



Acts (Part 6) – Scattered to Gather

Matt Chandler – March 16, 2014

[Video]

Female: In Jerusalem, AD 30, Jesus died on the cross, resurrected on the third day, and then ascended into heaven. Fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, the Holy Spirit fell on the apostles, giving them power, purpose, and a plan. Out of joy, the church was born. Empowered by the Spirit, Peter gave his first sermon, and 3,000 hearts were transformed. Hearing, receiving, and repenting, the young church walked in unity and garnered praise. Out of joy, the gospel creates community.

Peter and John then continued to spread the gospel through preaching and miracles, and the church grew by 5,000. Yet inside and outside forces threatened the unity of the church, including racial tension, a couple who held back money from the church body, and the Hellenists accusing Hebrews of neglecting widows, but still the church continued to multiply.

In AD 31, Stephen was arrested for performing miracles and speaking truth. Standing before the council, he gave a powerful sermon connecting the Old Testament to Jesus and what he accomplished. Stephen rebuked the people for their hard hearts and refusal to acknowledge Jesus. Enraged, the people stoned Stephen, making him the first Christian martyr.

In every day and age, the church faces both persecution and praise. Christians will always be misunderstood, misrepresented, maligned, but we must fight for and pray for unity to flourish within the church. Whether evangelizing to the lost, whether home groups creating YouGroups, whether campuses becoming autonomous churches, all multiplication comes at a cost, but we continue to move forward. Out of joy, the church multiplies.

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If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. Acts 8. If you don't have a Bible with you, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you. If you don't own one, that's our gift to you,

but I think it becomes important that you see it's not me saying the things we'll say today. Rather, we're going to just follow along with the narrative found in the book of Acts.

This is week six. In week one, what we said was that as we walked through the book of Acts, there were some things we weren't really going to focus on, but we had one thing in particular we wanted to show. We said we'll see a lot of miraculous things happening in the book of Acts. Although we're a people who believes in miracles and think miracles still occur, and we believe in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the book of Acts is not ultimately about the gifts.

I said there was an argumentation in the book of Acts about whether or not it's descriptive or prescriptive, whether or not this is a piece of historic, "This is what happened," or rather from God, "This is what you should do, and this is how your life should be lived out." I said really it's not as simple as picking one of those. Rather, you would see them merging throughout the book.

Then I said ultimately, although we are prayerfully considering rolling off our Denton campus to be an autonomous church, I said this series ultimately isn't to accomplish that but rather is to say some things again that we've been saying for the last 11 years about the nature of our family here and the mission we believe we've been given by God to fulfill.

With that said, here is my very ambitious goal today. I want to cover Acts 8-12. If you have any history here, you've seen me take a verse and go for an hour, so don't panic, all right? We're going to get it in, but I want to go four chapters. I said in that first week that my plan in teaching through the book of Acts is to show you the movement or the spread of the gospel across the ancient world into the uttermost parts of the earth.

We know the gospel gets to the uttermost parts of the earth because we're here. You and I are in this room. We have a Bible in our lap or on our device or under our chair or whatever, but you got here because, according to Acts 1:8, the disciples received power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they became his witnesses, first in Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria, then to the ends of the earth.

Today, I want to just show you the movement of the gospel out of Jerusalem. I don't know how close attention you were paying, but Jesus says in chapter 1, verse 8 that they're going to become his witnesses to the ends of the earth, and here we are, completed chapter 7, and they're still all

hanging out in Jerusalem. Today, we go past the walls of Jerusalem, but to get them there, some pretty disturbing things happen.

Last week, I was out. Beau Hughes, the campus pastor at the Denton campus preached. You can just tell he is an extremely gifted man, an extremely gifted communicator, just a ferocious man of God. In fact, I was a bit nervous. I watched the sermon and thought it was excellent. Then I had a meeting with the elders, and I thought, "Maybe I'm the one rolling out." I was pleased to find out that wasn't what that meeting was about.

He covered and covered well the death of Stephen. Really, the way he laid it out and taught it to you was... In our culture, most of us are not going to have to die for Jesus. He pressed on what it looks like to live for him. What we know is, at the end of chapter 7 in the book of Acts, Stephen is killed. He is dragged to the outskirts of town, and he is pelted with rocks until he dies. We have our first Christian martyr.

Up until this point, it has simply been threats, a night in jail, more threats, a night in jail, but no one has been killed. No one has been severely beaten. Now, that has been broached. That barrier has been passed in the murder of Stephen. With that, we'll pick it up in Acts 8, starting in verse 1, and we're just going to walk through these 12 chapters. I'll read some, tell you what we're missing, read some more, tell you what we're missing, read some more, and then I want to pull two truths out of these four chapters. In Acts 8:1, it says this:

"And Saul approved of his [Stephen's] execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city."

Now, if we just think geographically now, you have Jerusalem, and the city of Samaria is about 30 miles north of Jerusalem. It's about a one- or two-day journey, depending on whether you had an animal or you were the animal that got you there. Here you have a distinctively gospel work break out in Samaria that looks very similar to the one that occurred in Jerusalem.

Now, all of a sudden, there are those professing the name of Jesus Christ. We now have Christians in Samaria. When word reaches back to the apostles in Jerusalem that there is a new gospel work in Samaria, they send (you see this in verse 14) Peter and John to go check it out, not to verify whether or not it could happen, but just to see, "Is this the same gospel? Are lives being transformed? Have we seen the promise of Jesus begun to be fulfilled?"

Peter and John go. They see that the same gospel is being preached. The same results they saw in Jerusalem were taking place, and there was a glad celebration that the gospel began to spread. What you see as they work their way back to Jerusalem to report that this distinct gospel movement there in Samaria is the same gospel that was being preached in Jerusalem, look at what they do on the way home. Verse 25:

"Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans." On the way back from the city of Samaria, on their way back to Jerusalem, that 30-mile hike home, instead of going the direct route, they would veer off, stop in these villages, and preach the gospel.

Then there were Samaritans in those villages who came to believe. Now the gospel is beginning to spread. That closes out chapter 8. Starting in chapter 9, Saul... If you remember Saul, the last time we saw Saul, he was kicking open doors and dragging men and women into the street, arresting them and parading them, shaming them in front of people in Jerusalem to try to crush the spread and the growth of Christianity.

Saul of Tarsus now has papers from the ruling authorities to go to Damascus, which is about 160 miles northwest of Jerusalem, a journey of about eight or nine days regardless of transportation. Somewhere along the way, closer to Damascus than to Jerusalem, the Bible tells us a bright light shines on Saul of Tarsus, knocks him off his horse. Jesus speaks to him audibly, and Saul of Tarsus is converted to Christianity.

Then he is led into Damascus, now blinded by the light that knocked him off of his horse. The word of the Lord came to a man named Ananias, and God tells Ananias, "Saul of Tarsus is on Straight Street. Go and heal him." Ananias has some problems with this. He brings those problems up. "Okay, I know you're God, but this man has caused your people a lot of pain in Jerusalem." I love Ananias. He's asking a question we would ask God often. "Are you sure?"

God is never going to go, "Oh, man, what was I thinking? Thank me for you. I almost jammed us all up." God, in his grace, in his mercy, doesn't rebuke Ananias. He just answers him. "Yeah. He will be my voice to the Gentiles, and I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." Ananias goes, and he prays over Saul of Tarsus, and something like scales fall off of his eyes. He is baptized. He takes a little something to eat. We'll pick it up in verse 20:

"And immediately he [Saul] proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' And all who heard him were amazed and said, 'Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?'

But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket." Look to verse 31:

"So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.

There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.'" Oh, that ministry was that easy. How great would that be? "You're not paralyzed anymore. Get up." That's what just happened. "And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord."

What you see happen next in this chapter of the book of Acts is there is a woman named Tabitha, whose name translated means Dorcas. I just feel like I would go, "Call me Tabby. Tabitha is fine. No need to translate my name. Just leave it in the original language. My name is Tabitha. Tabby maybe, but stay away from Dorcas."

What we know about Tabitha, i.e., Dorcas, is that she was a generous woman who sewed and put together cloaks for impoverished women. She gets sick, and as she gets sick, the church knows Peter is in Joppa. Joppa and Lydda are not far from one another. They send word to get Peter, for Peter to come to Joppa in order to pray for or maybe heal Tabitha. Now, before Peter gets there, Tabitha dies, and they wash her body and lay her in an upper room until Peter can get there.

Peter gets there. He walks upstairs where this dead body is. He prays for Tabitha (Dorcas), and she is raised from the dead. You want to talk about big time. You have this eight-year paralytic being healed, and just as an encore, if you will, the Holy Spirit raises our girl Tabitha. We see there in verse 42, **"And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner."**

If you've ever seen a movie about the apocalypse where some sort of virus wipes out mankind or the zombies start to wipe out mankind, there is a scene in every one of those movies that looks just like this. There will be generals and scientists and politicians in a room, and there will be a big screen they're all looking at, and they'll show us where ground zero was.

Somebody, probably a scientist, will go, "This is 8 hours. This is 16 hours. This is 36 hours. This is one week. This is two weeks. This is one month. The death of all mankind as we know it." It shows kind of the globe turning red as extinction finally occurs, and we're all zombies, except for those of us who prepped for such an event.

In the end, what we're watching here in these four chapters of Acts that's going to speed up and then explode starting next week in 13 and 14 is the spread of the gospel. Ground zero is Jerusalem. If you remember, we started with 120 people. Then 120 people became 3,120 people, and then that became at least 8,120 people, and then there were more added to their number day after day after day after day.

Now, it's spreading. It's no longer a church in Jerusalem, but it's a church in Samaria and in Joppa and in Lydda, and it's beginning to spread. It's beginning to take over the ancient world. Then we

get into chapter 10, and the gospel is now going to cross ethnic lines. In chapter 10 the story shifts to Caesarea, which is about 65 miles northwest of Jerusalem. In Caesarea, there is a man named Cornelius of the Italian Cohort who was a God-fearer, he fears God.

He has rejected Roman paganism, but he's not necessarily a Christian. He's just rejected polytheism. He gives alms to the poor. He's a good man, a righteous man by standards of giving to the poor and praying to God. Not righteous in the way Jesus makes us righteous, but righteous in some external behaviors of his. An angel appears to him and tells him to send some of his men to Joppa to get Simon Peter from Simon the tanner's house and to bring him back.

At the same time, Peter has a vision, God pronouncing that there is nothing unclean. The Gentiles were historically viewed as unclean. God's Word comes to Peter through food and dietary restrictions, and God says, "There is no such thing as unclean because I made it, and if I made it, it's clean and not common." From there, Peter ends up at Cornelius's house, preaches the gospel to Cornelius's family and friends, and then we pick it up in verse 44 of chapter 10.

"While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised [Jews] who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God.

Then Peter declared, 'Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days." Now the gospel is not just crossing city lines and county lines; it's now crossing ethnic lines as we have our first Italian convert.

What God said would come true when he met Abram in Genesis 12 and told him he was going to bless all families on the earth and when he confirmed it again in Genesis 15 and again in Genesis 22, as the Law was written to make the nations glad, as the prophets prophesied that there would be a day that all nations came to know the great and glorious God we serve, as the psalmist sung about it, as Christ showed up, as the Holy Spirit empowered, we now see happening what was testified to happen through the entire scope of Scripture.

After this, Peter gives a defense, because the church, at times, has been a foolish institution and organization. In fact, even to this day, you'll find parts of us that are this way, but after Cornelius becomes a Christian, the church gathers together to decide whether or not God can do that. Always humorous. They get together. Peter staunchly defends the Holy Spirit, pointing himself out on these Gentile converts. After his defense, we pick it up in verse 19 of chapter 11.

"Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also preaching the Lord Jesus." Hellenists are Greek speakers. Not Aramaic speakers or Hebrew speakers like we've been dealing with. Now we're talking about Greek speakers.

"And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith."

And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians."

Again, we're just watching this spread. For the first seven chapters of the book of Acts, all we've heard is, "In Jerusalem. In Jerusalem. In Jerusalem. In Jerusalem." Now we have cities all over, ranging from 160 miles north to 60 miles northwest to 40 miles south. It's now beginning to spread. Then in chapter 12, things get a bit gritty, starting in verse 1.

"About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him..."

Why four squads? This dude is a fisherman; he's not Jason Bourne. Why do you need four squadrons of soldiers? He's a fisherman who, the Bible even tells us, wasn't even the sharpest of knives. In Peter's defense, did not the Pharisee say these are "unlearned men"? Yet four squads of soldiers. Well, if you've been following along with us, here's why. You can't seem to keep these guys in prison. You just can't seem to keep them in there.

They locked him up. There was an earthquake, and they were right back in the temple teaching. Then they locked him up, and an angel just walked Peter out. This time, he's like, "Four squads, inner cell, lock him up." Now we have Peter back in prison. I always want to kind of step to the side. What I'm about to say is conjecture. You don't find it in the Word of God, but I don't think it's hard to deduce it from the Scriptures.

Herod began to put a violent hand to the Christians in Jerusalem, and although the Bible is just telling us that he killed James the brother of John (one of the apostles is now physically dead), it's not a stretch of the imagination to know that there is also violence befalling the other followers of Christ in Jerusalem, and Peter has been arrested because the mob loved Herod for killing James and taking a violent hand to the church of Jesus Christ.

You have to believe that his plan for Peter is not to get him a nice house. It's not to put him on a fair trial. It's not to protect him from the mob. Herod is being applauded for the slaughter of Christians. He does not have strong, healthy intent for Peter. In fact, the text says that after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, he was going to give him over to the people. What does a mob do? We've already seen what the mob does. The mob stones. The mob kills. The mob maims. A mob can never be satisfied.

Despite all these beautiful, miraculous things going on, what heartbreak, what loss. Then, once again, four squadrons of soldiers are laughable to God. It's not like God is like, "Oh, four squads. How are we going to get him out this time?" He just got him out. He just delivered him. Chapter 12 ends this way. Look at verse 24. **"But the word of God increased and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem..."** That's back to Antioch. **"...when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark."**

Here are the two things I want to pull out of this text that I think become important for us to walk in the vibrancy and the vitality that I believe God has for us in Jesus Christ. Here is the first thing. Despite all the beauty in the world and all the life in the world and all the blessing that comes from

being alive, the world will, at times, look chaotic and out of control, and there will be heartbreak and loss and suffering that feels to us to not jive well with a God who loves us.

Although it looks chaotic to us, it never looks chaotic to God, ever. It never looks out of his control. He is never going, "Oh no. What now?" God doesn't drive an ambulance. He never shows up after something and tries to put the pieces back together. That's not how he works. There is no triage in the kingdom of God. No, God governs the chaos. We need to put roots there because the world is broken.

We need to put roots there because there will be a day (if you haven't been there yet) where you are perplexed but not crushed, where you are confused, and it's hard to reconcile the goodness of God with your circumstance. Maybe you haven't been there yet. On Friday, at 2:00, I did the funeral for a beautiful 22-year-old, blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl named McKenna.

The first time I met McKenna, she was 17 years old and had just found out she had cancer. I went to her house and sat on the couch with her. McKenna had that kind of spark of life that we all want and few of us have. It's kind of just that happy disposition. She had a strong faith in the Lord as well as the rest of her family.

She just seemed so glad in the Lord despite what was 14 rounds of chemo, the loss of her hair, the strong likelihood that she wasn't going to see 30. Yet with all grace and a smile, she confronted the storm that was coming for her. That was the first time I met McKenna. I left being marked by her joy, her gladness in the Lord, her sense of adventure, and her steadfastness in the sovereign reign of God.

The last time I saw McKenna, she was lying in her hospital bed in Fort Worth with her best friend Tori, cuddled up next to her, and we knew it was days if the Lord didn't do a miracle. On Friday at 2:00, I stood in front of her family and friends, and we talked about how to reconcile these things. Maybe that doesn't cause you to be perplexed. I'll tell you, I'm perplexed, and I'll tell you why. Here is what happens in my mind.

In that moment when you have this beautiful, happy, full-of-life optimist, I'm just going, "Lord, take one of your grumpy ones home. She was a happy one. It's a win-win if you take a grumpy one. They get glory, nothing to complain about there. We don't have to listen to them anymore. We all win if

you just kill of the grumpy ones. Leave the glad-hearted ones. Leave the ones who rejoice in you." See, it's perplexing.

God reigns and rules over the chaos. I said at her funeral that the reason Christians can have joy (not happiness, but joy) on a day like Friday was that we believed that God is sovereign over all things, including the day of death, and that he is good and beautiful in that governance. How do you reconcile those two? Right? How do we reconcile? Is this not probably *the* question that is thrown in the face of people of faith?

"If God is good, then how can we explain all that has gone wrong in the world? How do you explain the death of children? How do you explain disease? How do you explain these things if God is all-powerful and good?" Here you go. I'm going to solve it. Are you ready? I don't know. Let's talk for a second. I'm 39. I've been here for 39 years. Not here; on earth. In that 39 years, I've read a ton of books, and I've listened to a ton of lectures, and I've read a ton of journals.

I've been at the highest heights of human existence at weddings and the births of children. I've been at the lowest lows. I've been in the house right after the paramedics leave with stillborn babies. I've been on the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. I have some experience. Let me tell you all I understand about God's governance. Only what I see in his Word, but here is where humility comes in.

If I'm 39, and an educated 39 (I have traveled around the world, read a ton), aren't I still just small and sad compared to a God that is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, has always been and will always be? How could I possibly comprehend how he's governing? My 4-year-old daughter is a beautiful little monkey. I just have such delight in her. She has a view of the world that is not similar to my view of the world.

She has a way she would like things to be. She has a way she would like to eat, a time she would like to go to bed, a way she would like to live. I see that differently because I'm 39 and she's 4. If such a gap exists between her and me, what must the gap be between that which is finite to that which is infinite, that which is dew on the grass, here on the morning and gone in the afternoon, to the sovereign King of Glory? I had better not be able to understand how he's governing, or he's way too small of a God for me to worship.

If I go, "Well, here is why." No. We just trust that he's good. How can we trust that he's good in such difficult days? The cross. Come on, the cross, God's initiating love, the death of Jesus Christ on our behalf for the glory of God is the clanging of God's goodness in our hearts and souls. He is for me, not against me. I see that in Jesus. He is for me, not against me, otherwise Christ wouldn't have come. He is for me, not against me.

McKenna's death is not punitive. It wasn't about God's wrath or God's anger. There was no wrath for McKenna. It had all been absorbed by Jesus Christ and the cross. There was none left to be poured out on her or her family. They're all believers. No, God was doing something, and gosh, I wish I could tell you what it is. Seriously, I have a whole list of people in my office I'd rather the Lord take home. You laugh because you don't know you're probably on that list.

Let me say this to you, and I want you to have your confidence built in this. For the believer in Christ (not humanity), bad days, regardless of how horrific, regardless of how soul-crushing, heart-failing, overwhelming those days are, bad days for the Christian will always ultimately lead to better days on into the best of days.

I'll tell you why that doesn't sit well with us and why we have such a hard time with some of these things. Our culture, in every measurable possible, has no foresight to see tomorrow. It's just today, what I want today and what I want to enjoy today. All you need to look at is the level of debt we carry, how easily we'll bury ourselves in debt. Why? Because it's about today. It's about what we want right now.

Look at how we eat food. In almost every meal you buy in the store, the way we're tempted, the way we're drawn in is how quick it is to prepare. Five minutes. *Ding*. "Are you a busy mom? Here is how you..." It's like, "Fish sticks...just throw them in the back. Cook them in the heater of your car and toss them back there." This is us. It's right now. "I need it to be easy now. I don't need there to be any difficulty now. I need it to be..." We are slaves to the god of comfort and today.

He keeps betraying us, and we keep worshipping him. For the Christian, our hope is in tomorrow, not today, tomorrow. In fact, Jesus said it. "In this life, you will have trouble." He's not a liar. It shouldn't surprise you when you have trouble. Jesus said, "In this life, you'll have trouble, but take heart, for I have overcome the world."

Let me read you some of my favorite verses about bad days giving way to better days and ultimately perfect days. Romans 8:28. **"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."** I know all things are working together for my good and his glory.

There are a couple of reasons why I'm really grateful for being diagnosed with terminal brain cancer and having to do 18 months of chemotherapy and having radiation pumped into my brain. This moment is one of those. I'm not standing here with some sort of theory that all things work together for the good of those who love him.

That's not a theory of mine. I know it to be true. "Of course you do, Chandler. You're alive." Listen. If I were dead, is that a net loss for me? As a Christian, if I'm to die, is that, "Oh no, I got robbed of so many beautiful things"? Do you know how ghetto those beautiful those things are in light of what's coming for those of us who are children of God?

"Well you must not understand grandbabies." Well you must not understand the glory of God, because it would make grandchildren pale in comparison to the light of his glory and grace, make it worth it in a second. "All things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purposes." Here is one of my favorites, 2 Corinthians 5, starting in verse 1. This has a sentence in it that is one of my favorite sentences in the Bible.

"For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life."

I love that sentence: **"...what is mortal may be swallowed up by life."** What the apostle Paul is saying here in this text is that this body and this place we live, this is camping. This isn't home. This isn't our home. This body... We want to be more clothed than this. What does that mean? This body breaks down. This body gets sick. This body needs rest. This body feels pain. This body gets tired. Right? We groan to be out of this, and that this world, this house... This is a tent; it's not our home.

For some of you who love to go camping, you're like, "Awesome." I don't think that's Paul's point here. Paul's point is kind of how Lauren, my wife, sees camping, which is, "It had better be a Hilton,

at least." My wife's version of camping is, "I had better be able to call someone whenever and get food, and I'd better be able to lock the door."

Maybe you married a girl who dips and shoots a .223. I was not graced with that. If you were, praise God. When the zombie apocalypse comes, she can help you hunt, and you will take care of me and my wife, hopefully, as we are ill-prepared for such a cataclysmic event. I want you to hear what he just said here. When people talk about what is mortal, they're talking about life. What Paul just said here is what is mortal will be consumed by...what? Life.

There is a type of life that is greater than the life you and I are walking in now. Here's the point of the text. This is not our home, and we should not expect to feel perfectly at peace and perfectly comfortable here. This isn't our home. Our home is coming. Until then, we groan. Until then, we want more than we have. That has to be satisfied by God and God alone, and here is how John puts it in Revelation 21. In Revelation 21, starting in verse 1, it says this:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'"

When the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 65 began to prophesy this same thing, here is the way he put it.

"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind." I said at McKenna's funeral to her family and to her friends that there will come a day where the sorrow we rightfully feel today we no longer remember. It doesn't seem like we've lost anything.

Ten thousand years from now, there won't be among McKenna's family or McKenna herself or her best friend Tori or the rest of her family members, "Oh, we lost something." There will be no remembrance of that at all. Am I saying that you won't remember anything about life on earth? No, not at all. In fact, if we had time to get into Isaiah 65, it becomes clear that we will remember those things that cause us to rejoice in the Lord and in his governance of our lives. Anything that would rob us of that affection can no longer be remembered.

The bad days will always lead to better days that will ultimately lead to perfect days, but for now, you can be assured of this. In this world, you will have trouble, but take heart. He has overcome the world. I continue to have my mind blown at how readily evangelicals accept prosperity gospel teaching. It is so baffling to me that we would believe this. Now, I know some of you are like, "Well, Chandler, I've heard those guys. They say God wants to bless us."

Listen. God does want to bless you. He loves you deeply. In fact, he loves you so deeply there will be times he blesses you with great difficulty so that you might know what you need to know all the more and might not have what you desperately want that might hurt you. See, God loves you. He loves you enough to, according to Hebrews 12, discipline you as sons and scourge all of those he calls children. Don't despise the dark day; the Lord is in it.

Here is the good news: the Lord will sustain us regardless of circumstance. He just will. I'm just so confident of that in the number of hospital rooms and funeral homes I've been in right now, that the Lord will sustain on that day. If you have things in your mind like, "I just can't even imagine." First of all, stop trying to imagine. Why would you do that? Secondly, when you need it, it'll be there. That grace won't show up before you need it; it shows up when you need it. I'm telling you there is nothing you could imagine that the Lord wouldn't hold you up under if he governed you through it.

Am I saying God is the author of evil? Absolutely not. He can't be. He's not, but the Bible is clear that what is meant for evil, he will take and mean it for good. Hear me. Although the world will look chaotic to us, it never looks chaotic to God. Despite all the blessing we see in Acts, I want you to keep in mind that Stephen was killed. Stephen was killed. Think about it. Stephen's primary ministry was caring for widows. He taught Adult Seven Sunday school. Why do you kill that guy? You have to be gentle if you're going to work with the elderly, not rough, right?

James is killed with the sword, and Saul has his life threatened and has to escape down the city wall in a basket. Peter just keeps getting arrested. These are real men, many of them with real families. That's not conjecture; we know from the Bible that Peter has a mother-in-law, has a wife, has a family. Yet this man, when all is said and done, is going to be crucified upside down. God is at work in the chaos.

The second thing I want to pull from these four chapters (and it's much shorter) is the mission of God to declare the work of Jesus to the ends of the earth cannot be stopped, regardless of foe. What

you see happening in these four chapters, and what we've seen happen throughout Christian history is those who wish to destroy the Christian faith, the harder they press, the more it grows.

Let's just talk about some of the governments. Can we just agree that Rome is pretty legit? How many of you... Has anybody been to Rome? Okay, so let's chat, those of you who have been. If you haven't been, let me just tell you there are roads in Rome that were built 2,000 years ago that they still drive on. We can't fix the parking lot at our Chick-fil-A. We can't get it done. It's like a sinkhole. Somebody is going to die over there, yet the Romans 2,000 years ago built roads we still drive on.

We built roads just 20 years ago that they're having to shut down the highway to rebuild. Rome ruled from India to England. They tried to crush it, snuff it out, and destroy it. They fed our brothers and sisters to lions. They boiled them alive. They sawed them in two. They beheaded them. They crucified them upside down. By the thousands.

History tells us that by AD 351 there were 350 million people, or 51.3 percent of the Roman Empire, who were believers in Jesus Christ and called themselves followers of the Way. What about the communists in Russia or in other parts of the world? See, the harder you press on Christianity, the more it flourishes. The more you beat on it, the more it grows.

In fact, I'll say this to you. I believe you and I are in far greater spiritual danger than any of our brothers and sisters in Iraq, in Iran, and in other parts of the world where the cost of following Jesus might end in your physical death or in the torture of your own life or those you know and love. There is no great angst coming in to worship this morning. There is no, "Please, God, encourage my spirit. Please, God, protect us. Please, God, move."

No, it's just comfort and a cushy chair and, "Give me a good coffee. Man, it's a little cold in here." It's dangerous. It can just be an add-on. My point is this. Whether or not Christianity sits at the center of a culture, has been pushed to the margins, or is illegal, the gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be stopped. There will be 633 million Christians in Africa by 2025. More than that in Asia, South America... exploding. For those of you who are a bit more informed, you're like, "What about the secular West?" I love the secular West. Let's get it.

I was out last week because I was in Europe. Three years ago, the church-planting network I'm the president of did our first event in London, and we had 90 men who were interested in planting churches or associates who were interested in planting churches. This past week, we had close to

500 that sold out the venue we were in in London who wanted to plant churches that plant churches that plant churches in and out Europe.

We had 50 there from Italy who took the train over to Paris, and our first event ever in Paris had over 100 men and women who wanted to plant gospel churches that planted gospel churches in France and then took the train up to Edinburgh, Scotland, which is a spectacular... I love the Scots! Sarcastic, a bit angry, my kind of people. We got up into Edinburgh, and close to 500 guys, men and women in Edinburgh, wanting to plant churches that planted churches.

There is a re-seeding of the gospel going on in Europe that is good and glorious and right, and the purposes of God cannot be thwarted. The boldness we find in ourselves here as The Village organizationally to plant churches in the Metroplex, to invite you to leave and be a part of other gospel works, the freedom we feel even in prayerfully considering rolling off the Denton Campus to be its own autonomous campus isn't that the survey came back and 90-something percent of you not only understand this vision but are for it.

Our boldness isn't found in statistics. Our boldness is found in this: the purposes of God cannot be thwarted. The glory of God will cover the earth like the waters cover the seas, and we've been invited to play. I want to play. I find all other things boring. You've been invited, so let's play. Listen, do you want to risk your life? We can do that. Don't parachute; we can send you somewhere where you can risk it for eternal rewards.

You want to spend your money on bold hobbies? I have some ideas for you. Trying to plant churches in very expensive, very difficult places. How about we do that? I know you need that seat heater in your car. I know you need that, but there might be some things we could do better with those resources. Do you want to be a part of a great adventure? Quit watch comic book superhero movies, and let's go get it. Oh that you would quit watching and join the great drama. Let's pray.

Father, some of us just need to be reminded today that you reign and rule over what we perceive to be chaos. I thank you that you don't see it that way. I thank you that you are not nervous, you are not worried, and that you are near to the broken-hearted. I thank you that last night, McKenna's family gathered at Gilley's, and they toasted McKenna, and they laughed, and they told stories. There was a little bit of dancing and excitement over the fact that you are King of all.

Would you root us all like that? Might we, as the prophet Isaiah prophesied about us, be considered oaks of righteousness, a planting of you for the display of your splendor? Remind us that we have not been forgotten or abandoned. Father, will you increase our boldness? I thank you that we will win. There is a day coming where men and women from every tribe, tongue, and nation worship your glorious name, and there is no remembrance of the former things that pass away.

No one would have "died early" or "suffered too much." God, there will simply be a celebration of your sovereign governance over all of it. Until then, strengthen our hands. Until then, strengthen our feet and legs. Lead us into evermore obedience to your Word. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

I love you guys deeply.

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