

SUMMER 8 - God's Sending Church

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[0 : 00] Well, friends, let's pray. Lord, we are so grateful to you for your great kindness to us in Jesus Christ.

We thank you for calling us to be your people. We thank you for using our lips to proclaim the glories of Jesus. We thank you for the opportunity to live in a way that pleases you and reflects you.

We pray tonight as we look at these early missionary endeavours and this early Gentile church, that you might teach us great things about you and your purposes and how to live in response to you.

And, Father, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Friends, just to tell you a bit about what's happening tonight, I'm starting this particular talk in an unusual way.

And if you want to see the passages behind what I'm doing, they're the last few verses of chapter 11 of Acts and the first two of Acts chapter 13.

[1 : 09] I'm using them and I'm going to put them in a sort of narrative form for you. That will probably infuriate some of you, but the rest of you engage you. So let's get started. I want you to come with me in your imagination.

We're going to gatecrash a home. The date is sometime in the year AD 47 and the location is a city called Antioch, the capital of what is the Roman province of Syria.

Now, this city is the third largest city in the Roman Empire. It is prosperous. It is important. Its population is mixed. And now that we've come to the door of this particular house, I want to take you in with me and I want you to see what we find inside.

So let's go through the door and I want to warn you about what we are going to find. You see, I brought you here so that you could sit down and watch what is going on. And this group of people meet together here every week.

They meet to talk about their God and they meet to serve Him. Now, as they worship here, they worship a Jewish God. But as you look around, you'll notice that strangely, not everyone is Jewish.

[2 : 17] And that's because the people here belong to a particular Jewish sect, a sect that is looking less and less Jewish as every day goes on. Like most Jewish sects, this one believes in the coming of a Jewish king, that is, a Messiah.

They believe that this Jewish king will rule the world for God. The different thing about this particular sect is that it believes the Messiah has already come.

These people say that he was born in Palestine some 50 years earlier and they believe that he'll come back, he came, he died, was crucified by the Romans and that he came back to life after three days and that now he rules at God's right hand.

They also believe that everyone, Jew or Gentile alike, who believes in Jesus can be forgiven by God. Everyone who believes can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and they Gentiles have themselves received this gift.

It is this belief that explains really the strange nature of these people here. So I want you to take a look around the room at them. Now, as I said earlier on, you'll notice that most of them are not Jews.

[3 : 27] There is a predominance of Gentiles. Let me introduce you to a few of them. Take this one over here. This man's name, his name is Nicholas. He is a native of Antioch and his religious history is particularly interesting.

You see, he was not a Jew by birth. He became a Jew later on in life and do you know what that means? He went through that painful rite of circumcision as an adult. Now, it was Asa's converted Jew that he first heard about Jesus and he knew that what he heard about Jesus had to be right and so he believed in Jesus as his Saviour and his Lord in the fairly early history of this particular sect.

He rose to prominence very quickly in it as a man who was full of the Holy Spirit. In fact, his gifts were so prominent that he was appointed as one of the people who would look after the interests of Greek-speaking Jews in the early days at Jerusalem.

He was one of the seven deacons appointed with Stephen in Acts chapter 6 and you know what happened here. Stephen and other Greek-speaking Jews were persecuted by the religious authorities in Jerusalem and they were run out of town, as it were, pushed out.

It was people like Nicholas and other Greek-speaking Jews who finally, in the journey north, arrived at Antioch. They began to speak to people about Jesus. People began to believe.

[4 : 52] And this new meeting was founded. This meeting that now has grown to the number you see here. But take a look over here. Look at these two guys. There's no problem telling their nationality, is there?

They're Jews. And the one on the right is called Barnabas and the one on the left, well, he's called Saul. And now Barnabas was sent up here by the Jerusalem believers when they heard that people were being converted and in part they just wanted to check out what was going on.

But he's now one of the principal teachers and encouragers and he decided to stay around in this city and stay around and help this church. And the people here in this church, they think the world of him.

They love him an awful lot. After all, his name is the Son of Encouragement and he is doing it all the time. And so I love having him around. Now let me tell you a little bit about the other guy, about Saul.

You'd never know it, but he was one of the main persecutors of the Jerusalem Christians. It's a bit strange, isn't it, that here he is up in the north with the people who fled from his very persecutions and now he's teaching and training them, not in the faith that he once decried, but in the faith that he now owns.

[6 : 03] God had miraculously turned this man around, turned him back from being a persecutor. In this weird twist of grace, he made him a believer in Jesus and a teacher of God's people. And now Paul and Barnabas, Paul as his name now is, and Barnabas, encourage and teach this large company of people that meet together in this home.

Every week they explain to the people here who Jesus is and what it means to believe in him for eternal life and what it means for everyday life that you do believe in him.

They've been in Antioch for well over a year now. And this Jewish sect has become so well known that the people of Antioch have developed a nickname for its adherents.

They call them Christians, that is followers of Jesus. But let me introduce you to someone else. Here is this guy over here. His name is Simeon.

He's got a surname, which is Niger, which means black. And you can see he's not a Jew. His skin, his black skin alone would let you know that. Well, Simeon is one of the principal teachers and prophets of this particular congregation.

[7:11] And over there, well, that's Lucius. He's one of the guys from Cyprus who started an evangelistic ministry among Gentiles at Antioch. And here's Menean over here.

He's a well-known friend of Herod Antipas. In fact, he grew up with Herod. He was Herod's playmate and schoolmate. And rumor has it that he was sometimes Herod's whipping boy as well because, you know, when Herod's been a naughty boy, it's not good to whip him, so you whip his mate.

And so that's probably what happened. Now, when I put them to you like that, they're an impressive lot of leaders, aren't they? Impressive people. But they're not the only ones. For the whole congregation is impressive.

The numbers here today that you see are nothing unusual. They turn up in these numbers every week to hear teachers instruct and encourage them. And they work hard at turning that instruction into action.

And let me give you an example. Not long ago, there was a group of visiting prophets from Jerusalem. And one of them was a man named Agabus.

[8:18] Now, Agabus told them, look, there's going to be a severe famine that will spread throughout the Roman world. And without batting an eyelid, the people in Antioch dipped their hands into their pockets and they raised a significant amount of money and they sent it off to their fellow Jews in Judea with Barnabas and with Saul or Paul.

And their reasoning went something like this. The saints in Jerusalem are the ones who sent us to preach the gospel. They are materially poor.

We are relatively well off. The least we can do is express our gratitude to God and help them out. As you see, these Christians here who meet in Antioch are an exceptionally generous group of people.

They know the gospel. They understand the gospel. They live the gospel. But let's get back to our meeting here. I brought you here deliberately today. You see, for some weeks and months now, these people in Antioch have been aware that God has been especially gracious to them.

They realize the gifts God has given them and they know that it must be for a purpose. And so they've been fasting and they've been praying. And today it happened.

[9:37] As they met here today to hear from God through His prophets and teachers, as they met to serve each other, God somehow spoke to them. The Holy Spirit told them to do something.

I'm not sure exactly how it happened. We're not told. But I suspect that one of the prophets or some of them together had been thinking and praying about the matter and perhaps come up with an idea, a plan, and tested it out with the others, brought it to the meeting, said, what do you reckon?

This is what I think God is saying to us. And all jumped on it and immediately said, yes, that's exactly what we ought to be doing. They saw it was from God. Like I said, we don't know if that's what happened because we're not told.

But perhaps that's what happened. And the plan was this. The gospel had not yet touched the main centers of the world. The gospel had not yet got into Asia and to Greece and it's time it did.

And we're well geographically placed to send people to those parts of the world. We're well financially resourced to send people. We're well situated in terms of personnel and gifts to send people.

[10:43] So, the Holy Spirit's telling us, let's do it. And so they decided, or the Holy Spirit decided, to set apart for them, Paul and Barnabas for the work and they would go to parts of the world that the gospel had never gone.

Anyway, everyone realizes it's a clear plan from God. Today they're fasting and praying. They commissioned Paul and Barnabas and it's a day of very significant importance for today.

The first officially appointed overseas missionaries are about to set off into the unknown. And the question is in everyone's minds. What awaits them?

What will God do? This spirit-inspired thrust into the unknown. What will happen? What is God going to do through this appointment of these men?

Now, although I can't give you the details today, if you were to read on an Acts, you'd find some of them. What I can tell you is that the results were so outstanding that one, that a man once labelled Paul and his companions, those who have turned the whole world upside down.

[11:54] Friends, before we move on to the rest of Acts 13, I just want to reflect on this little cameo that I've presented for you. I've tried to do it, like I said, from the end of Acts 11 and the beginning of Acts 13. I want to reiterate something that I said in the very first part, first of these talks.

Do you remember what I said? I said, the book of Acts is a description of what God did in the first century. It describes the work of the Holy Spirit in the first century.

It does not mean that it is a prescription that ought to happen in every context, in every era of church history. However, it does appear to me that the writer does want us to show how important this church Antioch was for the expansion of Christianity.

But I also wondered whether he wanted to tell us and show us what a spirit-filled church looks like. I think he wanted to show us what happens to a group of people when the Holy Spirit moves in them.

I think he wants to give us a model of church. And it's that I want to concentrate on for a moment because I want to tell you what this church looks like. When you really think about it, when you analyse it, what does it look like?

[13:02] Let me give you a summary. And I've got too many points to give you on the fingers of one hand. And so here it is. We see a church, don't we, that is obviously captivated by Jesus.

This church at Antioch is like that, obviously captivated by Jesus. Two, we see a church that has its eyes fixed on God's purpose.

That is, they have the gospel and the outreach of the gospel primary in their concerns. Three, we see a church committed to the hearing of God's word.

How can I tell that? Well, they've got this multiplicity of prophets and multiple prophets are for declaring multiple words. Four, it's a church open to new directions from God.

You see that in the text, don't you? Five, it's aligned with the mind and work of the Holy Spirit wanting to constantly find out what the Holy Spirit is saying. Six, it is outward looking.

[14:00] Its focus is not on itself but out there. Seven, it is so wonderfully adventurous, isn't it? See, we're an inheritance of 2,000 years of Christian history.

These folk are right at the edge of Christian expansion and they're adventurous. They think and they pray and they ask God what is he going to do and they listen to what God has to say and they say, let's do it so we'll just send these guys and off they go.

Eight, it is prayerful and dependent, isn't it? It seeks God in prayer and it seeks to do God's will and it depends upon him. Nine, it is financially supportive and generous.

We saw that because it gives to the Jerusalem Christians. Ten, it is sacrificial in personnel. You know the wonderful thing about it, God says, send your best and they say, sure, off they go, we'll commission them.

You see, they don't just send the people that they can spare. They take their main teachers and encouragers and they say, these are for someone else. This is mimicking the grace of God, isn't it?

[15:08] Who sends his best into the world. So here is a church that says, we will send our best as well. Eleven, it is a church where people serve God and each other.

That's what I think the word worshipping there means. It means serving God but also there's aspects of serving each other. And twelve, it is a sending church. It sends people from its midst.

It doesn't try to cling on to them, it sends them out. I wonder whether they learnt, you see, because the Jerusalem church did try to hold on to people and finally persecution spread it out and they're the ones that are up there and they've already been on the move so they're keeping on moving.

And thirteen, it is a church that is serious about being God's people in God's world. They fast and they pray and they check things out and then they obey.

Friends, I think this church is a church that serves such a bright and shining light. It is a church that would be enormously exciting to be involved with, isn't it? This is a place where things are happening, where God is at work and the people want to be in tune with God and active with Him.

[16:20] It is a model you might like to compare your own church with. It is a model we might compare Holy Trinity to. So friends, we might ask ourselves here at Holy Trinity, those of you who are not from here, you can listen in to and perhaps ask these of your own congregation.

Is our church so obviously captivated by the Lord Jesus? Or is it captivated by the world, success, reputation, prestige or power? Is our church one which has its eyes fixed on God's purpose?

That is, the gospel as a priority. Is our church committed to hearing God's word? Or is it wanting to entertain, pander to people's personal demands, train people in skills other than the ministry of word skills?

Is our church open to new directions from God? Would we be happy if God intervened in some way, in some dramatic way and told us to do something that was so sort of out of left field that we felt under threat?

Would we open the door to it? Is our church aligned with the mind and work of the Holy Spirit? Or is it quenching the Holy Spirit?

[17:32] Such as when God pushes us outside our normal boundaries and we say, we can't have change, that would be a bit much. Is our church outward looking? Or is it inward looking?

Always wanting to focus on our own needs? Is our church adventurous? That is, is it constantly checking out what new thing God might be doing and throwing its weight behind those new things?

Or is it traditional and overly cautious? That is, is it constantly saying, but we have always done things this way, it cannot be done that way.

Is our church prayerful and dependent? Or is it constantly scheming and planning but doing so in an independent and prayerless manner? Is it sacrificial in its personnel?

So if the Lord were to say, well, you know, both Andrews, off somewhere else tomorrow, we are sending you, could we do it?

[18:34] does it only give or send those it can spare? Is our church a church where people serve God and each other?

Or is it one where people want to be served by others all the time? Where people grab all that they can get? Are we a church that is apathetic about others and their needs or keen to serve?

Is our church a sending church or is it a grabbing church? Reaching out for what it can get itself and reluctant to send? Finally, is our church a church that is serious about being God's people and God's world?

Is it a church that prays fast and checks things out? And I know there are a number in our church who do do exactly these things. Or does it just go on week after week, year after year, decade after decade in apathy?

Friends, I think the Antioch church is a great rebuke and challenge to us at times. It's just wonderful to see. There's such a freshness about it, isn't there? Such a lack of being tied down.

[19:38] Let's observe what we see here and let's imitate it. Okay, those observations, let's now turn to Acts 13, the rest of it. Now, you'd be glad to know that if we kept going at the pace we were going, we would not make it, well, we'd be here all night.

We're going to now move at a bit more pace, so let's follow and have a look more closely at the text here. Paul and Barnabas sail for Cyprus. We're told that in verse 4. Now, Cyprus has been settled by Phoenicians and Greeks and in 58 AD it was, BC, it was annexed by Rome.

At the same time, at the time we're looking at, sorry, it was governed by a Roman proconsul called Sergius Paulus. Sergius Paulus was a member of a noble Roman family with a record of public service over several generations.

So it's from good stock this man. Anyway, Paul and Barnabas, they land at Salamis, the principal city of Cyprus. We're not, verse 5 tells us that when they arrive they visit the Jewish synagogues and preach the gospel.

We're not told what sort of reaction that they get here in Cyprus. In any case, they journey on and they take the main road through the island. By the way, you've got a little map on your outlines at the back there and you can actually physically see where they go.

[20:50] Now when they arrive at New Paphos, they're summoned before Sergius Paulus. Probably, I reckon, probably so he could satisfy himself that their activity and their preaching were not a threat to public order.

You know, so he's just checking them out, seeing that, you know, they weren't doing things they shouldn't do. Anyway, part of Sergius Paulus' court consists of this Jewish magician, a false prophet called Elymas or if you like, Bar-Jesus.

He attempted to turn the proconsul against Paul and Barnabas and the message they proclaim and Paul denounces them as being a tool of the devil. There's no mincing words, is there really, with him?

He also announced that God would strike him with a temporary blindness, which God promptly did and the proconsul sees all of this and verse 12 says he believed.

I want you to notice, have a look at verse 12 and I want you to notice what it is that the proconsul is impressed with because he's not a very, he's not a very 21st century man.

[21:57] You see, because the thing that impresses him most is apparently not the miraculous. What the text says is, the reason for his belief is his astonishment at the teaching about the Lord.

He's astonished at the teaching about the Lord. Not at the miracle, but about the Lord and I presume that means who he was and what he did. Let's move on, verses 13 to 52.

The missionaries make their way north onto the mainland, then they go on to Perga, which is about eight kilometres inland on the coastal road from Ephesus to Tarsus. The only incident recorded here is the departure of John Mark and we're not told why he departs.

John Mark is, if you want to do a Bible study, it's a very interesting little Bible study to do some research on John Mark, otherwise known as Mark, sometimes known as John. There are only a number of options, I think.

Why does he leave? Here's some suggestions for you. It appears that from this time on, Paul is considered the senior member in the missionary band.

[23 : 04] His name invariably occurs first from here on in. Now, let me give you a bit of inside information. perhaps John Mark is upset that his uncle, Barnabas, is no longer the senior person.

Who knows? Perhaps John Mark left because he's concerned about what he heard of Paul's preaching in his preaching particularly about Christ to Gentiles without requiring them to submit to the Jewish law.

We don't know. Perhaps he hadn't reckoned on an extended journey into Galatia when he first set out. Perhaps he'd just become sick or something. We do not know the reason. However, I wonder whether it's John Mark who reported to the Christians in Jerusalem about Paul's practice of not requiring converts to keep Jewish food laws.

And I wonder whether that's what causes in part at least things like chapter 15 which we'll look at on Wednesday. No matter what it was, we find out that somehow rumours get down to Jerusalem that upset some Jewish Christians and that they are related to what Gentile Christians are being asked to receive and asked to do.

And we'll find out how it's resolved on Wednesday night. It's a marvellous story. Read ahead. Read chapter 15. Anyway, verse 14. Missionaries go to the region of Galatia. Paul chooses to concentrate his efforts on the cities of southern Galatia.

[24 : 28] First city, the city in Antioch. It is about 160 kilometres north of Perga. It's in the highlands. And we know from other parts of the New Testament that Paul was sick at this time.

Galatians 4.13 if you want to take a note indicates that. Perhaps he and Barnabas thought, well, let's get up into the highlands for the climate to be a bit better and let's see if some healing can take place or some help is there or whatever.

Anyway, the city in Antioch was populated by Roman citizens. It had a large Jewish community as well. And Paul and Barnabas therefore visit the community at the synagogue. They do the normal thing.

The normal readings are given. And after this the governing body of the synagogue invite Paul and Barnabas to give them a what they call word of exhortation. And Paul agrees and he stands up and delivers a message and the speech begins in verse 16.

Now it probably amounts I think to a sample sermon of what you might have said to a group to a Jewish audience if you're invited to speak. And I want you to notice it's got three main points.

[25 : 36] I'm just going to summarize. You can read the details later on. First, Paul stresses that God has fulfilled his promise to Israel by bringing it a saviour, Jesus.

God has fulfilled his promise and brought to Israel a saviour, Jesus. Two, you can see that in verse 23 by the way. Two, the salvation offered in Jesus is a salvation that could not be gained through the Old Testament law.

Rather, it is offered by God to all simply on the grounds of belief in Jesus. Friends, this is an incredible thing that you are being offered a salvation that could not be offered through Jewish law and it comes in only one way through Jesus.

You can see that in verses 38 and 39. Third, that makes it imperative that Jews hear properly and do not scoff at the message because to scoff at the message is basically to scoff at God.

That's stated in verses 40 and 41. Now, I reckon Paul must have known the stir that he would cause. Don't you? It's fairly obvious to say these things to Jewish people.

[26 : 48] You can expect some sort of reaction. He was saying that Jesus is better than Moses. Basically, Jesus is better than Moses. He's saying that to Jews that salvation comes by faith rather than keeping the law.

He was saying that Jews, despite all their religious endeavours, still needed to be saved. Now, if he just told them that they were sinful, could be a bit more rigorous in their keeping of Old Testament law, then he probably would not have provoked such a reaction.

But he's really saying things that cut to the heart of what Jewish faith thinks is important. He's doing much more, you see. He's telling good religious people that no matter how honestly or sincerely they practise their religion, it will be of no use to them.

Understandably, Paul's message brings about much debate and people ask many questions and then they look for a further, they try to book a further appointment as it were. That's stated in verse 42.

However, what appears to happen is people go away from this meeting and it becomes the talk of the town and they go and they talk to everyone else and they spread the news among their friends and they're saying, why don't you come along to this next booking?

[28 : 02] Why don't you come along and listen? And the result is that people just flock in and you can see that in verse 44. And among those gathered are clearly a number of Gentiles.

They're specifically mentioned in verse 48. Anyway, the Jews see all of this, they become jealous, they begin contradicting Paul. You can see that in verse 45. And so instead of being overjoyed that Gentiles are hearing the word of God, they become jealous.

They speak out against what Paul is saying and Paul and Barnabas respond and speak to them boldly. They admit it's appropriate that they speak to Jews first. That's right. But they also make the point that God has always intended that the message be spoken to Gentiles.

And since Jews rejected the message, he's going to continue to preach it to Gentiles. And a number of Gentiles are converted. Jewish reaction reaches its pinnacle. They stir up persecution and they chase the missionaries out of town.

Mind you, if you read on, you'll find they get pretty used to this happening to them. It happens time and time again. You can see it in verse 50. But I want you to notice the Gentile reaction.

[29 : 09] up until now, many of them had longed to be inside us. Remember we saw that last week? Longed to be in with the Jews, longed to be able to practice and belong to Jewish religion.

They'd coveted Jewish faith in God, but the Jews made it clear there will be no entry to you unless you go through the rigorous rites of circumcision and so on.

Now a Jewish religion, a Jewish sect, but a Jewish religion is actually welcoming them in and declaring to them that they too can be right with God.

Now friends, I want to wrap this up by making some observations for us because there are lots of them here. I wonder if I could just make these observations. First, did you notice the crux of Paul's sermon?

Paul is saying what matters to God is not morality, not religiosity, but a restored relationship with God and that can only be gained in one way, through Jesus Christ, through his death and his resurrection.

[30 : 19] Two, did you notice the end of the chapter? The missionaries are thrown out of town, yet they go on their way rejoicing, filled with the Holy Spirit. That's a lovely statement, isn't it?

And if you read on in Acts, you'll see it happen time and time again. Like Paul, sort of singing in prison, chained up in Acts chapter 16. You see, I think for us often joy is circumstantial, isn't it?

That is, it depends on our circumstances. For these guys, joy is found in being where God is and doing what God is doing. Joy is found in being where God is and doing what God is doing.

Circumstances are not what matters. Being with God and being involved in God's purposes is where it's at.

They can be suffering, they can be beaten up, they can be being persecuted. These things in one sense don't matter as long as they are with God and lined up with His purposes.

[31 : 25] Friends, that is hard to get into your being. But if you do, it will change your life because you will be transportable. You will go anywhere, do anything because God is transportable.

That is, God goes everywhere and you can be with Him and have your confidence in Him and be bound to Him. You can even suffer with His Son. Friends, we need to learn this, that joy is found in being where God is and in doing what God is doing.

And if you are there, all else can just fade away into insignificance. Well, not insignificance, but less priority and less worry.

Third, did you notice that we see the Gospel met with various reactions and responses? I wonder if you noticed them in the passage. There is the positive response. This especially from those who are spiritually deprived.

Did you notice that? Here are the Gentiles, the spiritually deprived ones. And they love it. They receive it. And even those in positions of secular power love it and receive it.

[32 : 34] But those who should know better, reject it. So the positive response, then there's a negative response. This is especially seen with those who have religious or supernatural vested interests.

Just if I can make this aside, most difficulty, most persecution that I've experienced in ministry has not come from people that don't have any religious commitment.

It has come from Christians who have strong religious commitment. Most of the pain I have encountered in being a minister of the Gospel comes from religious people. Much of it comes from those who name the name of Christ.

My experience is that Christians are secure, but sometimes they have a tendency to feel that they've got his God and his ways neatly boxed up, neatly tied down, and you say anything against this and then you're in the gun.

If you disturb them, then you will be persecuted. If you aggravate them, then you'll be treated sometimes very cruelly indeed. And the place this happens most is when you are plainest about the most fundamental of issues.

[33 : 49] I'm sorry, that's hard to hear, isn't it? But it's true. Look at verse 48. So have a look at it there.

It's a very interesting, just little one-liner. Sorry, I'm looking at, I'm after verse 48. 48. When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord, and as many as had been destined to eternal life became believers.

Read it again. It means what it says. Those who are appointed to eternal life became believers. Reactions to the gospel are in God's hands.

He oversees people's reactions. He chooses people, and those who are chosen by him believe. Now, what can we learn about this?

Do you remember that charter given right at the beginning of Acts 1? To our spiritual ancestors and representatives, that charter given to us through them, a charter to be witnesses to Christ from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth?

[35 : 05] That is, a charter to present the gospel? What is our job? Is it to make people believe? No, that's God's work.

That's God's job. We're just to be faithful, not successful. Faithful, not successful. See, God doesn't look at our success and measure us.

Unlike Christians and unlike the world, God does not look at our success and measure us. Success is God's area. He looks at faithfulness.

This is our area. This is our responsibility. This is what we are to do, to hear his word and to obey it.

And so you will have two gospel ministers holding the same beliefs, holding the same convictions, Christians. One will work their guts out their whole life to see a church grow.

[36 : 12] And it won't. And another will work their guts out too. And their ministry will thrive. And people, masses of people will become Christians.

Whose work is it? both men love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Both women in the ministry they're involved in love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's God's work, isn't it? It is God who gives the growth. Now our job is to be faithful. Faithfulness in what?

God's content, in our getting on with obeying him in the preaching of the gospel, in our being godly, in our loving the people of God and speaking the truth of God to them.

This is our job to be faithful. And God will grant success as he sees fit. And we ought not to measure ourselves by what happens.

[37 : 26] That is the way the world measures things. So let us pray. Our Father, we see so many things in these passages that mirror our own situation and our own church life.

We see people like the people we meet. We see people like the people we'd like to be. We see people like people that we definitely don't want to be.

Father, we pray that we'd be people that you want us to be. Please help us to be formed by your word, open to the work of your spirit in our lives.

Please help us, particularly as we struggle with sin. We know there are areas of our lives which are not what they should be. Please grant us deliverance.

Please help us. Please renew us by your Holy Spirit God. And be at work in us to carve us into people like your son.

[38 : 44] And Father, by your grace, we pray that in our ministry, whatever shape it takes, that you would cause people to come to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.