

When Mission Meets Tradition

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Preacher: Dr. Wes Feltner

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

So we should finish the series up here before too long. But tonight, we're going to look at a fairly lengthy section of Acts, Acts 21, 22, and 23, a good portion of that as Paul finds himself in Jerusalem.

When we last left him, he was leaving Ephesus, had a conversation, a very tearful moment with the leaders there in Ephesus. They accompanied him to the ship, and then he comes to Jerusalem.

[2 : 29] And we pick that up here in Acts chapter 22, beginning at verse 1. If you're able to stand, please do so as we honor the reading of God's Word. Acts chapter 22.

This is Paul speaking here and Luke recording this. He says,

And I said, And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus.

And one in Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who live there, came to me and standing by me said to me, Brother Saul, receive your sight.

And at that very hour, I received my sight and saw him. And he said, And when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance.

[5 : 05] And I saw him saying to me, Make haste and go out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me. And I said, Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another, I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you.

And when the blood of Stephen, your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him. And he said to me, Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.

Now watch verse 22. Up to this word, they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live.

This is God's word. Pray with me. Pray for me tonight. And let's ask God to teach us. Let's pray. Lord, here we are. As we come underneath the authority of your word.

Lord, I pray that you would speak to us tonight. Lord, I pray that we would understand the core of the gospel. And so Lord, I just ask for your help and that your spirit would guide me to speak your words and only your words.

[6 : 26] This is your time. May you be exalted in everything that is said and all that we do. And we lift up Christ and pray this in his name. And God's people said, Amen.

You can be seated. It opened on Broadway in 1964. It would go on to become the first musical in history to surpass 3,000 performances.

In fact, at one point, it held the record for the longest running Broadway show of about 10 years until it was surpassed by the musical called Grease.

Ultimately, if you've ever seen this Broadway show, you know the story. And if you've not seen the Broadway show, you may have at least seen the 1971 film.

The musical that I'm referring to is Fiddler on the Roof. Fiddler on the Roof. It's a story that takes place in 1905 in a little village.

[7 : 25] And there's a Jewish man named Tevye. Tevye lives with his wife and his five daughters. And not only are they dealing with like external chaos, they're also dealing with a personal crisis.

Tevye has five daughters and three of them want to do something that is absolutely unthinkable. They want to marry for love.

According to, as opposed to getting married by their father, determining and arranging who they would marry, which was the tradition longstanding within their Jewish community.

In fact, if there's one thing that you do not do in this community, it's go against tradition. That's because tradition impacts all of life.

Here in Anateka, we have traditions for everything. How to sleep, how to eat. How to work.

[8 : 33] How to wear clothes. For instance, we always keep our heads covered. And always wear a little prayer shawl.

This shows our constant devotion to God. You may ask, How did this tradition get started? I'll tell you.

I don't know. But it's a tradition. And because of our traditions, every one of us knows who he is and what God expects him to do.

That's really interesting. Think of that last line. Because of our traditions, everybody knows who he is and what God expects for him to do.

In a real sense, tradition determines everything. It determines what you eat. It determines where you sleep. It determines the clothes that you wear. And most importantly, it determines what God expects of you.

[9 : 40] And the very idea that anybody would even think about going against tradition is unthinkable. Now, Faith Family, most of us might not take it that far.

But I bet you, even if you do not consider yourself a very traditional person, my guess is you can relate to that feeling. If we are honest, many of us have traditions that we really like.

We have traditions that make us feel very comfortable. We have traditions that make us feel safe and we cling to them. And they might be traditions that are quite small in the big scheme of things.

Like for you, it might just be every year on the 4th of July, you get together with the same group of people and there is just something about firing up that grill that you cherish and that you long for.

Maybe for you, you go up every single year to that cabin up north. Some of you have a cabin you've kept in the family out of tradition. Maybe when you get close to Christmas time, you get that feeling of just that special time of year and you can't wait to bust out all the decorations and enjoy all the food because there's something about that tradition.

[10 : 57] It's why when you travel to other countries, you'll experience a lot of very different things. In fact, even when you travel to different parts of the U.S., you experience that.

Down south, we drink our sweet tea. We say, yes sir and yes ma'am and we literally fry everything, right? That's just a southern tradition.

But there are some traditions that go much deeper. The kind of traditions that really do define the very essence of who we are. And sometimes we experience those even in churches, religious traditions.

And every church and every denomination has them. For example, some of you sprinkled a baby or had someone in your family sprinkled a child when their baby was born.

Even though that's nowhere in Scripture at all, a lot of churches practice that as a tradition. There are churches that have specific programs that they do every single year.

[11 : 58] Worship styles. Some churches say you should only sing out of a hymnal. Some churches say you have to have a praise band. Here at Faith Family, we say you don't have to do either, right?

You can get away with not having either of those. Or maybe it's Bible translations. Oh, there are denominations that will get so hung up on what's the right English translation to use.

Or church governance. Should we be congregational or Presbyterian or Episcopalian model? There's all kinds of, say it with me, traditions.

Everybody has them. Everybody practices them. And many of us have certain ones that we cling to tightly. Why is that the case?

Here's why. And how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in one word. Tradition! Tradition!

[12 : 57] Tradition! Tradition! Tradition! Tradition! You'll be humming that later. You're welcome. All right?

It's how we keep our balance. I mean, the thing that keeps our life balanced is holding on and clinging to these traditions, which means if somebody begins to poke at those traditions, if somebody begins to undercut those traditions, particularly the ones that are at the very core of who you are, people get angry, people become divided, and they will even get hostile.

And that's exactly what's happening in Acts chapter 22. The apostle Paul is in Jerusalem, and he finds himself in hot water with the Jews.

Why? Because in their mind, Paul is undermining all of their traditions. Every time I point to you, you know what to say.

Traditions! Notice here, first of all, the reality of religious opposition. Paul is facing persecution from the religious leaders. And of course, that is not new at this point in the book of Acts, and it's certainly not new in the life of the apostle Paul.

[14 : 20] This is like another day at the office for Paul to experience persecution and persecution from the hands of religious leaders. Now, keep in mind, this was the very thing that the Lord told Paul when Paul was called into ministry.

Remember back in Acts chapter 9 and verse 15. Notice it here. But the Lord said to Paul, Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and the kings and the children of Israel.

Now look at this verse. For I will show him how much he must suffer for my name. And Paul's life certainly fulfilled that, right?

I mean, we've seen that over and over again. Paul even said this to the leaders in Ephesus. You remember back in Acts chapter 20 and verse 22. Now behold, I'm going to Jerusalem constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except this.

This is what I know will happen to me when I get to Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit testifies to me that in every city, imprisonment and afflictions await me. And even before arriving in Jerusalem, Paul gets warned of this very opposition that he's going to face.

[15 : 34] Now chapter 21 and verse 11. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, thus says the Holy Spirit, this is how the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt, that is you, Paul, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

And when he heard this, we and the people urged him not to go to Jerusalem. And Paul answered this, what are you doing? Weeping and breaking my heart.

I am ready, not only to be imprisoned, but even die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

Here's my point, faith family. From day one, Paul knew that this mission was going to face opposition. He knew that he was going to experience persecution.

This was not new to him. Yes, it drained him at times. It discouraged him at times. But he knew that this is what God had called him to do. And when Paul arrives in Jerusalem, this is exactly what he will experience.

[16 : 42] That prophecy that they said, this is what's going to happen when you get to Jerusalem, came to pass. Look at chapter 21 and verse 27. Chapter 21 and verse 27.

Now, when the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help.

This is the man who's teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he has brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.

That is the temple. And then all the city was stirred and the people ran together and they seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple. And at once the gates were shut. And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.

And so Paul gets to Jerusalem. He knew from day one, this is going to be hard. I'm going to face opposition. He told the Ephesian elders, listen, I know that what awaits me is imprisonment and affliction.

[17 : 49] Before he even gets to Jerusalem, he's told, the Spirit testifies that when you get there, you're going to suffer. And sure enough, when Paul gets to Jerusalem, he is opposed and opposed violently.

Now, who is doing the opposition? Who is doing the persecution? And the answer is religious people. Jewish people.

And I emphasize this because one of the lessons that we've learned throughout the book of Acts is this. Notice it on the screen. Religion is the main opposition to the gospel mission.

Religion is the main opposition in the book of Acts to the gospel mission. The biggest opposition in the early church was not pagan Gentiles.

It was religious Jews. The resistance that Jesus faced was not prostitutes. It was Pharisees. Listen to me. And this is so important.

[18 : 51] This gets to the very heart and culture that we have here at Faith Family. There is something at the core of religion that is antithetical to the gospel message.

There is something at the core of religion that is antithetical to the gospel message. So much so that when the gospel is proclaimed, when the gospel is preached, it faces opposition and often violently.

People get offended, they get hurt, they get upset, and they even get violent. And here's the question I want to ask. Why? I mean, at this point in the book of Acts, like, why is it that the religious people here are so violent, so upset at Paul and those that preach the good news?

What's going on here? Well, Luke tells us why this is the case. Look at verse 28 again. This is chapter 21, verse 28. Crying out, men of Israel, help.

This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against, say these three words with me, he's teaching against the people, against the law, and against this place, which is the temple.

[20 : 08] In other words, the three things the Jewish leaders accuse Paul of doing is that in their minds, he's preaching against the people of God, the law of God, and the temple of God.

In other words, Paul is going against all of their tradition. He's speaking against all of our traditions. He's going against us as a people.

He's saying things against the very law of Moses and the very temple of God. He's under... This Jewish man isn't being very Jewish. In fact, quite the contrary, he's being anti-Jewish.

Where have you heard that before? Now, note here, faith family, that it's important that Paul is not speaking negatively about the people or the law or the temple.

In other words, Paul's not saying this, I hate Jewish people and everybody ought to disobey the law and we should burn this temple down. That is not what Paul is saying. That's what they are accusing Paul of doing, but that's not what Paul is saying.

[21 : 14] Here's what Paul is saying. He's saying, being Jewish, following the law of Moses and offering sacrifices in the temple does not make you right with God.

Which, of course, was the very motivation for why they were doing those things. Christians. They thought they were right with God. They thought they had a righteous standing before God because they were Jewish and they followed the law and they practiced the sacrifices.

And Paul is coming along and saying, not that the temple is bad, not that the law is bad, not that it's bad that you're Jewish, it's just none of that accounts for anything before God.

Listen to the, notice this on the screen, faith in with, the last thing religious people want to hear is that their religious traditions don't earn them any righteousness before God.

Then why am I doing it? If coming to church isn't gaining me any righteousness before God, then why come to church? If following the law isn't making God love me more, then why would I follow the law?

[22 : 23] In other words, their very motivation for doing the very things they were doing was to earn a better standing before God. And Paul is saying, no, no, no, you can't do that. That's not the gospel. And they hated him for it.

Think about it, faith family, think about it. Do you remember what Tevye said? Our traditions give us balance. If traditions are what give you balance and you're told that your traditions don't ultimately matter, then what happens?

All of a sudden your life becomes imbalanced. everything is up in the air and you become very, very uncomfortable because your traditions are being pulled away.

And this is enough to make people absolutely go insane. They are going mad at Paul because of what he's saying. In fact, notice the links to which the Jewish people are willing to protect their tradition.

Look at chapter 23 and verse 12. I'm warmed up now. I may preach a while. Here we go. Chapter 23, verse 12. It says, When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath.

[23 : 31] Watch this. Neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. Now, I don't know what it's like where you come from, but that's pretty hostile.

That's a pretty vicious response to somebody undercutting your traditions, at least the way you view that. They're saying, literally, we're going to make an oath. We're going to make a pact.

We're going to make an agreement. We're not going to eat. We're not going to sleep. We're not going to drink until one thing is accomplished, namely, Paul is dead. That is how serious the Jewish people respond to Paul.

Now, most of us do not get that upset when we disagree. I say most of us, right? Most of us don't take it that far, but when you see that kind of response, your immediate question should be this.

What's going on under the surface? Amen? Are you with me? When you see somebody totally lose their cool, you almost always know there's something more going on underneath than just their reaction, right?

[24 : 42] It's almost never the issue. It's often what's going on underneath the issue. And so I want to ask the question, listen, if they're willing to respond this way, if the Jewish leaders are willing to say, we're going to make an oath and we're not going to eat until Paul is dead, I want to know what's going on under the hood.

What's going on in the heart? What's really taking place here? So the question is, why would religious people get this angry?

Answer? They hate? That's usually the answer in this sermon, but not this one, right? They hate the grace of God.

What? What? The grace of God? Who would get angry over the grace of God?

And the answer is religious people. Religious people hate the gospel of grace. Let me prove it to you. In chapter 22, which is the chapter we read to begin the sermon, the apostle Paul is going to be given the opportunity to speak to the Jewish people and to share his testimony and to present the information before the group.

[26 : 04] In fact, pick it up in verse 39 of chapter 21. Verse 39 of chapter 21 and you'll see where Paul begins to do this. Paul replied, I'm a Jew.

I'm a Jew. In Tarsus of Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city, I beg you, permit me to speak to the people. And when they had given him permission, Paul standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people.

And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language saying, Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you. Okay, so Paul gets this opportunity to speak and he's going to lay it out there and I'm basically going to summarize the next almost 20 verses.

Paul starts off this whole dialogue by saying, I'm a Jew. And their response would have been, yes, we love that about you. We're Jewish too. That's fantastic.

Not only am I a Jew, but I was educated under Gamaliel. Well, that's fantastic too. We love that. You studied under the very, very best.

[27 : 14] And I was extremely zealous just like you're zealous. Mike Tyson loves that. That's fantastic. We are committed. You are committed. In fact, I even persecuted Christians.

I oversaw their death and now they're really loving it. Like, this man's awesome. You can't get any better. And then one day on the road to Damascus, I experienced Jesus.

I received a vision and I trusted the Lord and was baptized. That response is probably a little more, eh, so-so, right? We loved the way this started.

Maybe not so much this part, but everything he says they listen to until he says one thing. They love the talk.

They love the sermon. They're with him every way until he says this, verse 21. Chapter 22, verse 21. And he said to me, go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles and all God's people said, die heretic.

[28 : 27] Oh, there's no amen. There's no amen in here, right? That applause and clap, proud that loves what Paul is saying now wants to slap him, now wants to kill him.

They hate what he said. In fact, let me show you this in the text. Look at verse 22. Notice that it says, up to this word, up until that, they listened to Paul.

Then they raised their voices and said, away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live.

Wow. Are you tracking with me tonight? In other words, they didn't have any issues with everything. We love that you're Jewish. We love that you studied under Gamaliel. We love that you persecuted Christians.

Yeah, I mean, we can tolerate the whole you had an experience on the road to Damascus with Jesus, whatever. But once he says, and I was told that I would go far out to the Gentiles, they want him dead.

[29 : 32] What's going on here? What's taking place here? What's the reason for their opposition? You might say racism. You might chalk this up simply to the fact that they hate Gentiles, but I would submit to you it's deeper than that.

The issue here is not that they hate Gentiles, it's they hate a God that would accept Gentiles. This is the Jonah complex.

Jonah has no problem with the grace of God until the grace of God goes to Nineveh. And then he hates the grace of God because he doesn't think God should be gracious to people like that.

That's what's going on under the hood. That's what's going on in the heart. The reason why they are so violent is not just because you're upsetting our traditions. It's that you're telling us that God would accept Gentiles.

You're saying that the people of God will now not just be Jewish, but include those pagan idol worshippers? No! And they hate it so much they want the message and the messenger dead.

[30 : 48] Are you tracking with me, faith family? Religion hates the gospel. God's grace being extended to Gentiles is not just what this means for Gentiles, it's about what it means for their Jewishness.

And that's why God's grace is a threat to religion. It's a threat to religion. Let me give you four quick things here. The gospel of grace threatens our identity.

So this is what's going on under the hood. This is what's happening in the soul of these Jewish people and why they're so resistant to Paul and resistant to the gospel because it's a threat to their identity just like it is for ours.

The Jewish identity was completely based on and wrapped up in being Jewish. It went like this. Listen, listen, listen. Other people might be smarter. Other nations might be mightier.

Some places might be more technologically advanced. But do you know what no one else is? Jewish. It's the one thing we have over everybody else.

[31 : 53] We are the Jewish people. We are God's chosen people. And so, listen, other nations might have other things on us, but they don't have that on us.

It is the one identity that makes us different. And now you're telling us that God is extending His grace to Gentiles and that the people of God will now be Jew and Gentile.

Then what will that mean to be Jewish? It was interesting in my trip to Thailand. I was meeting with one of the pastors and he was talking about how difficult it is to find converts in Thailand.

Thailand. And he was talking about the fact that Thailand is very open to the gospel in terms of they don't mind Christians being there. It's not a closed nation like some places are.

But the reason why it's so difficult to see a Thai person converted is because their identity is wrapped up in Buddhism. See, to be Thai is to be Buddhist.

[32 : 55] And so if you're asking me to no longer be Buddhist but convert to Christianity, I have to give up my identity. That's what's going on here.

You're saying that being a Jew no longer matters. And that's exactly what Paul is saying. Remember what he writes in Galatians 3, verse 28.

Notice it on the screen. There is neither Jew nor Greek that is Gentile. There is neither slave nor free. There is no male and female for all are one in Christ Jesus.

And if you think that verse is big, look at verse 29. And if you are Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring. Heirs according to the promise.

If you belong to Christ, you are Jewish. What it means to be Jewish now is not your ethnicity, it's your identity with Jesus Christ.

[34 : 00] And that's great news unless you're Jewish. If your identity is being female, you're going to have a really difficult thing saying that to be male is perfectly fine.

In other words, it doesn't matter what category you're in, whether you're Jew or Greek or male or female or slave or free, you're all one in Jesus. Because the moment that you accepted Jesus, your identity became something else.

And that is the good news of the gospel for those who don't find their identity in other things. Are you tracking with me what's going down here?

I mean, this is such a big deal. This is such a game changer. Jesus is saying, or Paul is saying that in Christ, your Jewishness doesn't give you any more of a righteous standing than someone's Gentileness.

We're one in Christ. And we do the same thing. we struggle with the same thing. You think about, for instance, athletes who get so much of their identity wrapped up in sports that when they leave sports, they don't have any identity.

[35 : 15] Or people that put all of their identity in being beautiful and attractive and I'm not saying the older you get, the uglier you get. That's not what I'm saying at all. You see all this gray hair, right?

But as the body begins to fade and people struggle with who am I. Or you put all your identity in your kids and your kids grow up and they leave the home and you just feel like, I don't know who I am anymore.

I'm telling you, this will preach even on jet lag. Notice this on the screen. When we base our identity on things that pass away, when they pass away, we don't know who we are anymore.

The Jews had based their whole identity on their Jewishness and that has passed away because the ultimate Jew has come.

His name is Jesus and He has made us all one and they want Him, His messengers, and that message destroyed.

[36 : 23] Number two, the gospel of grace is a threat to our comfort. It is a threat to our comfort. What I mentioned earlier, our traditions make us comfortable.

Listen, the Jews loved the way they did things. Listen, we've got our customs down. We know what we can eat and what we can't eat and so we don't want any of that to change. And now, what's going to be brought into the people of God are people with different customs and people that eat different things.

We've already seen it in the book of Acts. And so now, all of a sudden, the traditions that you leaned on to make you comfortable no longer matter and now you're outside, as Brad Paisley would say, your southern comfort zone.

Everything you're used to has now changed. In fact, it's why, oh, there's so much coming to my mind right now. It's amazing when you don't sleep the things that you can think of. It's why in the book of Acts, do you remember in Acts chapter 15 at the Jerusalem Council when the disciples went up to fight over the essence of the gospel?

What were the Jews doing? They were trying to add circumcision to belief in Christ. In other words, this was the response of the Jews. Okay, if we've got to accept this faith in Jesus, that's fine, but at least we're going to make them Jewish.

[37 : 44] We'll let them be Christians. Oh, this will preach. Listen, listen, listen, good point. It's right here. It's about to come out, right? It's fine if they want to be Christians as long as they're Jewish Christians. And so, what we'll do to the Gentiles is they can believe, but then we'll add all the law on them to make them like us.

Why? Because that would make them feel more comfortable. I mean, it's fine if you want to come into our family as long as you act just like us. That way, we're not uncomfortable at all.

But no, the Gentiles are coming in and that's why, do you remember another thing that Paul says to the Corinthians? It's why when I'm with the Jews, I don't eat meat.

When I'm with the rednecks in Tennessee, I eat the whole hog. When I'm with the Jews, I'll practice certain things, but when I'm with the Gentiles, I'm free.

What's he saying? I've learned to be comfortable in any context because I've learned that the traditions don't matter.

[38 : 55] Number three, the gospel of grace is a threat to our security. The gospel of grace is a threat to our security. Under Roman law, Jews were given a special status.

They were allowed to continue to function as a nation. They're very concerned here because if Gentiles now are going to be brought in, then Jews will no longer be distinct.

The thing they had going for them with Rome is that they were a distinct people, but now if you're saying it's Jew and Gentile, we lose our distinction and we might lose our status before Rome.

In fact, this, by the way, is the very thing they had against Jesus. Look on the screen at John 11, verse 47 real quick. The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, what are we to do for this man that is Jesus performs many signs?

If we let him go on like this, everyone's going to believe in him. Watch this. And the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.

[39 : 58] If we let this Jesus guy keep doing what he's doing and get away with it and start attracting all these people, do you know what it's going to cost us? Our security. We'll no longer be a distinct nation.

Faith family, listen to me. Jesus Christ is a threat to anyone that finds their security in anything but him. Jesus Christ is a threat to anyone that puts their security in anything but him.

The Jews put their security in being recognized as a nation under Rome and the gospel is threatening that. And number four, the gospel of grace is a threat to our pride.

It's a threat to our pride. The ultimate trump card, the ultimate ace of spades that the Jews could play was this. God chose us.

Not Gentiles. We are the chosen people. And now you're saying that in the middle of the night these idol-worshiping pagans get to just show up and they get the same rights as we have?

[41 : 10] They get the same privileges as we do? They get the same access as we have? Oh, no, no, no, no, no. We can't allow that. I mean, what good does it to keep the law if you don't get anything from keeping the law?

In other words, we've been the good people. How is it that they, those losers, those pagans, get the same privileges as we do?

You know, this is actually something that Jesus addressed frequently in the Gospels. Let me just give you two examples. These are stories that you both know. Do you remember the parable of the day workers, the day laborers?

Do you remember that story where there was people hired throughout the day? Some got hired very early in the morning, worked all day long in the burning sun.

Some got hired at the very end of the day and only worked a few hours. And when it came time for payday at the end of the day, guess what? They all got the same.

[42 : 13] And how did those workers that were hired at the beginning of the day respond? I love grace. Oh, I just love, I'm so thankful you got as much as I did.

Oh, that boss is such a gracious boss. I love him. That is not how they responded. How can you do this? I worked more than they, I worked longer, I worked harder.

How is it that these people that come in at the midnight hour, at the end of the day, get the same as I do? What's being hurt there? Their pride.

I've earned this. I deserve this. I'll give you the second example. You all know it. It's the story of the prodigal son. How does the older son respond when the younger son returns from squandering his father's inheritance?

And the father puts a ring on him, kills the fattened calf, throws a big tailgate party. And you remember how the older son responds? He's like, I'm so glad my brother's home.

[43 : 19] I'm so glad we get to party. Yes. This is going to be such a fun night. No. What was the response? I hate my father.

How dare you do that to that son of yours? I'm the one that stayed home. I'm the one that didn't run away.

I'm the one that was here the whole time. The hatred isn't towards his brother. It's towards a father that would be gracious towards a brother like that.

That's what's going on here. Religion becomes your identity and your comfort, your security, your sense of pride.

Don't you know I've been at this church longer? Don't you know I give more money than anybody else? Don't you know that I've memorized more and just on and on and on and on and on It's spiritual pride.

[44 : 32] It's religious garbage. And do you know what religious people do when they experience the gospel of grace? They kill it.

And they kill anyone who's associated with it. And that's why religion and the religious leaders want Paul dead.

They cannot stomach the grace of God. That is why faith family we must do everything we can as a faith family not to become a group of religious people but a group committed to the gospel of grace.

This is at the essence of what our mission is to be. Notice this on the screen again. I remind you religion is one of the greatest opponents to the gospel mission.

So how do we break through? If I say this I'm almost done how do we get to the other side and be a people committed to the gospel mission and not just a bunch of religious people patting each other on the back?

[45 : 49] Here's how. Chapter 22 verse 3 through 4. Paul said I'm a Jew born in Tarsus of Cilicia and brought up in this city educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers being zealous for God as all of you are this day.

I persecuted this way that as Christians to death binding and delivering to prison both men and women. Here's what Paul starts with. Paul starts with listen listen and I think this is so beautiful about Paul I'm almost done hang with me Paul says I get you I'm a Jew too I understand what it's like to find my identity and my ethnicity I understand what it's like to find all my hope in my Jewishness and listen I was zealous just like you you know what I understand what it's like to be really committed to this thing and committed to all these traditions listen I get you because I am you or I was you but Paul had a breakthrough it's the gospel breakthrough it's at the very essence of what the gospel is about look at verse 14 of chapter 21 chapter verse 14 says this chapter 22 and he said the God of our fathers appointed you to know his will to see everybody say it the righteous one and to hear a voice from his mouth everybody lean in

Paul came to realize there is only one who is righteous there is only one who is righteous and the righteousness that God requires you could never accomplish on your own but you could only receive that from Christ himself that's it Paul comes to understand listen I'm a Jew and I was devout and I was zealous and I was a part of the people of God and I followed the law of God and I did everything with the temple of God I get you I understand it but I came to realize that none of those things make you righteous because there's only one who is and his name is Jesus and so I need to understand that all the things that I'm doing are not gaining me a righteousness before God the only way I get righteousness before God is in Christ the righteous one faith family notice this on the screen a right standing before God is not found in tradition it is found in trusting that's the flip of the gospel all the things that you do religiously do not earn you they're good things coming to church is a good thing memorizing the

Bible is a good thing these are all good things they just don't earn you any righteousness before God because there's only one who's righteous and trusting him is the only way to get there here's another way of saying it notice this on the screen the only tradition the gospel supports is trusting in Jesus you want to follow a tradition here's the tradition trust Jesus that's the gospel tradition you see the reason why religion is such in opposition to the gospel mission is this is religion is putting all your hope on you and the gospel is putting all your hope in Jesus it is going all in on the righteousness of Christ alone I close with with Martin Luther because I can't think of this kind of a passage without thinking about old Luther Luther man he struggled with this now Luther was Catholic as many of you were raised

Catholic and he struggled with the traditions of Catholicism all Luther wanted to do was be a good Catholic and make God proud through his Catholicism and he tried everything and no matter what traditions he tried he never could find peace for his soul he became a monk he studied and taught theology he gave money away so it wouldn't be a distraction to him he punished his body by sleeping on the floor he developed intestinal problems because he gave up certain foods in hopes that all of these things would somehow make God love him more make him pleasing to God to be righteous towards God but he knew deep down it wasn't enough in fact all of this religious activity made Martin Luther so depressed he was suicidal and then he came across Romans chapter 1 verse 17 which is actually a quote from Habakkuk chapter 3 where Paul says this the just that is the righteous live by faith and this is what

[50 : 54] Luther wrote quote and I'm done at last meditating day and night by the mercy of God I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that through which the righteous live by a gift of God namely by faith and here I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise through the gates that had been flung open Luther learned the very thing Paul preached in the streets of Jerusalem namely life is not found in tradition even religious ones it's found in trusting the righteous one religion will lead you to a grave but Jesus will give you life and God's people said amen Lord thank you for our time in your word tonight thank you that you speak even when your messenger is imperfect as he always is but your message your gospel is always perfect and

I pray that tonight we rest in the truth of the gospel there there's always that pull towards religious activity and religious traditions as to where we find our right standing and none of that matters ultimately you are not pleased in those things you are pleased in a life that trusts!

you and so Lord tonight I pray that we would trust you that the righteous would live by faith Lord help us be a people that are committed to the gospel of grace and not religious activity we find our hope our identity in nothing in this world that passes away we have our hope and our identity in Christ only be with us now as we take just a few moments to remember and reflect on the gospel through partaking of the Lord's supper!

I pray that this would be just a beautiful moment as we meditate on the good news of this gospel of grace in Jesus name we pray Amen If