

Acts 14 "The Word and the Work of His Grace"

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[0 : 0 0] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah. It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Father, we're not honest often with you in terms of how we pray, and we're not honest with you often in terms of the doubts or curiosities that we have when we read your Word. But Father, we know that you know already in advance what we're thinking and what we're feeling, what we long for and what we dread.

So we, and we're so glad, Father, that you do know us truly, and knowing us truly, still you died on the cross. Jesus died on the cross for us. So we ask, Father, that your Word would do a powerful work in our lives that help us to think more clearly about who we really are, who we really are at the level of our heart in the real world. And help us, Father, by your Word to know and see the real world and the real you, and to live in the power of your grace in light of the reality of you, the reality of ourselves, and the reality of this world. And we ask all these things in the name of Jesus, your Son, and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. So one of the things which Christians often feel or think, and sometimes they talk to me about it, is, well, frankly, so much of what's connected to the Christian faith is frankly boring and uninteresting. I mean, that's what people will tell me. In fact, I don't know where people are in terms of their relationship with Jesus, who are here, or those of you who are online or listening to the sermon down the stream. And if you're outside the Christian faith, this might surprise you. But I've had many people over the years say, George, you know, I'll just be honest. I don't read the Bible. I find it just either very difficult or very boring. You know what? I love C.S. Lewis. I read C.S. Lewis instead, because it's just like I get way more out of it than when I read the Bible. You know, I'll have other types of people say, you know, George, I've just found more and more that there's just certain places, like if I go for a walk, in fact, I was just talking to somebody this week, actually, in a coffee shop, a big surprise to all of you. And they just said they've given up going to church because they're actually find themselves feeling way closer to God when they go for a walk in nature. I've had many people say to me that I, you know, frankly, George, I find prayer really hard, really boring. I get far more peace and satisfaction out of doing some yoga. And I've had many other people tell me, you know, frankly, George, I don't find the Bible helpful at all, not compared to this therapist that I've been talking to in the self-help books that I've been reading. And people will talk to me about that, and I'll have different things to say about it. The Bible text this morning that we're going to look at, apart from saying some very other profound things which we really need to hear, actually talks about this particular topic. So let's have a look. It's Acts chapter 14. It's 28 verses in the whole chapter. We just had Owen read sort of the funny, odd bit in the middle. We're going to look at the whole chapter. So Acts chapter 14, and we'll start reading at verse 1, and just sort of the context, right? Luke, Acts is an eyewitness-based history of the first 30 or so years of the Jesus movement, and so it's a history of that 30-some-odd years of the Jesus, written when eyewitnesses were still alive, where they could have either contradicted the writing, or people could go and check things out, because Luke, who wrote it, gives the equivalent

of footnotes all the way through this.

[4 : 53] And what's just happened is the very, very, very first, and I know this is a dirty word in Canada, missionaries are a bad word for most Canadians, but the very, very first Christian missionary journey has been embarked on. The Sending Church is a church in Syria, and we've sort of had a bit of an account of Paul and Barnabas and John Mark, who ends up leaving, and they're first places that they've gone on their missionary journey, and we're now sort of in about the middle of the missionary journey when this has happened. The other thing that's important to know as the story opens is that Paul and Barnabas are fleeing is too strong a word. It sounds like you're running in terror of your life, but they're at least sauntering away because people want to kill them, and they want to kill them because they're Christians. And so Paul and Barnabas have left and are now coming to this city, and that's where our story takes up, and it goes like this. Now, at Iconium, they, that's Paul and

Barnabas. It could be there's one or two others, but it's probably just Paul and Barnabas. Now, at Iconium, Paul and Barnabas entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and pagans believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the pagans and poisoned their minds against Paul and Barnabas. Now, just pause here for a second. This is an important application, and it's very, very, it's very, very, very contemporary. When you don't have a good argument, and when the facts don't support your argument, and you're unwilling to change your mind, people often poison other people's minds. That's how you deal with it. I've just explained 80% of the media and 80% of social media. People who don't have a good argument, don't have the facts on their side, aren't willing to change, and as a result, they poison people's minds. So it's actually a very, very ancient problem. And by the way, I'm not saying that if you're watching this saying, oh, look,

I'm not saying that because look at us, we're all like completely perfect. No, it's a warning to us. If your argument stinks, if the facts don't support what you believe, be willing to change your mind. That's what God wants, okay? Just that's a big application. Like, changing your mind to know the truth is a good thing. Poisoning people's minds instead, trying to shut them down, that's a bad thing. Anyway, so the story sort of continues. And oh, by the way, actually, it's really interesting. You know, just as this is another application in terms of reading narratives like this, always pay attention to the story arc, because a lot of times what you're learning, so on one level, we just learn it unconsciously by reading it, but it's actually important to sort of notice. So I'll read verse two again. But the unbelieving Jews, so many people have become Christians, both Jews and pagans. But those who didn't believe, they stirred up the pagans and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So what would we normally expect is going to happen now? Well, what we would normally expect is we might even give the advice, listen, if they're poisoning your mind, just move on, just go somewhere else. Like, that's what we would say. But what actually happens in the story, look at verse three, it's actually quite surprising. So, like it's a, like a reason thing or a for, like a logic step. So they remained for a long time. Isn't that surprising? They remained for a long time. They didn't let people poisoning other people's minds say, oh, I have to leave. Like, no. They stayed for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. And just pause here for a second. You're going to see in a moment I'll have some points on the screen, and I'm going to keep referring to this, the word of his grace. It's a wonderful way to describe what is involved in telling people about Jesus. It's the word of God's grace. Grace means God's kindness shown to you.

[9 : 07] His kindness, you don't merit his kindness, it's his unmerited kindness and goodness and love being bestowed upon you. That's what the gospel is all about. In the ancient world, especially for the pagan religions at the time, there's something which is still very similar to today. Today, kings and rulers send other people to die for them. Most of the gods in the world that have existed, they send, they have other people die for them. And there's this profound word of grace, something which is completely and utterly counterintuitive, that God seen, like, and if you think back to that parable of Jesus, that we're the people who didn't want to come to his kingdom. We're the people who beat up his prophets. We're the people who poison other people's minds because we just don't like the argument. We don't, there's too many inconvenient truths. And we're those people, and God's response, the word of his grace, is that God says, in the person of my son, I will die for them. Right? Kings say, go out and die for me. The true king says, I will die for you. That's a work of unmerited grace. That's what we share about Jesus, that it's a work of unmerited grace that seems

upside down, inside out, and backwards forwards to the way that normally people think, that you would, that God would actually do that. He knows everything about me.

He knows every dream I have. He knows every thought I have. And still, and by the way, folks, if I was just to put up on the screen, if God put up on the screen, the things I've thought, and my opinions, my judgments, all sorts of things, just from the last 24 hours, you would all be horrified about me.

And God knows all of those things, and still Jesus died for me. That's the word of his grace. That's the story that we tell. It's a very, very beautiful phrase. But it continues, verse four. But the people of the city were divided. Oh, but no, go back for verse three. This is actually something else I missed here.

Notice verse three again. So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace. So who's bearing witness? God's bearing witness. This is very important for you and me. I share the words of his grace, and God does the bearing witness. God does the greater work. We'll talk about this again in a moment. Verse four.

But the people of the city were divided. Some sided with the Jews, the unbelieving Jews, and some with the apostles. When an attempt was made by both pagans and Jews with their rulers to mistreat Paul and Barnabas and to stone them, that would be to death, Paul and Barnabas learned of it and fled to Lystra and to Derby, cities of Lyconia and to the surrounding country. And there they continued to preach the gospel. Now, here's the first point, if you could put it up. The word of his grace and the work of his grace converts some and scandalizes others. Now, the phrase you see throughout the text, it says how God's bearing witness to his word. And at the end of the whole story, at the end of Acts chapter 14, we'll see that the whole missionary journey and all that was happening and all those who came to faith was the work of God's grace. And I've just combined the beginning of the story and the end of the story. In fact, all my four points will have that beginning, that the word of his grace and the work of his grace, that's God's grace, converts some and scandalizes others. I think I've shared with you before. I'll share it to you again. I'm getting old. I tell stories more than once. In every church that I came to for the first time, when I first preached the substitutionary atonement of Christ, that the wrath of God falls on him rather than me, every single one of the Anglican churches I've spoken at, every single one of them, I had two, I had a bigger response for the first time I've done it from any of the other sermons leading up to that. And I had a whole pile of people say to me, that's the most remarkable thing in the world. Why have I never heard it before?

[13 : 22] And I had just as many people say, that is a completely horrible way to speak. You should be ashamed of yourself. It both moved some hearts and scandalized others. And that's what you see all the way through this. So this is very important for three different reasons, even if we have to camp on it for a moment. Hopefully I remember the three reasons. The first thing is, we're sort of inundated with this idea that things should be easy, that things should just flow smoothly for us. And so if we speak in such a way, and then let's say the other churches or people in the church say, oh by the way, did you know that George spoke last night? Actually a couple of weeks ago I was speaking a little bit about what in terms of other religions and how Christianity views it, and two people got up and left the service. I don't know if you noticed it. They got up and left. Never seen them, never came back. And you know, people might say, well George, you know, good grief. Okay, some people became, you know, Christians, but all these people became men. Maybe you have to work on your delivery.

You know, you have to maybe smooth some edges and stuff like that. That's the natural Canadian reaction to it, as if I've done something wrong, or we've done something wrong. But the fact of the matter is, is if you proclaim the gospel clearly and simply and humbly and winsomely, including the fact of saying that if you, if you just saw what went on in my mind, in my heart for the last 24 hours, you would be horrible. You can be, it's going to do both. It's going to both really convert and move people. It's also going to scandalize people. The second thing about this, which is really important, is to have a profound encouragement. You know, I've talked to you about conversations I have in coffee shops, and I've also tried to tell you at times what I, my attempt, my attempt was like flying a lead balloon, like it just crashes on the ground. I did a terrible job where I thought like a week later what I should have said. That's normal, folks. That's normal.

And if you wait to have a perfectly canned talk, amongst other things, Canadians will say, well, that's a really nice canned talk. Like, why don't you speak from your heart?

Right? So in other words, it's sort of like you can't win either way. Well, no, you can win either way. Just do your best to try to bear witness to Jesus. And maybe if you bear witness to Jesus, and people give you 17 objections, you don't know how to answer them, you just say, listen, there's this old children's hymn that says, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so, little ones to him belong. You know, they are weak, but he is strong. And just say that, that's my hope. I don't know how to answer your questions. That's my hope, and he loves you. I mean, that's, maybe that's all you can say, but that's fine. It's just a matter of planting seeds.

You see, the thing is, the word, you proclaim the word of his grace. You tell people about Jesus, about his great love, that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son to the end, that all who believe in him will not perish, but have eternal life. You just share those things, and God does the work. God does the work. Now, that's not saying you should be as dumb as you can be, and as rude as you can be. No, no, no. You try your best. But at the end of the day, what you want is to try to be clear, and you want to try to be humble, and you want to know, look, what is the point? The word of his grace and the work of his grace converts.

[16:47] Often sales guys and gals aren't good evangelists, because people can sort of tell that there's something too smooth about them, and that they're being played. It's amazing how many people, you even think for yourself, how many, you know, some of the people who had maybe a big way in pointing to Jesus, and a lot of them weren't really smooth. The third thing is this, and it goes back to the C.S. Lewis example that I said at the beginning, right? Like, George, you know, I don't get anything out of reading the Bible. You know, I really find it interesting when you read that.

I didn't see any of those things in there, right? But, you know, I don't get anything out of reading the Bible. I find walking in the woods better than going to church, you know, yoga better than prayer, therapy better than, you know, reading the Bible. So here's the thing. You need to listen to the point again. The word of his grace and the work of his grace converts, and that, you could actually say within that, if I wanted to make it long, it justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies, like it does the whole thing. It's like, you know, those of you who know the story of the water being turned into wine at the wedding feast, you know, just very, and outlines Jesus' first miracle. They're at the wedding. They run out of wine. Jesus' mom asked Jesus to do something. There's all these stones that you put water in for washing, and Jesus says to the servants, fill those stones, those stone jars with water. Take them, you know, whatever, 100 yards, 100 meters away to where the steward is.

Just do all of that, and the steward goes and tastes it, and somewhere between the water going in those stone jars and those 100 yards, the water turned into wine, right? Now, we all know if you want to make wine, you don't just put water in stone jars. It'll never make wine, not even in a hundred million billion years, but what's at work? They did what Jesus asked them to do, and Jesus made wine out of it, and that's the key to Christian growth. Jesus asked us to read the Bible, and if we read the Bible, he will make wine in our lives. Jesus asked us to pray, not ask as he tells us, you should pray, and we pray, and maybe at times we feel like there's the sky is stone and iron and nobody's hearing, but we pray, and God makes the wine. He said you should come and gather weekly with other people. You do that, and God makes the wine. You should celebrate the Lord's Supper, a variety of things like that. You see, what you do is you take some steps, and by the way, if you're saying, listen,

I'm really having a hard time, God, you know, I'm not getting anything out of this. Could you please help me? I mean, part of the way is God doesn't just deal with it instantly. That formative making of wine might take some time, but that's the promise we have in the scriptures. When you do what Jesus asks you to do, Jesus will do a work in your life, and if you are just trying to do what you think is the right work, well, that's just you doing what you do. That's all you've done. It's just a version of you do you, and listen, I need more than me do me. I need something way more than that.

Me do me is sort of a, well, it's nasty, poor, brutish, and short. I think that's from Shakespeare or something like that, but anyway, so what goes on? What happens next in this story? Okay, that was a long aside, but it's, I think, an important one. Verse four, oh, sorry, I've already done all of that.

[20:23] So here, here's what, so now we come to that odd story that, that Owen read, and like it's, it's, you know, the thing about this story is really neat. Some of you might notice that when you're looking at the words up there, the word pagan never shows up. What, what shows up there is Gentiles, and that's an accurate translation, and I could explain to you what it actually means, but the fact of the matter is, the next story is really important for us to understand something. It will help us to see our own world in a different way. I use it to translate as pagans, because that's who

they're, they're dealing with. They're dealing with pagans, and this next story shows that the pagans really are pagans.

Like, they really are pagans. Like, they're not just sort of really good kids who went to the Metropolitan Bible Church, and then they backslid for a couple of years, but they're fundamentally have a Christian, whole Christian. These are pagans. Like, this story really helps you to see how pagan the pagans are. Let's look at it again. Verse, verse 8. Now at Lystra, there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking, and Paul looking intently at him, and seeing that he had faith to be made well, and some of your Bibles will have a little footnote there, because the word well can also be translated as the word saved. It's one of those words that has a double meaning, and the text is implying both, by the way, that there's, that he can tell, Paul can tell that this man has come to not only put his faith in Jesus, but has made a longing to be able to walk to Jesus, and it's sort of an intertwined longing. Like, a lot of our longings are complicated. Am I the only one? I mean, sometimes they're not complicated. I just want to go to bed, right? Or just, I just need to eat. Sometimes they're not very, but a lot of times our longings are complicated. His was complicated, both being made right with God, and also being made well, and it was mixed up. But Paul somehow discerns this, and so verse 10, he said in a loud voice to the man, stand up right on your feet. Not because Paul's words have any power, but because he could sense that this man was having a work with Jesus. And it continues, and the man sprang up and began walking.

And when the crowd saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lyconian, and by the way, that means that up until now, Paul's been speaking Greek. That would have been the common language. Just like when, this would be, all of you could give examples like that, but when I was in Angola, I had a translator who would translate everything into Portuguese, because that was the language. And in one of the places where I spoke, which was just an unreached people group that had just been reached with the gospel about five years earlier, I had to speak with two translators. I spoke in English, it got translated into Portuguese, and the local person translated into the local dialect. So Paul is speaking the common language, but here's what they say, verse 11.

The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men. Barnabas, they called Zeus. Barnabas was probably older, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice to Zeus and Hermes, to Barnabas and Paul. And he wanted to offer sacrifices with the crowds.

But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their garments. That's a sign of great distress. And rushed out right into the crowd, crying out. Now, just before I read what's going to be, just the way to understand these next few verses is what we actually see here, and I'm going to spend very little time on it, but what you have here is an outline of how Paul would come to speak to pagans.

We might call it apologetics or pre-apologetics, helping them to understand either after conversion how the Christian faith works or maybe leading people up to accept it. And it's sort of an outline of how he would have talked, of his argument. Listen to what he says, verse 15.

[24 : 44] Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men of like nature with you, and we bring you good news that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. Pause, I'm going to read it again. We can just skip over vain.

This is very important. Vain is a good word, but it's often a word that isn't used very much in English anymore. It's an example of you'd have to have a higher vocabulary to get what it means.

Another way to translate it is worthless. I'll let that just sit with you. These gods are worthless. And that's why they're vain. To pursue them, you think they're going to lead you somewhere, but it's all in vain. It's worthless. It will lead you to nothing.

It will not accomplish what you want to accomplish. I'll return to that, but it's a very bracing thing to have that Paul say that.

It's another one of those examples. You know, with Paul, you often wonder, you think sometimes, Paul, why don't you tell us what you really think? Well, that's what he does. He sort of beat around the bush. He would be terrible in politics, right? Just tell us what you really think. No, no, no, no, no.

[26 : 01] All of his aides would be saying, no, no, no, no, no. Don't tell them what you really think. Let's massage that. We don't want anybody to know what you really think. Anyway, so I'll read that

again. Sorry, verse 15.

Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men of like nature with you, and we bring you good news that you should turn from these vain things, the worthless things, to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is them. In other words, every insect, every creature, every fish.

Verse 16. In past generations, he allowed all the nations, all the people groups, to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without a witness.

What's the witness? He did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons. And not only is he doing good in that way, but he satisfies your hearts with food and gladness.

Even with these words, they scarcely restrain the people from offering them, you know, sacrifice. So what's going on here is probably something like this. Years ago, I got invited to an international gathering.

[27 : 20] The first time I went to an international Anglican gathering, there were Anglicans from about 70 nations there. And it was really a very profound time. It was a bit of a scary time.

It was my first time in rural Africa, and it was at a time when there was a travel advisory against Canadians going to that country because of terrorist attacks. Louise and I had to talk about it, whether I'd do it or not, and we decided we'd go.

But one of the things that was just so wonderful was meeting Christians from all over the world. And one of the people that I met was a man who had grown up as a Hindu and became a Christian and became, in fact, an evangelist in India.

And one of the things he told me was that it was quite possible in India, you would meet many people who'd hear about Jesus and have an attraction to them, to Jesus. And they would say that they'd become a Christian.

But what really they had done is maybe before they were devoted to Krishna, but now they were no longer devoted to Krishna, they were devoted to Jesus, but they were still fundamentally Hindu.

[28 : 21] Like, they would have said, oh, I don't stop trusting in Krishna because Krishna doesn't exist. I just now, Jesus is who attracts me to. He's now my guy, right? And so he said, this evangelist said, one of the hard parts is actually getting people to understand that they have to actually abandon Hinduism.

That if they give their life to Christ, it implies a whole different way of thinking. In fact, if you could put up the second point, Claire, that would be very helpful. The word of his grace about Jesus and the work of his grace changes how you think about everything.

The word of his grace and the work of his grace changes how you think about everything. So I think maybe what's happened is Paul is maybe just doing, like, often now at weddings, if I think there might be a—well, actually, I do that at most weddings, but even if there's just a few people who are outside the Christian faith, but especially if I think there's a lot of people who are outside the Christian faith, I do my wedding sermon on the story of Jesus turning water into wine as a way to introduce people to Jesus.

And let's say there was somebody who became very interested in Jesus and wanted to pursue him. Part of that conversion process would be for them to come to understand that it's not just believing Jesus, but it's going to change how you think about a whole range of things, how you understand the world.

So I think maybe what Paul was doing is he'd been telling you about Jesus. This man came to faith. People might have been quite open to it. But then when they act like pagans, he realizes he needs to talk something.

[29 : 50] And all that little talk, it's a refutation of paganism. It's a refutation of pantheism. It's a refutation of panentheism. It's a refutation of naturalism.

All an outline there with the idea that there's only one God who's created all things. And then that other flip side of it, that God is good and that he satisfies your longings through food and satisfies your longings for gladness and for joy and that he's the satisfaction of those things.

And those are two very powerful types of apologetic arguments. And so what we see in this whole story is that... Well, let's just take for a second.

I'm not saying that when we talk to people outside the Christian faith, we have to tell them that if they believe in another religion, if they trust Allah, that it's worthless. I'm not saying you have to say that to their face.

In fact, in Canada, that probably wouldn't be very helpful. But you've got to know it. You've got to think it. This is very important because often people outside of the Christian faith are way better people than you are.

[31 : 11] They're nicer. They're kinder. They're smarter. They're way more devoted. They spend way more time doing meditation than you do praying. And they just seem to have their lives very, very, very well together.

And we feel completely and utterly intimidated by them. And we need to understand that that's worthless. And part of the reason we can say that it's worthless is it's just a matter of being realistic in two different ways.

The first way it's just being realistic is just this. Just think for a second. And this is the Christian claim. That for over a millennium, for over a thousand years, for at least 1400 years, there have been developed a profound overarching story that explains reality.

There has developed over time profound texts that give profound insight into the human condition. There have been profound changes in law.

There had been a profound account of the dignity and worth of every human being. And I could go on and on. And the mix of those, not only these very profound and powerful texts, this profound grouping of ideas, this profound overarching story.

[32 : 21] There have also been, for 1400 years plus, prophecies that God, the true God, the living God, not any idol, the one creator of all things, that he was going to do something to help to deliver people, to save people, because we could not save ourselves.

And there are prophecies about that happening. And after 1400 years of all this, a man arrives by the name of Jesus, and by performing miracles, and by his teaching, he is understood to be, people know of who he is, and he says he's going to die on the cross.

He says he's the culmination of these 1400 years. And he actually does die on a cross, something that he really couldn't completely orchestrate himself. He really is buried.

He's buried for three days. He's completely dead. And on the third day, the grave is empty. The grave clothes are still there. They cannot ever find the body. And he appears alive in many places, in many ways, to convince people that he's actually completely and utterly defeated death.

And if that is true, it changes everything. Remember what I said earlier? If you have a good argument with good truth, you have to be willing to change your mind.

[33 : 34] It changes everything. If that's true, it means that Hinduism, while it has some profound insights, is at root wrong.

It means that Buddhism, which, by the way, has profound insights, is at a major level wrong. It means that Islam is wrong. It means that naturalism is wrong.

That's just realistic thinking. And we might say, well, George, it's not right to say or think that other things are worthless.

Well, that just means, first of all, you haven't actually followed that type of argument and thought about it. But it also means that you're not actually really being realistic if you give that objection. Why do you say that? Well, I can illustrate it very perfectly, very, very easily.

Imagine for a second that you're flying and for some reason or other the plane is in trouble. It happens to be a plane with parachutes. And the plane is going to crash.

[34 : 33] You jump out of the plane with another person who knows how to parachute. You land safely and you come to a lost people group or a people group that doesn't really, hasn't had much contact with civilization. And they see that the person who, the pilot and you, and they see you coming down from the sky and they want to worship you as a god.

What are you going to do? Are you going to say, this is the life? These people are going to worship me as a god for the rest of my life. I don't have to do any work.

No more dishes. They'll just be, I can just lie on a couch and say more grapes, you know, more goat, more chicken. No. If you said that, if you gave that story and somebody said, that's not what I do, you'd all despise that person.

What would you want them to do? You want to say, listen, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. We're not gods. And actually to think that way is all wrong. And if you don't agree with that, well, like really? You want to let these people continue to believe a delusion? You see, Canadians don't like, what's so powerful about the story, it reveals our hearts.

[35 : 45] We don't want to say that those things don't work. Yet really, if we're honest, you should say they don't work. If they don't work. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, as Paul says later on, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, we should all get up right now.

And I don't know, we have some people here who can probably tell us where the best Mexican food is. We have some people who can tell us where the best South Indian food is. Victor can tell us where just the best food is, period. In all sorts of different genres.

And we might as well go out and do that because we're completely and utterly wasting our time. We're fully, fully deluded. But I don't think we are. The word of his grace and the work of his grace changes how you think about everything.

It's partially in apologetics, in evangelism, and in discipleship. Let's just go through this story very quickly. It has a very surprising end. There's just two very brief lessons which are important for us to hear.

So Paul does this. They stop them from sacrificing. What happens next? Well, let's look. Verse 19. A very surprising part. I intentionally had Owen not read it. Verse 19. But Jewish people came from Antioch and Iconium and having persuaded...

[36 : 57] So Paul and Barnabas, they want to worship as gods. But these people come and persuade the crowds. Having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul to death.

Or at least they thought it was to death. And dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. People have always been fickle. Brothers and sisters, when I say that once again, don't take it, yeah, those people have always been fickle.

No, no, no, no, no. We can be fickle. If you just think everybody else is fickle and you have nothing in your life that's fickle, brothers and sisters, I have some news for you.

You can be fickle too. And if that probably, if the person around you was to speak honestly, they'd say, yeah, I can think of 10 times you were pretty fickle. It's not a condemn... It's just like that's a problem.

In verse 20, it doesn't tell you what the miracle exactly is, but verse 20, when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city. Whoa, whoa. He went back into the place where they killed him.

[37 : 57] So one of the things about this story which is really interesting, you'll see that sometimes they leave persecution and other times they walk right back into it.

There's no one rule about this. It requires the discernment and prayer and maybe community. But he walks right back into the city. And then the next day, continuing the verse, he went out with Barnabas onto Derbe.

And when they had preached the gospel to that city as well and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch. And strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God.

Now just pause here and I'm going to get, actually, if you could put up the point, Claire, that would be helpful. Here's the thing. You go back and you read chapter 14, you make a little note. This is an astounding thing.

At Derbe, Paul and Barnabas could have gone some other way. They're going to now go back to Antioch, the sending church. Maybe they realize they're running out of money. Maybe it's just time they've been gone a couple of years. They could have gone another way down this way to go to Assyria.

[39 : 08] But instead, they go right back to Lystra, right back to Iconium, right back to Antioch in every one of those cities that was places they tried to kill them. They went right back. It's not explained, but they went right back.

The only explanation is that they went back to encourage them and do one other thing, which I'll get to in a moment. But here's the point. There's a lot of people who tell you that Christianity should be easy, and if it's not easy, you're sinning in some way.

They're not telling you what the Bible says. The word of his grace and the work of his grace will lead you into tribulation on your way to your forever home. That's why the Christian faith requires courage.

And then one other thing. Look at verse 23. And this is another. Going back to encourage... By the way, isn't it really neat? How do they encourage them? One of the ways they encourage them is so

you're going to have tribulations.

Actually, that is encouraging. You know what? Because I bet you there's a whole pile of people in this room who at different times in their life... I grew up in a type of context where it was the joy of the Lord is your strength, and what characterized Christians from other people is that we had way more joy, and our lives were more successful.

[40 : 29] And when I was feeling depressed, I felt even worse than just feeling depressed because it meant that I was a crappy Christian. And I'd look around at all these people with their smiles on their face, the joy of the Lord is our strength, you know, and all that type of stuff.

And I'm feeling that I'm struggling with some hard times. And that only discouraged me. They might think they're encouraging me by telling you that life is going to be a bowl of chair. Like, it's...

No! Because you accept the gospel, you have a forever home, and there is a kingdom that you now have a place in. And that kingdom both has its beginnings here on this earth, but really only is consummated.

And you know what? On your way to that forever home, there are going to be hard times. But God's grace, Christ is with you. And this other part's also really important, and hopefully will be a church that encourages.

Look what happens next in verse 23. That's the other thing they do. They encourage, and, verse 23, they appoint, and when they had appointed elders for them in every church with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed.

[41 : 37] The final point, Claire. There, the word of his grace and the work of his grace form elder-led, or presbyter-led, missionary-minded churches.

That's the word of his grace, and that's the work of his grace, to form churches. But churches that share the gospel, that have that type of health. And then just very briefly, they passed, verse 24, they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia.

And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Italia, and from there they sailed to Antioch, that's Syrian Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled.

That's where I got the work of his grace. The work of his grace. And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the pagans, and they remained no little time with the disciples.

Brothers and sisters, this is a beautiful story. Let's stand in prayer. Father, it's really easy for us to, you know, think that certain types of things really work for me, like maybe it's C.S.

[42 : 51] Lewis, or maybe it's reading that, I can't remember his first name, Strobel on spirituality, or maybe it's reading Gavin Ortlund, or something like that, and that seems way more powerful than the Bible.

And Father, I know that you want us to read great writers like that and be formed by it, but Father, we ask that you help us to understand that when we just do what pleases us, we're just doing ourselves, and that doesn't actually accomplish anything, because in and of ourselves we die.

But that you, Father, who are calling us to our forever home through Christ, that when we do what you ask us to do, that you're making wine in our lives. You're changing our lives. And so we ask that you help us to persevere in the simple means of grace, like sharing the gospel and being financially generous in the Lord's table and daily prayer and daily reading of your word.

That you help us, Father, to be faithful in these things. And help us, Father, to be a church which isn't just concerned about making ourselves happy, but always has a concern to go, to reach those who do not yet know Jesus.

To go, not just to our neighbors, but also to the end of the earth. And not just to the end of the earth, but also to our neighbors. That you would do that wonderful work in us, and that we, Father, your word and your gospel would so form us that we would be a church that encourages each other as well.

[44 : 13] And we ask all these things in the name of Jesus, your Son, and our Savior, and all God's people said, Amen.