

23rd Sunday after Trinity 2024

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Date: 03 November 2024

Preacher: Rev. Daniel Avitan

[0 : 00] Before we get into it, let me pray and ask for the Lord's blessing. Lord, we ask for your blessing. Lord, your blessing looks different at different times to us different people.

Lord, some of us will be greatly encouraged to continue on in a steadfast way after reading your word and this time together this morning.

Other people will feel conviction in their soul and be so moved and strengthened to seek amendment of life and strength to obey.

Still others, Lord, will feel a weight just lifted off. Maybe it's a combination of all three. Maybe there's other things. But Lord, we are your people.

We come to you for blessing. And we trust you that you know what we need far greater than what we think we need. And we pray all of this in Christ's name.

[1 : 03] Amen. Truth matters. It's what we're about here at our church. Truth is a very important thing. Not truths, not a specific kind of truth, but truth, capital T, truth.

Because truth produces good outcomes. And conversely, untrue things produce not just not good outcomes, but horrendous outcomes.

So you see that consequences flow downstream from truth or a lack thereof. An example of this. Truth, when it is embraced and applied, results in good things.

We think of the embrace that all people are made in God's image and have equal dignity before God. So something like the abolition of apartheid in South Africa.

Beautiful thing. Truth applied produced a good, godly, righteous outcome. Conversely, an untruth or an anti-truth or a deceptive lie has catastrophic consequences.

[2 : 17] A hundred and forty-ish years ago until maybe the 60s or 50s. For sure not, at least in the 40s.

Eugenics was the rage. There was this idea that we could purify and perfect the human race. And we would do that in two ways.

By breeding favorable ethnicities and qualities, but eliminating ones that were unfavorable. This was a lie. It produced evil things.

So you see that truth matters greatly. And the application of that truth, it's a very important thing.

We come to the scriptures expecting to hear truth and to know truth.

Why? Because God has created all things. He is good and he has revealed himself to us in the words of scripture as truth. So as we approach Acts 17, we will see Paul travel to Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia.

[3 : 27] Later he'll go to Berea, as Ken read. And he will attempt to convince people of the truth.

The importance of it. And how, from the scriptures point of view, at the core of capital T truth, is that Christ is the Messiah.

That Jesus is the Messiah. He is the Savior. And that at the core of that truth claim is the resurrection. And he proves it by appealing to the source of truth.

That is, the scriptures. We'll also see that just because the truth is proclaimed doesn't mean the truth will be embraced.

And therefore, there will be a cost associated with the truth. So, we'll break up our text, Acts 17, 1-15, in two big chunks and then one smaller chunk.

The first big chunk is the primacy of the resurrection as the core of truth. The second is the clarity of scriptures as the source of truth and also the cost of believing the truth.

[4 : 35] And that little bit, I'll have a few different references, but we're going to primarily stick in the first two points. So, we'll jump into it. Again, if you have one of these scripture journals, Acts 17, starting in verse 1, it's on page 98.

And we'll look first at the primacy of the resurrection as the very core of truth. So, Paul is on his second missionary journey. If you remember, he departed in the beginning of Acts 16 from Barnabas.

He took Silas with him. He took Timothy with him. And he went to Philippi. He saw some wonderful fruit in being, as he shared the gospel, as he evangelized.

And he was tossed in prison. And even still in that situation, the Lord did something miraculous. People continued to come to faith.

And now, as Paul and company continue with the second missionary journey, they find themselves in Macedonia. And they're heading to the capital, Thessalonica.

[5 : 39] Interesting. The population historians figure, and it's anywhere from 50,000 to 200,000. I mean, that's a pretty big spread. Regardless if it's on the lower end or the higher end, it's a very significant city.

It's a city that is self-governed. So, it's a free city. So, even though they have connections with Rome, they are self-governed. They're an economic hub.

They are a cultural hub. If you're going to spread the gospel in Macedonia, in this region, it's a good spot to go to. There'll be the neighboring cities and towns and villages that will frequent there.

Ideas will spread. It's a critical juncture for this missionary journey. And as Paul's normal practice, he goes to the local synagogue.

He, it's a bit of a beachhead for him in a new city. So, he connects with the Jews that are there. He reasons from the scriptures.

[6 : 42] And in this specific case, he will lay out a case that, number one, the Messiah had to suffer. And number two, Jesus is that suffering Messiah.

So, let's pick up in verse three. We'll read verse three and four. And then we'll continue on. Verse three. Actually, we'll skip back to verse two.

And Paul went in, that is, the synagogue, as was his custom. And on the Sabbath day, and on three Sabbath days, rather, he reasoned with them from the scriptures. So, Paul does two things.

He explains and he proves from the scriptures that the prophesied Messiah had to suffer. Leading up to the first century, there was many different versions of what the Messiah would do.

Some of them derived from the biblical case of the Messiah, but others, it was like extra biblical stuff. The Messiah would be somebody who would lead God's people against Rome.

[8 : 07] The Messiah would be a miracle worker. There's different views of the Messiah. Some of them, all of them, kind of maybe touch on some truths. But, by and large, there was no consensus.

And this idea that the Messiah would suffer seemed to be fairly foreign from the Judaic understanding of the biblical Messiah.

So, the Apostle Paul, likely he was there for longer than three weeks. But here it says that he was there for three weeks. We figure he was there for longer because in one of his letters to the Thessalonians, there's a reference that he was there much longer than three weeks.

But from Luke, who records Acts in chapter 17 here, there's three weeks that he's covering. And he is reasoning from the scriptures. And almost certainly, Paul would have referenced Deuteronomy 21.

He would have certainly referenced parts of the Psalter, like Psalm 2 or Psalm 16. Maybe Psalm 110. And of course, he would refer to the servant songs in Isaiah's prophecy, especially Isaiah 53.

[9 : 17] Very famous prophecy of the servant of God, who is the Messiah, who would suffer. If you've gone to Handel's Messiah, it will be referenced a whole bunch.

It's beautiful. So, the scriptures are teaching this. And what's interesting here is that the scriptures aren't teaching it in just one spot, but all over what we know as the Old Testament. And not just in one portion of the Old Testament, but the Old Testament, then as it is now, was understood to be broken up into three big sections.

It would be the Torah, or the Law. It would be the Writings, or the Nevi'im, and something called the Ketuvim, the Prophets, or the Major Prophets.

Three big sections that comprise the Old Testament. And almost certainly, Paul would have referenced all of them. All of the Bible, all of it, Paul says, he explains, and he proves, that, testify to the suffering of the Savior to die on the behalf of his people as God's servant.

So, he establishes this very, very logical and rational way he's approaching it. This is who the Messiah is. So, listen, you've thought that he's this conquering, sword-drawn warrior that's going to

lead us away from Rome to establish David's throne once again.

[10:45] It's not that. You think he's just going to be a miracle worker, doing wonderful signs and wonders. Okay, he did it, but it's not just that. At the core of what it means for the Messiah, to be the Messiah, is that he will suffer.

Then he gets into this proof that Jesus is that. And this is a key bit in all of this.

At the core of proving that Jesus truly was the Messiah, what is the linchpin in all of this? Is that Christ rose from the dead.

So, if Jesus just died and suffered and he stayed dead, Paul could say, listen, this is the Messiah. He suffered on our behalf. But he'd say, well, there's other Messiahs that suffered on our behalf. So what? You say this guy, he says that guy, she says that guy. It doesn't matter. But at the core of what Paul is proving and explaining is that Jesus rose from the dead.

[11:50] Not the idea of Jesus rising from the dead, but that Jesus physically, really, in a specific location, at a real time and point in history, at the hands of real people, died and rose again afterwards.

And certainly he would have referenced the crowds that witnessed both the ministry of Jesus, the passion of Jesus, and Jesus would have been scourged.

He would have been beaten to a pulp. They would have seen that. And then they would have seen the resurrected Jesus who didn't have a blemish on him apart from the nails, the nail marks in his hands and feet in his side.

And he testified to all of this. It's like he's saying, this is who the Messiah is, this is who Jesus is, and I can prove it. It's true. And it's a big deal for Paul and his ministry because he is staking his life on the resurrection.

And what he is doing also, and this is a huge point in all of this, is that Paul is connecting the Jesus of history to the Jesus of the scriptures. And this greatly matters because Jesus was a real person.

[13:14] And like I said, he suffered at a real point in history, at a real location, at the hands of real people. And if that didn't happen, then it's all for nothing. Some of you are YouTube philosophy junkies.

You know the different corners of the interwebs. Jordan Peterson had a debate with Richard Dawkins not too long ago. And Richard Dawkins being one of the world's, if not the world's most famous atheist, and Jordan Peterson being growingly, increasingly the most famous Canadian we have, or at least a Canadian intellectual.

Anyways, I didn't watch the whole thing. I watched snippets of it. One of the bits of this debate had to do with Dawkins pressing Peterson on if the Bible, if he believed that the Bible characters literally existed.

So he pushed him on, surely you don't believe in a literal Cain and Abel. And Peterson was, oh, maybe. Maybe there were, but it was the idea of a literal Cain and Abel he wanted to push.

And then it got to the bit of the resurrection. Surely you don't believe that Jesus literally rose from the grave. There was a man named Jesus, and he physically, like you get cameras there, and you'd see him rise from the grave.

[14:36] And Peterson had this kind of non-committal, I don't know, maybe. But the point of all of this was, it doesn't really matter. Because it is the idea that Jesus rose from the grave, it's the idea of the resurrection, it's what it represents, that that's what really matters in the end.

And it's so remarkable how a man can be so close to the truth, but so far away. So close, yet so far away.

And if you're honest, in your less faith-filled days, can you not relate to Jordan Peterson? I like the idea of the risen Christ, but if somebody pushes me, gun to my head, did he really physically rise from the grave?

I don't know, yes, but maybe you say it sheepishly. You want to say yes, but you're afraid of what it would make you look like.

I would say for myself, if I'm pressed on this, this is maybe one of the impediments for me not being brave enough to share my faith. I'm going to have to say, well, actually at the core of our faith is that a physical man, at a real point in history, physically rose from the grave.

[16:03] And he wasn't swooning, he wasn't in a coma, he wasn't, I don't know, having like one breath every two minutes. He was dead, and then he was alive.

And I would, if I'm being honest, in my less faith-filled days, I don't really want to even talk about that. I don't want to go there, I want to feel like I'm a respectable person. Whether or not I look like one, I want to feel like one. And I think as a society, and as people, we struggle with this for two big reasons. I think the first one, I'm not going to dive into this, I think the first reason is we are fed a steady diet of a scientism, science is good, but a scientism and an empiricism and a materialism that says what we see is all there is, there's no such thing as a spiritual world, there is no such thing as the metaphysical, what we see is what we have. And the second thing, and this is what we'll spend a bit of time on, is that as, again, as a society, I'm painting with a large brush here, but we enjoy the boundary that separates myth from fact. Myth is great, for from it we can understand all sorts of wisdom and truth, lessons learned, morality, but we wouldn't affirm myth as anything other than fiction.

[17 : 28] We can learn a lot from the story of Icarus or Oedipus or Hercules but are we going to actually say that these characters are real?

They're fictional. But it doesn't matter if they're real because for myth, what we gather from it is the enduring lessons to be learned. And I think that is why we can struggle with embracing the Christian faith, even as Christians, as it is proclaimed here by the Apostle Paul.

we like that boundary between myth and fact. So in this view, Jordan Peterson is spot on.

I mean, he would even say that this is the myth, the myth of myth, and he's not entirely wrong with that, but he would say this is the idea, that it's the idea of the resurrection, the idea of Christ physically transcending all of the evil and death to incorruptibility.

The idea of that is what we should mentally ascend to. But in the end, Jesus is not fact. The resurrected Jesus is not fact.

[18 : 43] He is myth. The Apostle Paul is not playing around with this. He is saying, no, this is fact. It's fact.

He physically rose from the grave because everything else hinges on it. C.S. Lewis, he beautifully articulates this in one of his writings called *God in the Dock*, and I'm just going to quote it rather than summarize it, because who am I to summarize, Lewis?

This is what he says, quote, The heart of Christianity is a myth, which is also a fact. The old myth of the dying God without ceasing to be myth comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history.

It happens at a particular date, in a particular place, followed by definable historical consequences. We pass from a balder or an Osiris, dying nobody knows where or when, to a historical person crucified under Pontius Pilate.

By becoming fact, it does not cease to be myth. That is the miracle. For this is the marriage of heaven and earth, perfect myth and perfect fact, claiming not only our love and our obedience, but also our wonder and our delight.

[20 : 06] If we are to set our hope, and I mean our eternal hope, if we are to set our hope on the idea or the ideal of the resurrection of Christ, we are setting our hope on something that is flimsy and that will not stand up under the weight of our hope.

There's a huge difference between putting our hope in the idea of the risen Christ and in the physical risen Christ. There's a huge difference. The Apostle Paul here is saying to put your faith in the risen Christ, the physically risen Christ.

Everything in Christianity rises, no pun intended, and falls on the literal resurrection. And if this is the truth, if this true myth is also a true fact, it changes everything, for it means that the sin, if we're, again, this is all under kind of like the umbrella of like extreme honesty, the sin that we cannot expunge out of our own lives, out of our own hearts, is forever dealt with on the cross.

It means our deep desire, if again, we're being brutally honest, that we can never have fulfilled in the things, the experiences or the people that are in our lives or that we hope to enjoy one day, those deep desires for transcendence and purpose won't just be found but will be never-ending in Christ.

It means that our deep desire for friendship that seems to be elusive will be found forever in Christ. I'm telling you, those things can't happen if you just mentally ascend to this idea of Christ being resurrected.

[22 : 12] It has to be rooted in fact. The second point in this and it's connected to the first point is the clarity of scripture.

So what Paul does here is that he appeals to truth in fact not from his vast knowledge and he would have had vast knowledge from rabbinical teachings or experiences but from scripture itself.

So verses the second point verses 10 to 15 we'll look at the clarity of scripture. I'll read this whole portion here and then we will take a look at it. It says this, verse 10, the brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica. That's just to say that they were more open-minded, more open to reason, that they were more eager for truth. They received the word with all eagerness examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

Many of them therefore believed and not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. I'll actually pause there and then we'll jump into that last bit later on.

[23 : 25] So the Bereans are rightly held up as an exemplary example of how to approach scripture and truth claims if you've been around church for a while especially a church that holds up scripture you will hear it being said we want to be a church like the Bereans.

We want to dive into scripture. We want to know scripture, examine scripture and I would say that is wonderful and beautiful and that's what this church is, the hope for this church is as well.

So there's hard work. It means not being gullible. It means being discerning. It means doing the hard work of reading well and having one's mind changed.

If it needs changing. It means being committed to the authority and primacy of the scriptures above all else. It means to put into practice what you believe.

To be a Berean. This is what it means. It's to live your life and to form your habits and thoughts around God's word. But here's the thing.

[24 : 31] We read about the Bereans and the importance of diving into God's word as if, and I'll touch on this a bit more, as if the Bereans all made individual order to Amazon or chapters and got their vegan leather Bible.

Beautiful. And then went home 5 a.m., 5.30 a.m. before the cock crowed, had a coffee, did their devos, dug into the word that way.

But that's almost certainly not the case because Amazon didn't exist. No, but because nobody had a Bible in their home.

So what this means is that the Bereans, they were Bereans together. It's a huge aspect to all of this. So we'll get into this in a moment.

I just wanted to point that out. The passage here provides two very important principles or guardrails as we want to be Bereans ourselves. The first is this, and it's a combined doctrine, two combined doctrines from the Reformation.

[25 : 42] The first is the clarity of Scripture, or if you like fancy words, the perspicuity of Scripture. And then combined with that is the doctrine of sola scriptura, that Scripture alone is the ultimate and chief authority for faith and practice.

So, we'll get into the second principle in a minute, but for the first principle, this idea of the clarity of Scripture with the authority of Scripture. The Reformation sweeps across Europe in the 16th century.

The Reformers were committed to not change for the sake of change, but to reform the church so that it would come back under the authority and practice of the biblical witness.

No church doctrine or practice was exempted from being scrutinized. Scripture would be what would be applied to everything. So, as a result of reading Scripture in the proper authoritative place, the church was reformed and salvation was assured and Christ became central once again.

The Scriptures were held to their rightful place. So, the English Reformation, this was included in the English Reformation.

[26 : 56] I'll read two of the 39 articles of religion that defines English Reformed theology.

This is like a key, key document for the English Reformation. This is what Article 6 says. Holy Scripture contains all things necessary for salvation.

Consequently, whatever is not read in Scripture nor can be proved from Scripture cannot be demanded from any person to believe it as an article of the faith.

Nor is any such thing to be thought necessary or required for salvation. By Holy Scripture is meant those canonical books of the Old and New Testament whose authority was never doubted within the church.

In verse 20, Article 20 says this, the church has authority to decree forms of worship and ceremonies and to decide in controversies concerning the faith. However, it's not lawful for the church to order anything contrary to God's written word.

[27 : 56] Nor may it expound one passage of Scripture so that it contradicts another passage. So although the church is a witness and guardian to Holy Scripture, it must not decree anything contrary to Scripture, nor is it to enforce belief in anything additional to Scripture as essential to salvation.

Too long, didn't read. Scripture is at the very top, ultimate authority. The church has a place, a very important place, but the church cannot overstep its bounds for authority.

Scripture and Scripture alone is the ultimate guiding authority for practice and belief in the church. So we start with Scripture and go from there.

A pope in Italy or France cannot speak doctrine into existence that must be believed no matter how much it goes against Scripture and if one doesn't believe it, damnation is, you're at risk of eternal damnation.

No, no, no, no, no. Scripture itself is the ultimate authority. Therefore, it's been put back into its place. This is one of the gifts of the Reformation. However, and this is a big however, sola scriptura and this idea of the clarity of Scripture does not mean you or I get to determine whatever doctrine we believe based on our interpretation of the Bible.

[29 : 36] It's a very important aspect of what it means to be a good, godly, Bible-believing part of the church, member of the church.

We don't trade one pope or papacy in Italy for a papacy within our own home, as if we are the ones who make judgments ex cathedra on doctrine or practice.

So, it's very important that, and this is not my idea, this is from well, the reformers, but a theologian, a more recent theologian named Keith Matheson, sola scriptura does not mean solo scriptura, so it does mean that God's word is for God's people, which is to say that we ought to be reading and wrestling with God's word together.

So, if you think of scripture as having two guardrails around it, number one, that scripture is clear, any of us can read it if we are true believers and trust that the Holy Spirit is going to reveal to us essentials of the faith.

So, on one side there's the clarity of scripture, and on the other side there is the guardrail to make sure that we don't become the arbiters or the main interpreters of scripture.

[30 : 59] The Bereans are meeting daily together. They're opening God's word together. They are wrestling with it together. Almost certainly they're not reading it inside their heads, but they're reading it aloud.

They are coming together as God's people. I mean, I don't think they're God's people at this point. It says that then they came to faith, but nevertheless, as this group of people on the way to faith in Christ and they're wrestling and they're digging in, somebody has an idea, yeah, that sounds good, this is what it says, no, no, no, no, but what about this portion of scripture that contradicts what you just said, and all of a sudden you can just trust that with the proclamation and the reading of scripture together in the community of the church that truth prevails.

It means also that for us, we need to, it's a corrective for us because we need to, of course, by the way, I'm not saying that we go home and we don't do our own personal Bible reading, but it means as a community of God's people, we are talking the scriptures scriptures to each other.

We are debating and discussing, we are being honest that maybe we don't have as much Bible knowledge as we do, so we're saying, hey, listen, why don't you explain this to me?

Why don't you teach us to me? Can we read this book together that might illuminate something about scripture? How do we wrestle through scripture together as a community? I mean, there's huge implications for the church itself.

[32 : 36] That can't just happen on an hour and a half on a Sunday morning. Mind you, what we're doing here is some of that. I think what it means to be a church that are, that take the example of the Bereans very seriously is a church that reads and wrestles with scripture together.

It also means we can't be snooty about the past. We need to remember on All Saints Day, a great example, that there have been saints that have gone before us, that God in his goodness and wisdom and mercy and love for the church has given insights into the scriptures and that we have them at our fingertips so we can appeal to brothers and sisters of the past and grow together in

faith, again, centered around God's word.

Friends, this is the beginning of having a very high view of church and the place of church in our lives. So, the centrality of the resurrection to Jesus being the Christ, the centrality of the scriptures to the understanding of who Jesus is and what truth is and who God is, the guardrails around that. But we'll see in this next section, and this is portions from verses 5 to 9 and 13 to 15, that as God calls his community together out of darkness into the light, there will be another community that will despise the light and remain in the darkness and look to snuff out the light of Christ. Look with me at verses 5 to 9. By the way, this will cost us. So, to have belief will cost. Look with me first at verses 5 to 9 and then verses 13 to 15.

[34 : 27] Verses, starting verse 5. But the Jews, that is the Jews that did not come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, but the Jews were jealous and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.

And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, these men who have turned the world upside down have come here also. And Jason has received them and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.

And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. When they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. Verse 13. This is in Berea now.

But when the Jews, again these unbelieving Jewish people, but when the Jews from Thessalonica heard that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds.

Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

[35 : 47] Increasingly, following Christ in our day, and I say increasingly, maybe in the past, say two to three generations in our time, will seem upside down to the world we live in.

I mean, it was upside down back here. It's more or less in any part of the world, following Christ looks upside down, but in the West we've enjoyed the benefits of Christianity and Christendom for a long time.

Not so much anymore. But increasingly for us, following Jesus, again, as I laid out with believing that Jesus factually actually rose from the grave, will look upside down to those around us.

And it might very well feel upside down for us. Again, we are people that have been force-fed, a steady diet all our lives of a modernity that denies this idea that Jesus could have truly risen from the grave, or denies this idea that there's an exclusivity claim to the Bible, or denies that the tenets of biblical morality is life-giving and is applied to all people.

So we will feel upside down. Obedience and devotion will be difficult. But, friends, but, if we, by God's strength, as a community, commit to this, again, by God's strength, as a community, commit to this, the obedience and devotion that seems upside down will actually be right side up.

[37 : 33] And that our obedience and our devotion might still feel difficult, but it will feel less like a chore and more like a joy. And our loves and our affections and our priorities will begin to change.

We will say no, not to the, to the, say no to things, not because they are necessarily bad, they're likely very good, but we'll say no to them because our society has said you have to prioritize them. And for us, we will say no, we are prioritizing a different way. So it will change our approach to our careers and our goals and our ambitions, the opportunities we take or the opportunities we want to give to our children, things we buy, the way we invest, the charities and organizations we donate to, or maybe we begin to donate to charities and organizations.

How we spend our time, how we spend our money, money, in short, as we grow in our faith by God's strength together in him, we will have the gospel affect every aspect of our lives.

It will feel upside down and until we get our balance and we'll realize, no, no, no, this is, this is right side up living. Jason is not talked about much in the Bible here and then in later on in Romans 16, there's a reference to him just in one of Paul's greetings.

[39 : 12] And it cost him a lot. He was, he was clearly a man of means, some degree of means. He was dragged and humiliated in front of the crowds. He was forced to give up money that he knew, he knew there was no chance he was, he was going to get it back.

I mean, either, either they were going to hold it or take it, hold it for good or they were going to take it because there's no way that he could stop the crowds from inciting a mob against the Christians and especially Paul and company.

He was unjustly treated, but you know, he was counted worthy of being associated with Christ. He was. In a lesser way, he got to participate in the sufferings of Christ and we are reading about him 2,000 years later.

This man enjoyed a life of faith, participated in the community of hope, and enjoyed the promises of eternal and deep friendship with the triune God. I'm telling you, I promise you, I mean, this is what I'll promise.

I'm not promising that it's going to be easy. I'm not necessarily even promising that it's going to be terribly, terribly, terribly hard. It might. It might not. But I will promise this, that as you commit to a life of devotion and obedience, as a product of the love, in response to the love that God has given you in Christ Jesus, in a community, life in him will start to seem right side up.

[40 : 49] And you'll want to tell people, hey, listen, I believe in the myth, but it's also a fact. And I'm telling you, if you embrace this Christ, it'll transform your life.

It'll cost you your life, but it'll transform your life. Listen, friends, as God's holy people, let us search the scriptures diligently, individually, but also together.

Let us revel in this myth-made fact of Christ rising from the grave, and let's do that together. And let us joyfully live right side up, bearing witness to the joy that we have in Christ, and let's do that also together.

And friends, we will enjoy the right side up living, and we will see other people come to faith and be rescued from a backwards existence that is killing them.

Let us pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for the great example of the Apostle Paul, the great courage that he had to suffer torture in Philippi, and then continue on to suffer in Thessalonica, and continue on, and in every stop, proclaiming and making a case for the risen Christ.

[42 : 14] Lord, proclaiming the upside-down kingdom, that is really the right-side-up kingdom.

Lord, help us to take St. Paul's example, and by your strength that we would walk in like manner.

And Father, we pray that you would give us courage to trust your word. Lord, to believe that you, by your Holy Spirit, use your word to transform our lives.

And Lord, we pray that you'll do just that. Gently, we ask, Lord, but deeply. Lord, we want to grow in our faith. We don't want to be pretenders.

We don't want to be people that have deep spiritual regrets as we come to the end of our days, whatever that may be. But instead, Lord, help us to have courage to trust in you.

We pray all this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.