

# The Name That Brings Life

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, good evening, folks. Good evening. And I want you to know, I forgive you if you've ever fallen asleep in church. So we're in the Book of Acts. Do you know when the Book of Acts was first written, there was probably only a couple thousand Christians, like in total, in the world. By 350 AD, there was 35 million Christians in the Roman Empire.

35 million. So that was about 50 or 60% of the entire population there of the Roman Empire. And just to remind you, from between when Acts was written and 350 AD, for huge chunks of that time, Christians were tremendously persecuted. So how do we account for that?

Like, how do we account for that kind of growth going from a couple of thousand to tens of millions? Well, Luke in Acts gives us part of the reason, a part of the reason. And part of the reason was the ministry of the Apostle Paul. He invested in a network of churches that became so widespread, it took over the Roman Empire. During the last six weeks, we've been looking at Paul's grand adventure. And we've kind of danced across the book, looking at his sort of missionary exploits. And as we come to the end of the series, I hope you don't get the impression that Paul was some sort of showy evangelist who kind of blew into town and preached, did some cool stuff and then jetted. No, I mean, he loved evangelism, but he was deeply, deeply concerned about church planting. And planting churches that would flourish and grow and multiply themselves. So he'd plant them and he'd keep going back to invest in them. And that's why if you look at a map of Paul's missionary journeys, it's very scattered and scribbly because he's repeatedly going back to the same places. So he's not some kind of one night gig evangelist.

He loved the communities of faith and he wanted to see them healthy and passionate about the gospel. And this is one of the big reasons why the Christian faith, despite hundreds of years of persecution, became the predominant religion in the Roman Empire within the space of a couple of hundred years. All that to say, tonight in Acts 20, we get a little snapshot of Paul's love for all of these little churches. We see in verse 17, Paul's on his way to Jerusalem, but he stops off near Ephesus to get together with some folks from a church that he planted there. And it was a church plant that he actually spent three years. He spent three years in this place encouraging them, teaching them, praying with them. So he ranges to meet with them. And after getting them all together, what does he say to them? Well, that's verses 18 to 24. It's a short sermon that he preaches. And I think you could summarize that sermon in a number of ways, but I think the best way to summarize that sermon is to say this. Paul talks to them about, one, the gift of the word, the gift of the word, and two, the gift of a life, the gift of a word, and two, the gift of a life.

Let's start with the gift of a word. So listen to verse 20 here. I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. So Paul had this comprehensive word ministry. He spent his life telling people the truth in forums and markets and homes to groups, to individuals, to Jews, to Gentiles. And he told them the whole counsel of God. He told them everything. He didn't hold back from the tough stuff. Do you see how he says there, I did not shrink from declaring. He didn't trim the gospel to avoid the difficult things. It wasn't a vacuous gospel designed to sort of just, you know, tickle your fancy. It was comprehensive. And preaching was so important to them. And even when a kid, you know, fell off the third story floor and died and was raised from the dead, what did

[ 4 : 3 8 ] Paul do afterwards? He just got back into it. Just got back into it and preached till midnight. And here at St. John's, we place a huge emphasis on preaching. You know that. And why do we do that?

Well, let me just say it as simply as I can. The Bible is the word of God. So on Sundays, when I open my mouth, I'm trying to say what is there. The big lesson here is you don't build strong

