saying, may we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting, for you bring some strange things to our ears.

We wish to know, therefore, what these things mean. Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. So Paul, standing in the midst of the Arapagus, said, men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.

For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, to the unknown God. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.

[15:23] Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being, as even some of your own poets have said, for we are indeed his offspring.

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed.

And of this, he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, but others said, we will hear you again about this.

So Paul went out from their midst, but some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius and Arab Haggai and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

This is the word of the Lord. Praise be to God. Thank you, Aaron. Please take a seat. So, Paul starts to make this journey to Athens, the cultural center, the cultural capital, not of Greece, but of the world.

[16:49] This is Athens, not at its prime because the Romans had already taken over, but this is in terms of cultural influence. They were still the most important city in the world right now. And it's really funny.

Silent Timothy, they are going to join him soon, but Paul goes there first himself. And we're actually going to just jump a little bit. It was actually the before part in Thessalonica.

Paul does the same thing as he does in every city that he goes to. He goes straight to the Jews. He goes straight to the synagogue. And he speaks to them in a very interesting way. At the beginning, chapter 17, verse 2, 1 and 2 and 3, you can see he goes straight, 1, first S, he goes straight to the synagogue.

Same thing that he does every time. He goes to the synagogue and then actually he spends three weeks there because he spends three separate Sabbaths there. So he spends three weeks on the Sabbath in the synagogue talking to the Jews and opening up the scriptures.

So he's opening up the scriptures. So that's one way of him contextualizing because he knows what they believe. He knows that they are waiting for the Messiah. So all his job is to do is open up this book, well, half of this book, the Old Testament, and he's saying, hey, do you realize who it is?

[17:54] Do you realize he's actually come? Do you realize there's actually 300 prophecies in the Old Testament who are pointing to the person of Jesus? The fact that he would be born to a virgin. The fact that he would be born in Bethlehem.

The fact that he would be a descendant of David. The fact that he would be pierced and that is how he would die. The fact that he will then rise again. Do you realize all these 300 prophecies are about him?

It is him. That's his message to the Jews. And it's one that, well, they would have understood to a level because they would have known the scriptures. They just didn't know who it was.

So he was simply just kind of pulling open the curtain and saying, this is it. Follow him. And of course, some believe and then others set a mob and actually go and try and beat these people out of the city and that's what they do.

Jason, who hosts them, also gets into trouble. He ends up having to pay them money so they can go so you can see there. And then afterwards, they go to another place and from there in Berea, they do the same thing.

[18:51] They go to the Jews. They open up the scriptures. This group of Jews are better. They actually open up the Bible with them and go, okay, well, this is verse 11. They receive the word from all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

So basically, they say, oh, okay, all right, that makes sense. Okay, I guess that is, I guess Jesus couldn't have chosen that he would be born to a virgin. He couldn't have chosen to be born in Bethlehem.

Who got to choose where they were born? No one. So they're like, oh, okay, this starts to make sense. Again, so some Jews responded, but then another group left every time. Honestly, that's what they gave me the courage this time as I was going up to my, who, of course, very deeply loved by my family, but I was like, I don't know if they will actually receive this message well.

And it happened to the very last moment in bed when my family was saying, oh, he's going to be with your dad. And then he's like, oh, how can I not go to the temple?

So good. So good. So good. Your uncle's going to go and be with your dad. It'll be fine.

[19:58] He's such a good, he was such a good person. In that moment, for me just to go, oh, I actually don't think he will.

Because he needs to recognize that he needs Jesus. Can you imagine if it was just, oh, if it's a good person that gets to go? If you're just nice and if you were kind, then that's enough.

For me to be able just to go, no, I think the only way he's going to get there is if he recognizes he needs Jesus. Of course, the easier thing at that point to say, yeah, of course, he's going to a better place.

He was good. Everyone speaks highly of him. But that's not the message, is it? That's not the Christian message. The Christian message isn't if you are good enough and kind enough, you will go to heaven.

That's not the message. We don't need a cross for that. We don't need Jesus for that. The Christian message is someone who's willing to say, I need a savior.

[21:06] And that savior is Jesus. It's funny because time and time again in this book of Acts, the Christians had a chance. Actually, the Romans were like, look, stop talking about the resurrection.

Just keep Jesus as a nice man, a good man, a prophet even, who spoke on behalf of God. Keep him there, but don't talk about the resurrection and we'll let you continue.

And then the Christian's like, no, that's the only thing we hang our hat on. That Jesus is the son of God that he died and now he rose again. And I wouldn't need to die for that. You might want to allow me to live by just compromising my message, but that's the only thing that matters.

That he put death to death. Do we have the courage to actually stand up and go, wait, there's something wrong here. Of course, Paul time and time again seems to just be relentless, focused on what his message was.

And so then he gets kicked out of another town and another town and by verse 16, he finally goes to Athens. While he's in Athens, he's waiting for Timothy and Silas. So we're now in verse 16 if you're following along.

[22:12] While he's walking around and waiting for them. So he's probably waiting, maybe grabbing some food, walking around the city, seeing, and then this line comes. His spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.

Provoked, the word there is distressed. The word there is sudden, violent emotion. He walks around in Athens and sees the different temples and sees the different statues and he has this sudden moment of emotion that is violent and distressed and devastated.

Why? Because he looks and he sees this whole city, this cultural capital of the world is worshipping anything but God.

It's filled with idols. So again, he does the thing that he always does and goes straight to the synagogue and then he speaks with the Jews. Like guys, come on. This is it. Hey, I know the scriptures better than you.

I promise you, I've met him and now I'll go through every passage of scripture with you but Jesus is him. But he doesn't just stop there this time. He goes into a place called the Agora which is the marketplace.

[23:22] He doesn't stay in the synagogue. He doesn't stay there. He goes out into the marketplace and he speaks there and that's when he meets a group of interesting people. Verse 18, some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also converse with him.

The Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, let's just maybe a modern equivalent. The Epicureans were the ones, you'd call them the hedonists, the ones who just live for pleasure, maximize pleasure, avoid pain, live life to the best now and so they're trying to just mold their whole lifestyle around this philosophy is just enjoy as much as you can now.

So that was them. Next to them were the Stoics who were a different group. They would be like equivalent to the modern determinists who say, who actually just want to seek control. They believe that actually when you do this, this will happen.

When you do this, this will happen. They are much more traditional, much more strict in the way they live their lives and so you have these two different camps of people in this agora, in this marketplace and it's fascinating.

Paul comes to them, engages with these philosophers. Remember, the Greek philosophers were just, they were used to debating, used to discussing these things and Paul comes and he says one thing, verse 18, he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

[24:36] Armed with nothing but the fact that who Jesus was, what he did, that he died and then he rose again. And so they go, who is this guy? What does this babbling wish to say? It looks like he's preaching about a foreign god.

And so then they took him to this place, verse 19, Areopagus, which is basically a court of law. If anyone has been to London, it's probably like, a little bit like the speaker's corner where people can actually debate philosophies and argue and discuss all these things.

The only difference is this court actually had even more authority. Speaker's Corner in London just has a bunch of tourists who are hearing people argue. But this Areopagus is where actually the greatest minds all get together and exchange ideas and discuss and debate.

They say, we would like to hear more about this God. We're going to take you there and we're going to have you speak to us there. And so, verse 22, Paul preaches one of the most powerful contextualized sermons that he's done so far.

Remember, up until this point, he's talking to the Jews. He's saying, he's talking about the Old Testament, he's talking about the prophecies and he's pointing them to Jesus, talking about the Messiah. Here, you can see his sermon completely changes.

[25:41] Completely changes and it's almost word feeding again but we'll do it bit by bit. Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription to the unknown God.

What's the first thing he does? When he gets to Athens and he's waiting for his bros, he's going on a walk, he's going on a prayer walk and looking around then he gets very distressed at seeing all these statues and all these temples and idols and now he's finally given a place to address this and so they give him a space to speak and he says, men of Athens, I can see that actually you are very religious.

You have gods around everywhere. Again, the cultural center of the world here had a god for everything. Ares, the god of war and thunder. You had the god of fertility, you had the god of agriculture, you had, think of a god, you name it, they've got it.

It's just like Taobao. So you have everything is right here. And then he says this one thing. He says, but I noticed there was one statue that I want to talk about.

I'm going to use that as my entry point for my sermon to contextualize so you understand who this Jesus is. I see that you have an inscription for one statue which you just called the unknown god.

[26:54] You don't even know who that god is. Well, why is that god, why is that statue there in the first place? Because they had so many gods. The one thing that they wanted to make sure is that they would appease and satisfy every god.

So they didn't want any god to have FOMO and so they just put a god there and said, okay, well, everyone else, if we missed your name, apologies, we worship you.

It's kind of why that god is there. And so he used that as his entry point and said, hey, I want to talk to you about that god. You don't know that god but can I introduce you to him because he knows you.

Isn't that clever? Isn't that a clever way to introduce himself into this context to talk to these people? I remember as a, I think I would have been maybe 20 years old when the Da Vinci Code came out and I've shared this story sometimes.

I was just, okay, so I grew up in a university time where apologetics was a real, like, real hot topic. It was really fun to debate and argue and discuss about apologetics. I think that's kind of lessened a little bit because people care less what you think and care whether just whether you care.

[27:58] And so I remember using the Da Vinci Code. It was just my way to talk. I mean, I guess I don't have any more friends from university anymore but maybe I'll reflect on that. But I remember going to my friends and saying, hey, have you watched the Da Vinci Code?

And they said, yeah, yeah. And of course, during that time, people were actually, I think Dan Brown's right. I was like, Dan Brown's just a fictional writer. What's he right about? Well, I think there might be something.

I think Jesus got married and did this and this and this and this. I was like, that's a lot of faith that you need to have to believe what Dan Brown said. But I remember that was my entry point. I was like, have you read it?

Have you watched the movie? Tom Hanks is pretty good in the movie. Well, actually, by the way, are you actually religious? I go to church. I don't believe that because that's written by a human. But I believe this book, which is written by God. It was just a great season for me in learning how to defend the faith, how to talk about these things. Culturally now, I think we're in a different place.

[29:01] And I want us to think about your context. My question at the very beginning, why are you here and why has God placed the people that are around you? What do they need to hear? So anyway, he finds this unknown God and he says, let me tell you about this God.

And he doubles down. He says, my God is bigger than yours. My God, he goes, he says, let's see, the God who made the world. So you have a God that kind of made reproduction. You've got his God who makes the kind of all these other things that you worship.

Can I just say, my God just made all of it. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord and heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man like your ones do, nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

He's like, your gods, your gods demand everything from you but give out very little to you. Your gods want you to serve them with a promise of something but it doesn't really happen.

My God created everything, gives you everything, doesn't even need you to serve him because actually what you will serve him with came from him anyway. It's kind of like a parent and a baby child. My God is different to yours.

[30:13] I want to pause here and just segue a little bit and ask you, if you walk around the city of Hong Kong, what are the idols that you see? What are the idols that you see in Hong Kong?

Maybe I'll make it a little bit more awkward just to buy me some time to gather my thoughts. Can you talk to the person next to you and share the first idol that comes to mind that you see as you imagine walking where you're walking?

What is the idol that you see in Hong Kong? 30 seconds, go. Another 15 seconds.

If the other person hasn't said one yet, then make them say one. All right, that's all we got.

That's all we got. Looking around, Dr. Arrow. Avoiding eye contact with me, Dr. Arrow. Arrow's in my life group and I've learned to love him so much and he also hates speaking to anyone, actually.

[32:08] What's an idol that Janice brought up, shared? Money. Of course, that's the one that rules all of Hong Kong, right?

Especially if you walk through Central and Admiralty. Of course, again, money itself is not the problem, right? What's the problem? The love of money is the rule of all evil. If anyone wants to talk about that, Roger's the person to talk about that with, okay?

He's dedicated his life towards this topic. Money. Jesus talked most about money because he realized this whole, that it has on us. When we turn a good thing into God, that good thing turns into a bad thing.

When we turn a good thing into God, that good thing turns into a bad thing, right? Money is huge. Well, it's the thing apparently that makes the world go around and you see this everywhere. I mean, the Chinese culture may be what struggles the most of all with gambling. Money, when we talk about money, everything is, did we pay too much for this? How do we get this the cheapest as we possibly can?

[33 : 12] Right? We're nodding and we're like, that's just a righteous pursuit. That's why we all go to Shenzhen. Money. But how much of that money is a poverty mindset?

How much of that money is just rooted in this mindset that actually I don't have enough? How much of this is just in a mindset of just, oh my goodness, I need to keep saving more for that rainy day. I was convicted by Paul maybe a while ago. Paul has this running joke with me because he knows one of my idols is the refusal to pay for parking. Like, it just, it just, it ruins my whole day, it ruins my life because I'm just thinking, how do I, how much money do I need to spend so that I can redeem free parking?

And I'll spend up to \$1,000 so I can avoid paying the \$30 parking. I am that person. And one time, Paul walking with me as we were doing this journey, I think he probably doesn't even remember this, but he says many nasty things to me, but this one he said, he was like, are you poor?

Are we poor? I was like, well, I don't, no, no, but parking! It's, I, well, because it's cleaning detergents. Have you met my wife? Like, it's cleaning detergents, it's tissue, it's household things.

[34 : 31] I'm like, if I'm going to spend the money anyway, I might as well spend money to give me free parking. Can I get an amen from anyone? Amen. With that said, my goodness is an idol. And sometimes I'm like, just pay.

Just get it over with. Kelly knows, Kelly shares in this with me. We go to the great food hall and scrounge for receipts so we could collect enough to get free parking.

Man, I'm too vulnerable today. You guys are just judging me. Money, okay, I want to deflect and move on to somewhere else. Janine and Ellen, what's the idol that you see? Status.

Hmm? Status. Status. Status. If you keep peeling back status, if you keep peeling back, okay, it's status, it's recognition, it's power, it's just worth.

It's, do I contribute to my tribe? There's just this issue of, just, are we worthy? And we have a, just, mankind just walking around this world just going, I am not worthy, I am not enough, I don't know who I am.

[35 : 38] And so I'll grab anything I can hold on to, any badge I can wear, so that others will look at me and honor me. Status. Huge idol. As I've shared before, Keller says, the idol is the one that you say, if I can just have that, I will be so happy.

If I can just get that promotion, then I, my life will be complete. And we get there and we realize it is still not complete. Status.

One last one. I'm looking at this area over here. Uncle Paul. Materialism.

Materialism. Materialism, when you, when you walk around and you see that that other person has that, when you walk in the MTR and you see all the adverts of the things that you don't have, but you realize that you really need to have.

And so you have to go and get it. And maybe in a city like Hong Kong where we are just so packed in together, we get to see and compare constantly about what others have and what we do not have.

[36 : 46] Another idol I would say is just, and it's not just Hong Kong, it's just in the world, just secularism in general, where we have this thought that actually, we are actually self-sufficient. We just need to obtain success.

We need to get as much status, money, power, as we possibly can and there we will be satisfied. And when you worship secularism, when you worship self, actually those who worship self, the followers of self are exhausted.

They're deflated. Because whether you succeed or not, you still lose because you realize there's no satisfaction here. The one that may be even more dangerous, I think, for secularism maybe specifically in our, in this room right now is the idol of syncretism.

What is syncretism? Syncretism is when we integrate our faith with our work. When we think, oh, I need to worship God, I need to follow God to be a good person.

Oh, and then he blesses me and then he'll give me a good job. And when he gives me a good job, then I'll get the gym membership that I need. So then I'll start having the body that I want to have.

And when God blesses me with the body I want to have, then he will give me the spouse that I want to have.

[37:59] And when he blesses me with the spouse I want to have, and then we'll have babies that have my same body. And they will succeed. And then they will get into Bramer Hill Primary School.

And from Bramer Hill Primary School, they will then head to St. Paul's Co-Ed. And from St. Paul's Co-Ed, they will then head to Harvard. Harvard. And when they get to Harvard, that's when the money making comes because then they get to go to McKinsey.

And when they go to McKinsey, oh, God has blessed us so much. My kid is now at McKinsey with the body, with the wife, with the children who will also head to McKinsey.

We laugh, but I think it's a nervous laugh because you and I both know that's one of the biggest gods in Hong Kong.

That's one of the biggest gods in the church. When we think God is here to give us what we need and what we want, sorry, not what we need. We only need bread but we get more than that.

[39:05] We want more than that. And then we get upset when we don't get it. And that's when you will know. That's when I know that's become my God and how I react to losing that.

Right? See, when you look at these, actually, there's this passage in 2 Kings that I must share with you. 2 Kings, chapter 17, verse 33. So they feared the Lord but also served their own gods.

Ouch. So they feared the Lord but also served their own gods. Is that you? Long pause for dramatic effect and introspection.

Is that you? That you fear the Lord but you serve your other gods? Gabs is nodding.

I agree. It's you. It's me. Because we say that we follow Jesus but we actually follow him and all these other things.

[40:14] Right? All these other things. We follow Jesus on Sunday morning between 11 to 12.30. Jesus isn't here just to improve our lives.

Jesus, when he calls people, he's saying, you're fishers, you're fishermen, I want to make you fishers of men. You're good with money, I'm going to completely change your perspective on money so you can use money for my kingdom, for my glory.

You're good at caring and hospitality and you work in the hotel business, great. you're going to do it for my glory. Not everyone needs to turn into a missionary and a pastor and a monk.

Everyone just needs to do whatever Jesus has made you to be so you can do what he's calling you to do. That's it. What is your idol?

You see, when we actually have a faith, there's something else that's happened in our culture which is your faith is your own. I can't really meddle and deal and ask you too much about your faith because otherwise I'll hit a nerve and you'll get insecure and then you don't want to talk about it and so you keep that faith private but the problem here is you cannot really keep your faith with Jesus private.

[41:33] It has to seep into, overflow into your public life and so you can think about your colleagues, you can think about your friends who know you and if they're asked about you, they're like, yeah, I think that person is a Christian.

I think they go to church on Sunday. Going to church on Sunday is the lowest bar. It is the lowest bar but how we live the rest of our lives, the prayer is that they can think of you and go, okay, well, I think that person goes to church on Sundays and maybe at that point it's okay for them to think that and go, well, actually, and that really helps him when I watch him dealing with his boss and I'm like, that's different.

That's a different kind of way. Maybe it's something to do with church and then we can go, actually, well, it's really something to do with Christ. See, these people, I think we didn't actually read it in Acts but when he was getting, when he was in Berea, oh, in Thessalonica, sorry, they accused this of the Christians in chapter 17 verse 6.

And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities shouting, these men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.

Praise the Lord that they would be described as people who turn the world upside down.

When most of the time, when most of the time, you and I are so adamant and so terrified that we try and live in a way where we conform to the patterns of this world and so we stay and do whatever everyone else does and then we wonder why we can't discern the good and perfect will of God.

[43:09] Romans 12, where he says that in view of God's mercy, live your life in this way. Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world because if you can actually go against it, your mind will be renewed and then you will know my will.

And so here's a simple equation, here's a simple question, if you're wondering what God's will is for your life and you're wondering why can't I hear God's will, maybe the next question respectfully, politely would be, well actually, are you still conforming to the patterns of this world?

Because if you are, then you won't hear the will of God. The whole point is when you stand up, turn around the other way, repent is what that word really is, and then you'll start hearing the will of God. What about you looks different?

John Stott says this, Paul was, his spirit was provoked. Sometimes we look at Paul and we go, well we can't do what you did, we can't speak the way you did, we can't do what you did, we can't have the impact that you did.

You see, the only reason Paul had all these things was because he felt the way he did. Does that make sense? How many of us walk around the temples of Hong Kong, whether it's money, status, power, or actual idols?

[44:15] You see, it's interesting, at least with the Greeks, they were very overt about what they worshipped. We keep our idols very hidden, right? You can't actually see our idols until you really think about it, because otherwise they just look like shiny buildings.

But the reason why Paul got to do what he did, was because of the way he felt. He was provoked. He's like, this isn't right, when so often we wander through the city and well, whatever.

Hong Kong, we have this problem. As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, John Calvin said, the human heart is an idol factory. We keep creating them. We can't help it.

The only solution is that we would turn to the only one who is real. Exodus 20, when he says, you shall have no other gods before me. Nowhere in my vicinity. They can't even be anywhere close. I have to be the only one, not just the number one. Why? Because God is a jealous God. Actually, Paul, his feeling there is provoked feelings of jealousy, which is actually, I wish they would only just have this, only just have God, but they keep just flirting and cheating on him with all these other gods.

[45:30] Not because he, not because he just wants us to himself because he's self-centered and selfish, but he's like, I'm the only one who is willing to give you everything. All the other ones, they demand everything, but they don't give you anything.

They will corrupt you, they will consume you, even the good things. But the real God, instead of corrupting and consuming, he will complete. That's the only solution that we would go to him.

He was provoked. Paul was heartbroken when he saw this. I recently came across the stat that actually 90% of Asia is not Christian.

90% of Hong Kong is not 95% actually, I think it's for Hong Kong. I'll let it sit just for a second. I'm going to say it again. Nearly 95% of people in this city are not followers of Christ.

My next question to you is, what did that just do to your mind? Some of you just let that thought just fly across and just, it's done, it's gone. Oh, that's a shame. Sucks to be them.

[46:41] Let me paint another picture. I don't know, 95%, 200 people. Let's say it's this group here. this group here believes in Jesus.

And let's not just say believes in Jesus in the kind of the Christian-y Sunday school way. This is the only group that will go to eternity in this room. the rest will not.

The heartbreaking thing is we sit here in this group here and our hearts aren't breaking for this.

We're just like, thank goodness I made it into the 5%.

Thank goodness. Thank goodness I'm here and I made it into the lift. Now I need to keep closing the lift so that older lady doesn't get in.

Come on, old lady, just wait for the next one. That's it. If that doesn't break your heart, then I pray that at some point it will.

[47:49] That you will look and you will see people that you love and see people that you don't love and you're like, oh, if only they would know that there is an answer. Not to their problem, not to our itty-bitty problems about our boss and our promotions and our, but there is an answer to the brokenness in this world.

If only they would know that death isn't the end. Pray that we would feel as poor feels, so that we would see as poor sees, so that we would speak as poor speaks, that we would contextualize as he

did.

Of course, I have no problem saying that because he himself said, hey, if you can't see Christ, 1 Corinthians 11, imitate me as I imitate Christ. So Paul gives us this great example. If we struggle with Jesus, then we can see what Paul is doing here.

And it's funny, so he doubles down, he says, my God is bigger than yours. And then he goes in and he quotes Greek poets so he knows their culture.

So it makes me think, actually, do you know your culture? I was asking this myself when I was in the hospital yesterday, which is, how can I explain to my uncle and auntie or my family about Jesus in a way that they will understand?

[49:08] Because they're not going to be going into the Old Testament and going, oh, this is the Messiah that I've been waiting for all of my life? No. They've got a certain way that they've developed, which is just, let's just be the best people that we can be.

And then the Christian message comes to crash in and say, you will never be good enough. But that's okay because there was one who is. You just have to follow him. That's the only thing. Talked about Hong Kong, I want to talk a little bit about one other thing.

A part of culture that maybe Paul himself actually wasn't familiar with. that actually he himself didn't get to address because it didn't happen during his time. What do you think that is? What's the culture that we swim in?

What's the waters that we swim in now? Social media. Because something's happening around the world that has only really happened in these last few decades, which is the world has globalized. It has expanded but has shrunk at the same time. And now a teenager from Tanzania knows who stray kids are from Korea. That is the, yeah, I don't know what stray kids are.

[50:16] Don't worry, Juju. I never expected you to know. Apparently, a Korean pop band. There we go. But can you see the world is just shrinking?

That's the culture that we live in. And I think here's the call. And one of my favorite writers is a guy called Henry Nowen. And he says this, the call actually isn't for the world to have more Christian leaders who are relevant, but actually ones who are willing to stand up against the current that it is and speak into the situations.

Paul here does something very interesting. He observes, he discerns, and then he speaks into it. He's like, hey, you worship all these other gods because you're out of fear because you want to satisfy them.

And there's one god, you're so afraid that you just cover your bases by having this statue here. Let me just use this to tell you about this one. So he observes, perceives, and then he speaks into it. Can we, we must do the same for our culture here. Social media is a huge thing. Technology is a huge thing. At the conference last week, they were talking about AI.

[51:22] I'm not smart enough to talk about AI. And all the problems to do with AI, one of the people who are at the very forefront of this is, well, AI is just, it's just, it's not, that's not the problem. You know what the problem is?

The problem is, is human sin. Because technology, all it does is amplify and exaggerate and shine a light onto human sin. That's all it's doing. But as Christians, I'll be able to stand up and look at it and go, okay, that's what it's doing.

We are raising a group of people who in the past, in my own village in England, I would only ever be compared to my friends in my little village in England and my brother and that was easy.

But now I'm comparing to all these other people that I don't actually even know. All the ones who are making it into Ivy League. All the ones who are doing CrossFit. What's the joke? You know, how do you know someone who does CrossFit?

They'll tell you. Because we're shouting out everything that we're doing and we're putting them onto social media, the latte that I'm having, the degree that I got, the job that I've got, and then everyone else is just looking at what you're doing from the bathroom seat and you're comparing because you're just filled with just insecurity.

[52:34] That's the culture, that's the water that we're swimming in right now. As Christians, what do we do about that? You can, on one hand, just completely ignore it, log out of everything if it isn't good for your soul. On the other hand, if you feel as though this is where the Lord's called you to, then actually there's something that you can do and speak into that culture.

Are we willing to do that? And just before, maybe the more older people here go, oh yeah, these young people on their phones. It's you too. You are crushing the candies 24-7. It's you. Watching videos on the MTR of strange people doing strange things and strange, it's you. You are not, actually, there was an article written in The Economist about this. There's always this thing about Gen Z and technology and yes, we get it. Figure it out, screen time, whatever it is, there's this little thing called brick that Wes and I talked about one time that will really help you kind of control your social media usage. But for the older people, don't just go, oh, well, those young people, they're better now. It's you too. Just doom scrolling. We have to ask that question, well, what are we surrounded by and what is it doing to my soul?

[53:51] And once you get past that, then you actually, well, Lord, actually, what are you calling me to do? Are you calling me to stay on the Facebook? Or are you causing me, are you calling me to leave it?

I can't tell you what the answer is because only the Holy Spirit can. But I think most of us aren't even asking the Holy Spirit. Let's ask him what he actually wants us to do. So he finishes and this is where I'll finish. Verse 29 to 31. He observes, he knows their culture, so he quotes their prophets, their poets, sorry, in him we live and move and have our being and for we indeed are his offspring and then he goes in and he talks about Jesus. He's saying, your idols, your idols are made of gold and silver. But actually, your time of ignorance is up because Jesus has arrived. Because Jesus has arrived and he will be the one who judges. But praise be to God, he won't judge you in the way that you deserve to be judged so long as you believe in him. Verse 29 to 31.

[55:01] It sounds hard to understand sometimes, so I'm going to read Eugene Peterson's translation of it in the message. God overlooks it as long as you don't know any better, but that time has passed.

The unknown is now known and he's calling for a radical life change. He has set a day when the entire human race will be judged and everything set right and he has already appointed the judge, confirming him before everyone by raising him from the dead.

He's appointed the judge. The great news, this is why it's good news, people, the great news is that we will be judged but the judge is also our defender. That's why it's good news.

Because we are going to be judged and if it's going to be judged on what we did or what we've been doing, that's not good news for us. But the good news is the judge so happens to be the one who's going to look at himself and actually pay the price for us and advocate for us.

Isn't that freeing? Isn't that the good news? So therefore we don't have shame anymore, we don't have fear anymore, we don't have guilt anymore because he's done it for us. That has to fill your heart with joy and relief.

[56:08] And your next response after that must be, there are people out there who don't know that. If you're sat here thinking, yeah, actually, when you did that whole 90% thing, my heart was just kind of like, well, my prayer is that then you would really, truly understand what the good news is for you.

Because once you understand the good news, then you can't help but cry for those outside. You can't help but pray for those who you love and know to know the same thing.

That is the prayer that we have. That we have a way now. That we have a way to the Father.

That we have a way to eternal life. And there's only one way and it's going to hurt it's going to hurt you to tell those who you love about that way but there is only one way. There is only one who turns the world upside down.

Who completely introduced a new kingdom. A new way of living. A new way of saving. He turned it upside down because he succumbed himself to death and in most stories you think that would be the end.

[57:20] But by doing so, he opened a way for all of us. Not just 10%. Not just 5%. All. In Acts 17 he says that.

He says, Paul's saying, actually, you don't know him. You see him as an unknown God but actually he's not that far away from you. He's actually right next to you. So beautiful in the way he says that. There are those of us who are sat here going, oh well, I'm actually really far away. I don't know him yet. To me, he is that unknown God. He's too far.

That's where I want to encourage you, Jesus. He is the image of the invisible God. He comes to you, preaches peace to you who are far off and invites you in.

That is it. That is all there is. There is nothing else. Who can ascend that hill to God? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.

[58:24] And we ask God, would you give us clean hands and a pure heart so we can ascend the hill? And he answers our prayer but not in the way that we think because we think he will do it by helping us get there in ourselves but the way he gifts us is by giving us the one, the only one who has clean hands and a pure heart, Jesus.

It flips that song, it flips that Bible verse into a different mindset going, actually Jesus, all I need is you. The only way I ascend this hill is because of you. Would your spirit guide me?

Would your spirit lead me? And lead me to those around me? It is only you. Let's pray.

Jesus, we rely only on you and your spirit.

We surrender every idol. We approach your throne with confidence and humility. We are not for your grace and mercy, we would not even be able to stand.

[59:40] Amen. Amen. But your grace is truly sufficient. Your power is made perfect in our weakness.

So would your spirit guide us? Amen. We humble ourselves before you. We release every failure, every idol.

We press on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus and we pray that as we press on towards you, you would bring as many people alongside us. Thank you.

Lord, we seek your face. Would you let us be a generation that seeks you and you alone?

Holy Spirit, we need you. We need your help. We need your guidance. Point us to the sun. Point us to Jesus and in doing so, would you point those around us to Jesus too?

[61:12] Thank you, Lord. Would you empower us, encourage us, convict us as we move on from here, that we would see as you see, feel as you feel and move with you to be in step with you.

Thank you, Lord. In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.