

Do Justice; Love Kindness

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[0:00] We'll be reading two passages this morning, both from the book of Jeremiah. The first passage is Jeremiah 22, 13 through 19.

! Who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing and does not give him his wages.

Who says, I will build myself a great house with spacious upper rooms. Who cuts out windows for it, padding it with cedar and painting it with vermilion. Do you think you are a king because you compete in cedar?

Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy. Then it was well. Is not this to know me, declares the Lord?

But you have eyes and heart only for your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood and for practicing oppression and violence. Therefore thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah.

[1:16] They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah, my brother, or Ah, my sister. They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah, Lord, or Ah, his majesty. With the burial of a donkey he shall be buried, dragged and dumped, beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

And our second passage is Jeremiah 23, verses 1 through 6. And in this passage, God pronounces judgment on the kings of Judah and promises that he will one day raise up a king from the line of David who will rule his people justly.

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, declares the Lord.

Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people. You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them.

Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the Lord. Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.

I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

[2:44] In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called. The Lord is our righteousness. Hear the word of the Lord.

Good morning, everyone. Welcome any visitors. My name is Martin. I'm one of the elders at church here, and I'll be sharing from God's word.

Why don't we pray and ask for God's help as we meditate on the scriptures. Heavenly Father, thank you that we can gather this morning. We thank you for your word in which you speak to us everything we need to know for salvation and for a life of godliness in Jesus.

Please grant to us this morning that we might be attentive to your word. Write it on our hearts. Change us by it.

Shape us to be the people you want us to be, more and more like your son, in whose name we pray. Amen. Well, just a heads up, there are some passages that will come on the screen, but the majority of them won't, and the ones that won't are almost all from the book of Acts.

[4:07] So, it would be great if you could have a Bible open and sort of ready to look at Acts when we get there, although that will be a little bit later on in the talk. Now, the first emperor to profess faith in Jesus was, of course, the Emperor Constantine, who reigned for three decades until the year 337 AD.

Following Constantine, there was a sequence of emperors who were Christian in name, at least, and the Roman Empire became more and more Christian, at least outwardly.

But there was one exception in the sequence of emperors in the 4th century. In 361 AD, 24 years after Constantine's death, his nephew Julian came to the throne.

Julian's known to history as Julian the Apostate, because he turned away from Christianity. And Julian favoured the old Greek and Roman gods. He wanted to see a revival of Hellenistic religion. And Julian thought he knew the reason why devotion to Jesus had begun to displace devotion to Zeus and to Demeter and to the mother god and all the rest, the pantheon of Hellenistic gods.

[5:34] Julian thought he knew the reason. And he wrote a letter to a pagan high priest whom he installed about why devotion to Jesus had begun to be, you know, why the other religions were starting to fail and what he thought they should do about it.

This is some of that letter. Here's what he said. It'll come up on the screen. I'll read out bits of it. The Hellenic religion, that just means sort of the Greek, religion of Greek culture, the Hellenic religion does not yet prosper as I desire and it is the fault of those who profess it.

Why do we not observe that it is the Christians benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done most to increase atheism?

By atheism he means disbelief in the old gods. He's calling Christians atheists there. And then he goes on to say, I believe we ought really and truly to practice every one of these virtues.

And it's not enough for you alone to practice them, but so must all the priests in Galatia, without exception, either shame or persuade them into righteousness or else remove them from their priestly office.

[6:48] For it is disgraceful that when no Jew ever has to beg and the impious Galileans, that's the Christians, when the impious Christians support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.

Then let us not, by allowing others to outdo us in good works, disgraced by such remissness or rather utterly abandon the reverence due to the gods. See, Julian understood the secret of Christianity's success was love.

He was frustrated that the religions he favoured didn't produce the same deeds of compassion and love and mercy that he saw in the Christians.

And so he tried to pressure the pagan priests, copy the Christians' love. The Roman Empire's conversion to Christianity was ultimately because the love of Jesus was stronger than the power of Caesar, stronger than the might of the legions of Rome.

Jesus made people more just and more kind. Jesus himself had said to his disciples that they would be known, the world would know them by their love for one another.

[8:07] Jesus could take a man of rage, a man of hatred, and transform him into a model of sacrificial love.

Case in point, the Apostle Paul. Jesus brought change to people, and the change brought people to Jesus. We're in the final week of our three-week sermon series on justice and mercy or justice and kindness.

The key verse for this series is Micah 6 verse 8. He has told you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?

In the last two weeks, we've reflected on God's justice and God's kindness. God's kindness seen in that magnificent trio of words, his compassion, his grace, his steadfast love.

And God's justice. And what I really wanted you to take away from last week is that God's justice is not just his negative justice in punishing sin, but much more fundamentally his positive justice, his absolute commitment to doing what is right and to establishing what is right.

[9:27] And flowing out of God's positive justice comes God's determination to restore creation to be what it ought to be. Justice and kindness are the marks of God's kingdom.

Justice and kindness are the marks of God's kingdom.

Verses after that that are just sort of listing some of David's officials. And then the very next chapter begins with a story of David's kindness. 2 Samuel 9 verse 1. And David said, Is there anyone left of the house of Saul that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?

Remember, Saul was the old king who tried to kill David. He persecuted him. And now he wants to show kindness to Saul's family. And chapter 9 goes to tell a story of God's kindness and mercy

towards Mephibosheth, the crippled grandson of King Saul.

But see, this is the high point of King David's reign. Justice and kindness. It quickly went downhill a couple of chapters later when David abandoned both and committed horrific sin.

[10:57] But God had given David a promise that one of his descendants would rule on his throne forever over an everlasting kingdom. And as descendants of David, as kings of Israel and Judah came and went, and the kings in Jerusalem grew more and more corrupt, like the king Sean read about in that reading from Jeremiah 22.

The prophets proclaimed and clung to God's promise of a better king who would come. Jeremiah 23 verse 5 and 6. Behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, when I'll raise up for David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called. The Lord is our righteousness. Or Isaiah 9, 6 to 7.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be on his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness.

[12:24] From this time forth and forevermore, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Brothers and sisters, the kindness and justice of Jesus reach a focal point at the cross, but they don't cease at the cross.

Jesus sits on the throne of David. He rules forevermore. As Isaiah 9, verse 7 says, of the increase of his government and of his peace there's no end.

The rule of Jesus causes kindness and justice to increase.

Does that mean that the world will keep getting better and better until Jesus returns? No, I don't think it means that.

But is all righteousness and justice and peace deferred until the last day when Jesus returns? Well, no, it doesn't mean that. It certainly doesn't mean that. The reign of Jesus, of course it makes a difference in eternity, but it makes a difference now too.

[13:38] That's the expectation of the New Testament. It's the expectation of the apostles. It's the testimony of history. And what I want to do, and just kind of as Jen did in the kids' talk, in the remainder of this talk, I want to skate through the book of Acts and look at some of the ways that the rule of Jesus prompted justice and kindness in the early church.

Now, I don't want to stand here this morning and say to you, you must do justice and you must do kindness. Of course, God wants those things of us.

But what I want to do is just try and inspire us that God actually does this. He produces it in his people. This is the work of God. Not that the early church was perfect.

There were plenty of problems that sprang up in the early church. But the rule of Jesus caused justice and kindness to increase. And so here are seven things about the early church.

I might not get through all seven. I'll keep my eye on the clock. If I don't get through all seven, that's all right. First, they built real community. They built real community.

[14:50] By that I mean they built a community where people genuinely and generously shared their lives and possessions with each other. You see this in Acts chapter 2.

Have a look at Acts chapter 2, verse 42. Acts chapter 2, verse 42. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Now, there are four activities listed there. They listened to the word of God through the apostles' teaching. They prayed together. They shared meals together. And they devoted themselves, the second item in the list, to fellowship.

What's that? Well, literally, it's just a word that means sharing. They shared with one another. And it's illustrated in verse 44 and verse 45 of chapter 2. Verse 44.

We get a repeat of this description with a bit more detail in chapter 4.

[16:00] Turn over to chapter 4, verse 43. 4, verse 43. Sorry, verse 32.

I don't know why I've said... Oh, I've got my numbers muddled. 4, verse 32. Now, the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul. And no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

And with great power, the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon all of them. There was not a needy person among them. For as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as they had need.

Now, in the early church, people's attitude to their possessions and their wealth had changed. On the one hand, they had everything in common.

Whatever they owned, whatever they possessed, they viewed as being available for others to use. It wasn't theirs alone. It was for all, for any, whoever needed it.

[17:09] Beyond that, they were selling. They were liquidating assets, selling property so that the proceeds could be used for the needy. Now, we read this, and it sounds crazy to us, right?

Because, you know, in Australia, we view property as, you know, that's the most secure form of long-term investment.

Now, why would you sell off property to do this? You know, that's the thing you hang on to. And yet we probably all know people, we can probably all think of people who have had to sell their house, who have had to sell property in order to live.

You know, maybe they're out of work. Maybe they can't make the mortgage repayments. They're unsustainable. So selling the house was the only option they had to sort of erase their debt and enable them to feed their families and keep going.

But in the early church, people weren't just doing that for themselves. They were selling their properties to provide for others, to meet the needs of others.

And that extreme sharing was noteworthy. We meet one example of it here in verse 36 in chapter 4. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

[18:30] We meet this disciple Barnabas, who is one example of those who are doing this.

Barnabas is a beautiful character in the New Testament, the little glimpses we catch of him.

But that wasn't unique. He wasn't the only one. Verse 35 says, as many as had properties were doing that. 34, rather.

And if that's just one remarkable expression of their life together, it's that attitude of what's mine is yours.

They cared for one another so deeply that they shared whatever they had. No one said that anything that he had was his own. Whatever God had given them, that was available for others.

And that mindset extended not just to their possessions, but also to their talents and their skills and their gifts and abilities.

So flick over to Acts chapter 9. Acts chapter 9. Here we meet a woman named Tabitha, verse 36. Acts chapter 9, verse 36.

[19:35] Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which translated means Dorcas. We'll call her Tabitha, that feels a bit kinder. She was full of good works and acts of charity.

In those days she became ill and died. And when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to get to him, urging, please come to us without delay.

So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them.

And then the account goes on to describe how actually the Lord restores her life to her, gives her back to the church. But Tabitha, what was she, we don't know whether she had houses to sell, but she used what God had given her in the service of others.

She was a seamstress. She made clothes, garments. And all the widows could show the Apostle Peter, look what she made me, the clothing I'm wearing.

[20:46] Tabitha made it for me. Barnabas sold a field, Tabitha made clothing, each was sharing what God had given them with brothers and sisters in Christ.

Real community, because Jesus is on the throne. Is it the same today? You bet it is. I mean, I tried to write a list of some of the things that brothers and sisters in Christ have shared with me over the 38 years I've been a Christian.

There's no way I could write a complete list. But I wrote a long list. Homes. When Jen and I first got married, we squatted in different people's homes because we had nowhere to live.

Then in our first year of marriage, after that, we settled down in a house where the owner charged us well under the market rent because we were Bible college students and we couldn't afford much. And then later when we were at Bible college, someone paid our rent for an entire year. We've been loaned cars, as you heard Jen talk about that. Trailers.

[21:54] Given meals, hospitality, books, help moving house, painting, repairing things, gardening. Soon after I became a Christian, when I was about 13, I'd become a Christian through school, teacher at school, started going to church, a youth group.

And one of the middle-aged mother of one of my new friends at youth group at the church I was going to, met with me once a week for several months, sitting at their kitchen table to teach me to pray.

Now, people have cared for our kids. Now, not to mention all the kind and encouraging words that people have offered.

I mean, you could write your own list, couldn't you? I can't count the things people have shared with me, but I don't remember them all, but Jesus remembers. They're all Jesus' work.

They're the fruit of our King who reigns with justice and kindness. Well, there's the first thing about the early church, real community. Second thing, they cared for the weakest.

[22:59] We've already begun to see this in chapter 9, as we saw Tabitha, the clothes she made were for the widows of Joppa. Now, the Old Testament speaks of what Nicholas Wolterstorff has called the quartet of the vulnerable.

In the Bible, the quartet of the vulnerable are widows, orphans, foreigners and the poor. These are the people in the ancient world who were most vulnerable.

They were most in danger of kind of – they were on the margins of society, struggling to survive, vulnerable to abuse or mistreatment or neglect, with few means to care for themselves, no one to defend or speak for them.

Who are the vulnerable in our society? I mean, in many ways, we might think in those – we could think along the lines of those four categories, widows, orphans, foreigners and the poor. But, you know, we might think a little bit more broadly as well or maybe more specifically in some of those areas.

The vulnerable in our society, it's not just about money. I mean, having insufficient – being poor makes you vulnerable. But there's also social capital, access to services, the ability to find and take opportunities.

[24:16] All of these things contribute to whether someone can fully participate in the good things that society offers or whether they miss out. Healthcare, education, recreation, work.

You might think of people who are fleeing from family violence. Children in homes where there's family violence. The homeless and rough sleepers.

People living with disabilities or mental health disorders. Those experiencing long-term unemployment. Refugees. Unborn children.

Do you know, the leading cause of death in Australia is abortion. Do you know, the leading cause of death in Australia? Each year, abortion kills approximately the same number as all cancer deaths and all heart disease deaths combined.

In Australia, the most dangerous place to be for a human being to be is in the womb of their mother. And that's not even to begin to speak about frozen embryos kept in IVF clinics, many which are destined to be discarded.

[25:36] What happened in the early church? They cared for the weakest. They cared for the vulnerable. They opened their homes to travellers and offered hospitality.

They developed systems of care for widows. We see that in Acts chapter 6. Look at Acts chapter 6, verse 1. Acts chapter 6, verse 1. Now, in these days, when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

Now, notice there's a problem. Verse 1, there raises a problem. But notice there's already a daily distribution. There's already a system in place for the care of widows before this problem arises.

That every day, food or money or whatever goods are distributed to widows to provide for them. It's just that this problem has developed. The need is so great that some are missing out.

And so what the early church did is they refined their system. They improved it. They implemented a change. In chapter 6, what it is, is they appoint seven people.

[26 : 54] Verse 3, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. They appoint seven people to oversee the distribution so that no widow need miss out.

The outcome in verse 7, once this is done, is that the word of God continued to increase and the number of people. The number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem. Now, they cared for the needy.

Julian, the apostate, was right. The love of Jesus. Their care for the needy. And the church flourished and grew. Both abortion and the abandonment of infants were commonly practiced in the ancient world.

If family didn't want a child, they'd just leave it out on the street. And the post-New Testament evidence is not only that the early church strongly condemned abortion, but that also that Christians would take in abandoned infants.

If found alive, they'd care for them and raise them. If they found a child deceased, they'd give them at least a proper burial. At times, the church raised funds to redeem slaves, to buy their freedom, or to redeem prisoners of war.

[28 : 20] When plague struck in the mid-third century, Christians were at the forefront of providing care for plague victims. I mean, everyone else kind of scurried and ran, but Christians were at the forefront of providing care for those who were afflicted.

And then, you know, many of them succumbing to the plague themselves. Jesus is on the throne. The one who cleansed the leper by reaching out a hand and touching him.

The one who welcomed little children and blessed them. The one who gave sight to the blind. The one who honoured a poor widow. Who died for sinners. The Jesus who cared for the weakest is on the throne.

And so his followers care for the weakest. Thirdly, in the early church, they overcame prejudice. They overcame prejudice.

Very early in its existence, the church was confronted with one of the deep and abiding divisions of the ancient world. It was the ethnic division, the division between Jew and Gentile. Thirty-five years after Jesus, in the year AD 66, that division erupted in violence and war in the Jewish revolt in Judea.

[29 : 34] It was a bloody conflagration in which the Roman legions kind of swept through Galilee and Judea and crushed, ruthlessly crushed the Jewish rebellion.

Besieged Jerusalem. People, thousands and thousands, perished in famine and disease and then in violence as eventually the legions stormed the city and destroyed the temple in AD 70.

And then there was another Jewish rebellion in the second decade of 115 to 117 AD. This time not in Judea, but in the diaspora, in the other parts of the Roman Empire.

And then there was another Jewish rebellion in Judea again in AD 132. That division between Jew and Gentile. But Jesus showed the early church a different path.

In Acts 10, in Acts chapter 10, the apostle Peter had a vision. We read about his vision in Acts chapter 10, verse 11.

[30 : 40] He saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth.

In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, rise, Peter, kill and eat. But Peter said, by no means, Lord, for I've never eaten anything that's common or unclean.

And the voice came to him a second time, what God has made clean, do not call common. This happened three times and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. Now at face value, this vision appeared to be about clean and unclean food.

God saying you can eat anything, all food's clean for you. Food was one of those social distinctives or Jewish distinctives that created this barrier between Jews and Gentiles.

It meant Jews couldn't eat with Gentiles because Jews could only eat clean food. Jesus was tearing down that barrier.

[31 : 41] But this vision to Peter wasn't really just about food. It was actually about people. It was about immediately after the vision, God's spirit told Peter, or sent Peter to the house of Cornelius

the Centurion, a Gentile, to share the gospel with him.

And Peter understood the significance of what God had shown him. Acts chapter 10 verse 28, look at verse 28. He said to them, this is once he's reached that, he's in the home of Cornelius, he said to them, you yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or visit anyone of another nation.

But God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. 10 verse 34.

So Peter opened his mouth and said, truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

Verse 35, he calls Jesus, he says, Jesus is Lord of all. And he goes on as he shares the gospel with them, as the Holy Spirit pours, God pours out the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles.

[32 : 56] And Peter baptises them, they're welcomed in full and equal standing with Jewish believers. By the first century AD, Jews were scattered throughout the Mediterranean.

And Jews faced a choice. Separatism or assimilation. Remain Jewish or become like everyone else.

There were some Jews who remained separate. There were some Jews who abandoned their Jewishness and assimilated. But Jesus Christ showed a third way.

The way of welcome. Of accepting one another. Jews and Gentiles together in the same church. No one unclean. Quickly other barriers to social acceptance broke down too.

The barrier between slave and free. In the church, the slave had the same status as the free person, as a brother or sister in Christ. The barrier between rich and poor.

[34 : 04] In James 2, there's a strong warning against favouritism. The poor man must be welcomed and honoured as rich in faith and an heir of God's kingdom. Jesus healed the divisions of humanity.

Because he's on the throne, because he welcomes all, we welcome all. In the 2021 census, we've just had a census, but I don't think the results have been published from that one yet.

In the 2021 census, according to that, 8.6% of the population of Glendale is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. And 7.7% of Edgeworth.

Of course, there are other communities in the country where there's much higher percentages of Indigenous peoples, but in Glendale and Edgeworth, they reach more than double the state and national average.

Wouldn't it be great to see reconciliation between First Nations people and later arrivals in Australia played out in the church in love for one another?

[35 : 23] Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, of course, have for a long time been predominantly Anglo, but it is shifting. In Cameron Park, after Australia, the next most common country of birth is India.

Now, we have an opportunity to see divisions of humanity healed here, if it pleases God. Certainly, there's no place for prejudice in the church. There's a third thing.

The rule of Jesus enabled the early church to overcome prejudice. Fourth thing, their love crossed borders. The second half, we're now in Acts chapter 11, the second half of Acts chapter 11 tells of how the church sprang up in the city of Antioch in Syria.

Antioch was a church in which the barrier between Jew and Gentile had broken down. They were all together in one church. But we see there, beyond that even, that fellowship, their expressions of fellowship weren't confined to the church in Antioch, but actually crossed borders and boundaries.

So look at Acts 11, verse 27. Now, in these days, prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, and one of them, named Agabus, stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world.

[36 : 51] This took place in the days of Claudius. So the disciples determined everyone, according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

Now, do you notice the truly remarkable thing here? The remarkable thing is not the accurate prophecy. I mean, I guess that's remarkable. But there's...

Do you see where the famine was going to occur, according to the prophecy that God gave Agabus through his spirit? Who would be affected by this famine? Verse 28.

A great famine over all the world. Now, this occurred around AD 45 to 46, this famine.

The famine struck Egypt, and Egypt was the bread bowl of the Roman Empire. So, you know, basically the entire Roman Empire, certainly all the eastern Mediterranean, was going to be deeply affected by this.

[37 : 55] Grain prices skyrocketed. A great famine over all the world, at least the Roman Empire. Which means that the Christians in Antioch who heard this prophecy, they were going to be affected by the famine too.

They're living in the eastern Roman Empire. It's going to hit them as well. But what did they do? The disciples determined everyone according to his ability to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. They could have reasoned, you know, there are tough times ahead. We need to tighten our purse straps and look after ourselves. But even though they were facing famine too, they looked south towards Judea, where their brothers and sisters were poorer and they thought they're going to be hit harder.

They'll be less able to bear the cost of this famine. They'll be less able to ride out the hardships. And so they gave, freely, generously, according to their ability, they gave. I don't know whether this strikes us as remarkable.

I think it should. I mean, it kind of feels ordinary because I think we are more used to this today because of the impact of Christianity and Jesus through the ages. But, I mean, loving people in distant places whom you haven't even met isn't ordinary.

[39 : 27] It's the justice and kindness of our king. Barnabas, they sent this gift to Jerusalem through Barnabas and Saul. Barnabas and Saul, when they got there, we read about what happened in Galatians chapter 2.

While they were in Jerusalem, they met with Peter and with James, the brother of Jesus, and with the apostle John. And they discussed with them the gospel they preached and they agreed, yeah, we're preaching the same gospel.

Paul and Barnabas, you're going to the Gentiles. Peter, James and John, we're going to the Jews. But it's the same message, the same gospel. And then that little account Paul gives of his time in Jerusalem, he ends with these words in Galatians 2 verse 10, only they asked us to remember the poor.

The very thing, Paul says, I was eager to do. And Paul did remember. 10 to 12 years later, after preaching the gospel in Macedonia and Achaia, he took a collection from the churches he'd planted for the poor saints in Jerusalem and they carried a gift to Jerusalem again.

You get some hints about that in Acts. Later on in Acts, Paul talks about it at greater length in some of his epistles. Here was a love that crossed borders. Compassion and prayer for brothers and sisters in different places.

[40 : 46] How are we going? Fifthly, they stood with the persecuted. I might skip briefly over that one. In Acts chapter 12, Herod killed James, the brother of John. He threw the apostle Peter in prison.

The whole church united in prayer for Peter, who was facing his own execution. Elsewhere, we see in the New Testament multiple times of Christians' compassion for people who were in prison, sending food, sending gifts, sending people to minister to them, visiting them in their care for prisoners, exposing themselves to the danger that would come by standing with them, sharing in the danger of potentially sharing in their mistreatment.

Sixthly, they experienced radical liberation from evil. Let's have a look at this one and then we might draw things to a close. Turn to Acts chapter 19. Acts chapter 19. Acts 18 and 19 describe how the gospel first came to the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor.

This was the leading city of Asia Minor. It's probably, at the time, probably the third most important city in the Roman Empire after Rome and Alexandria. It was a strategic location. It became a ministry base for the gospel to go out throughout all of Asia.

That is sort of modern day Turkey. And it's known for its famous temple of Artemis. It may also have been a centre for the practice of magic and sorcery. Certainly, some of those who turned to Christ in Ephesus had been enmeshed in the practice of magic.

[42 : 18] And we read of their dramatic repentance in Acts chapter 19 verses 18 and 19. Look at those with me. Acts chapter 19 verse 18 and 19. Also, many of those who are now believers came confessing and divulging their practices.

And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to 50,000 pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. Verse 18 might speak more broadly of people coming confessing all manner of sins. Verse 19 focuses in on those specifically on those who practiced magic arts.

And the books they burned and gathered together are worth 50,000 pieces of silver we're told. Now that's a massive sum of money. Probably means 50,000 silver drachmas.

A drachma is equivalent to a denarii. So about one day's wage for a labourer or a worker. So 50,000 silver drachmas represents something like 8,333 weeks of work.

[43:30] The Australian average wage weekly wage this year is about \$2,000. So in Australian terms this is about \$17 million worth of books. I mean I don't know that you can really make equivalents like that but I mean the costliness of this repentance is stunning.

these are people who had been deeply invested and involved in the practice of magic and the practice of magic is at its best worthless and empty and at its worst the deception of demons and evil spirits.

I think the earlier bits of this chapter hint at that actually here in this context where there's this confrontation with evil spirits and Jesus' name and Jesus is shown to be the one who is in control and has power. Jesus delivered them from that.

He repudiated it so drastically and so thoroughly that they publicly burnt 160 years wages worth of blasphemous texts.

Why? Because Jesus is on the throne. Jesus is setting things right. He's bringing about a kingdom of justice and righteousness. For people today who are ensnared in addictions and enmeshed in patterns of evil Jesus is on the throne still offering the same liberation and freedom.

[45:05] Let's bring this to a close. We'll skip over point seven. The Nicene Creed from the fourth century has a line that goes like this.

We believe in one holy Catholic and apostolic church. Now the word Catholic there just means universal. It's not talking about the Roman Catholic church. It's talking about the one universal church.

We believe in one holy Catholic and apostolic church. It's a strange line. Do we believe in the church?

church. If you go to the New Testament the church is I don't think anywhere the object of our faith. The Bible the scriptures never call us to trust in the church or have faith in the church.

Can we really say we believe in the church? Jesus is the object of our faith right? We can only say we believe in the church because we first said we believe in the Father.

[46:14] We believe in the Son. We believe in the Holy Spirit. The only thing that makes the church remarkable is that Jesus Christ is on the throne ruling with justice and righteousness and kindness and he is changing his kingdom where he rules his domain he is bringing about the way things are supposed to be.

He's remaking humanity the way it's meant to be. He's setting things right. He's causing righteousness and justice and kindness and goodness and truth and mercy and compassion to increase.

Do we believe in the church? Well I believe in the church. because I believe in Jesus and I believe his rule is real.

Thanks be to God.