

Acts 15:36-16:5

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Date: 12 April 2015

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Would you turn with me to Acts, chapter 15. We're looking at verses 36 into chapter 16, verse 5. That's page 924 in the Pew Bible, if you want to follow along there.

Acts 15. Let me read this passage for us.

After some days, Paul said to Barnabas, Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaim the word of the Lord and see how they are. Now, Barnabas wanted to take with them John, called Mark.

But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement so that they separated from each other.

Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and departed. Having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

[1 : 21] Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer. But his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.

Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places. For they all knew that his father was a Greek.

As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith. And they increased in numbers daily.

Let's pray. God, we thank you for your word. And Lord, we thank you for this time that we get this morning to read it and to study it and to hear it proclaimed to us. Lord, would the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight.

Our rock and our redeemer. Amen. Amen. Well, in the last verse of this little section from Acts, we have a picture of local churches that are both deep and wide.

[2 : 35] Every night, well, almost every night, my family spends a little time reading the Bible together and singing some kids' songs. And that's one of our kids' favorite songs, Deep and Wide. Do you know that one? I won't sing it for you.

But Luke ends this section by saying that they were strengthened in the faith. That is, they were deep. And they increased in numbers daily. That is, they were wide.

They were theologically rich. And they were evangelistically effective. Now, I don't know about you. But my sneaking suspicion is that most churches, at least most churches I've been a part of, tend to sort of tip or lean kind of one way or the other, don't they?

That some congregations tend to be really rich theologically. They love going deep into doctrine and Bible study and discussing these things richly. And other churches tend to be really evangelistically and missionally creative.

And they take risks. And they're doing great things along those lines. But very rarely does it seem like you've got a church that's both deep and both wide.

[3 : 42] And you might be wondering, I wonder which way Trinity tips on that scale. And you know what I found as I've been a part of this church for a number of years is that it kind of depends who you ask, actually.

Sort of depends on your background. Some people show up at Trinity and you're like, you guys are all head. Where is the heart? And then other people show up and say, man, this is great. You're involved in so much mission and evangelism. But you guys are soft on doctrine.

So, you know, you can't please everyone. But isn't it true that we need to be both? That this is what we need both as we seek to build one another up as a church.

And isn't this also what our city needs? That our city, our communities, they need a local church.

And they need local churches. Not just us, but all the churches here in New Haven.

That are deep and that are wide. And lo and behold, Luke right here says, It's possible and it happens. And the question is how?

[4 : 43] How in the world do we get to be like that? And in these two paragraphs that make up our little passage this morning, I think Luke shows us at least how we get along that path.

And the first thing that he shows us as we seek to be a church that's deep and wide, the first thing is that we have to rely on God's mercy. This is chapter 15, verses 36 through 41.

So this section sort of, it starts the beginning of Paul's, what's sometimes called Paul's second missionary journey. But it also is sort of wrapping up the account of the Jerusalem council that we looked at two weeks ago.

And it begins, as we read in verse 36, with Paul wanting to return and visit the brothers and sisters in every city where we proclaim the word of the Lord and see how they are. Paul wants to go back to these churches that he planted and see how they're doing.

Now notice, just real briefly, notice Paul's love for the local church here. His heart is not just to see churches started, but to also see them grow and persevere.

[5 : 46] To see them continue to grow up spiritually. John Stott in his commentary on this section says, Paul was more than a pioneer missionary. He was also concerned to see churches and believers grow into maturity.

In fact, that little word translated visit in verse 36 is the same word that's sometimes used of care and oversight, of visiting the sick, of caring for orphans and widows.

There's a heart behind this verse. And let's pause just briefly as we think about this. You know, some of you here have a great gift of evangelism.

And some of you are on the front lines of being salt and light in our region through your work or through your other engagements. And that is great. But, don't lose your love for the local church.

Jesus said they'll know we're followers by how we love one another. Wanting the church to grow to maturity isn't just a thing that pastors and elders care about.

[6 : 53] It's something that Christians care about. That we all care about. Because Christ himself does, you see. But isn't it also true that the church can be a hard place to love?

I mean, after all, what do we see in this very paragraph? Paul and Barnabas getting into a sharp disagreement over whether or not to take Mark along with them.

Here it is. Christians being Christians again. Disagreeing with each other. Now, notice first. That Luke is very careful not to whitewash this event.

Or to whitewash his account of the early church. He's giving us the reliable history, warts and all. As he tells us what's going on in these first few decades.

And isn't that just another sign of the New Testament's historical reliability? After all, if you were sort of concocting a story or writing some propaganda, you probably wouldn't include or make up this story, would you?

[7 : 57] Two heroes of the early church movement falling out because they can't see eye to eye over a personnel decision. Not exactly the kind of thing you want to cook up and put into your propaganda.

But second, if Luke's being reliable here, he's also careful not to assign blame. It seems that Paul and Barnabas both had good reasons. For Paul, you'll remember back in chapter 13, Mark had turned back on their first missionary journey.

When the going got rough, the kitchen got hot, and he got out. Somehow that metaphor works, right? Mark, it seems, is not ready to jump into the fire.

Again, Paul's thinking he's going to hinder the work. If we go and the same thing happens. And yet for Barnabas, let's give Mark a second chance. He's grown.

He's matured. He will grow. He will mature. It's going to be good for him. Paul, let's take him along. Classic Barnabas, right? The encourager. Now, as you weigh those different rationales, who's right and who's wrong?

[9 : 07] Well, they both have pretty good reasons, right? One valuing the work and the team, the other valuing the person and the individual. But, you know, regrettably, even though they both had

good reasons, they can't agree.

And so they separate. And that, I think, is a good reminder, or at least this passage should make us consider and remember, that churches are not perfect places.

And that church leaders aren't perfect people. Now, this isn't to excuse wrongdoing, to excuse blatant sin. That needs to be called out and repented of.

But, you know, it is to say that ultimately, we don't become followers of Christ and come to love his church because the church is so flawless. No, the church is full of sinful people who need grace. And who continue to need grace. After all, isn't that the central part of the Christian message? That we can't do it on our own. And that we need someone to rescue us.

[10:17] We become Christians and learn to love the church, not because of the church, but because of who Jesus is. And what he's done. And so if you're here today and you're not a Christian, I hope you see that there's genuine love in and through this community.

I hope you see that. And I hope it prompts you to look deeper into Christianity. But trust me, you're not going to find perfect people here. And I know that because I know myself. And if you're waiting to consider the claims of Christianity until you find some perfect expression of it, friend, you'll wait forever.

Instead, consider Christianity because of who Jesus is. And because of what he's done. He's the one that all of us as a church are looking to.

So look to him too. And see what you find. Now what we ultimately see in this paragraph, and I think what Luke sort of wants us to take away, is that God is able to take this regrettable disagreement of Barnabas and Paul, and actually use it to further his kingdom.

After all, at the end of our text, what do we have? Instead of one team, we've got two. Instead of three missionaries, there are four. Barnabas takes Mark and goes to Cyprus.

[11:37] That was his home land. And Paul takes Silas and heads towards what we now call southern Turkey. And Silas providentially ends up being a great pick for this mission.

We met him, remember, at the end of the Jerusalem Council. What a strategic choice for Paul to have Jerusalem-approved Silas delivering the decisions of the Council to these embattled churches of southern Galatia.

And Silas, we learn a little later, was also a Roman citizen, which ends up being an incredible advantage. Because as we'll see, even next week, the Holy Spirit's going to take this new missionary team that's visiting these churches, and is going to push them out of Asia, across the Aegean Sea, and into Macedonia.

That is, into Europe. That he's going to take this new team, and he's going to break new ground. So how strategic is it that Silas himself is a Roman citizen, as they get deeper into Roman territory? So taking a step back, what do we see? We see that God, in his sovereign mercy, takes flawed human beings, and uses even their mistakes, to advance his kingdom purpose, to strengthen the church, and thereby to display more of his glory to and for the world.

[12:54] You know, if we're going to be a church that's deep and wide, this is square one. We need to rely on God's sovereign mercy.

There needs to be a deep river of trust that God loves his church more than we ever could, and he's accomplishing his purposes for his own glory. And he's going to use us, even as flawed as we are, to be part of that.

And again, this doesn't excuse what happened between these two church leaders. It's not a license to be careless and foolish, but it is to say that we need to see that the ultimate agent in all of this is God himself.

And won't that make us deep? If we have that kind of view of God, the view that Luke and all the other biblical writers have, that God is king.

That he upholds the universe by the word of his power. That in him we live and move and have our being. That all things are from him and through him and to him.

[14:07] If we really sink our hearts into that magnificent truth about God, it will make us deep. To know that God isn't some supercharged projection of Father Christmas, anxiously rubbing his hands together, peering over the clouds, wondering what's going to happen in this mad world.

No! That God is the boundless and everlasting creator of all things, whose roaring majesty will either undo you or thrill you for all eternity.

And whose glory will one day cover the earth like the waters cover the sea. I remember watching a surfing documentary some time ago.

I'm not a surfer, so I had to watch a documentary. And one of the things I learned, one of my friends was into surfing, so I thought it would be nice.

One of the things I learned was that the best surfers, the wisest ones, the most elegant ones on the waves, were the ones who had really studied the sea. They were the ones who knew its movement and they knew its character and they knew its power.

[15:26] They spent a long time not just staring at the waves but feeling the current and learning how they surged and moved and they were in awe of this thing and they were humble before it.

They were the best ones. They were the ones, they were the gurus that everyone wanted to get with and learn. And friends, in the same way, that's how we need to be with God.

He's revealed himself in creation and most of all, he's revealed himself in his word, both incarnate and written. And we need to be humbly and deeply acquainted with all that he shows himself to be. But you know, understanding God and his sovereign mercy won't just make us deep, it'll also make us wide.

To know this majestic God, more powerful than a million oceans, to know that that God has extended his mercy to us, not just once at conversion, but again and again and again.

[16:36] All of us are Barnabas and Paul, aren't we? None of us wants to give in to the other when we're in the heat of a dispute.

None of us wants to admit that maybe our reasons aren't the final word on the subject. And yet God continues to extend his unfailing mercy to us.

How could that mercy we've received not make us a people passionate to show mercy to others? Even people who disagree with us.

How could it not make us want to go out into the world so that other people, people just like us, flawed and hard-headed, so that those people too might get a glimpse of God's undeserved grace? Those who know mercy are the ones who show mercy again and again. You know, this isn't the last time in the New Testament that we hear about Paul's relationship with Mark.

[17:42] Listen to what Paul writes later in his ministry. This is Colossians 4.10. He tells the church in Colossi, if Mark comes to you, welcome him. And then in 2 Timothy 4.11, he writes from prison and tells Timothy, get Mark and bring him with you, for he's very useful to me for ministry.

And then in Philemon, verse 23, he says, Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark and Aristarchus and Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.

Do you see? Whatever happened here in Acts 15, it didn't grow a bitter root. It didn't remain a source of tension and separation for long.

Paul eventually could say about Mark, he's my fellow worker and he's very useful to me. Go get him and bring him in my hour of need. And oh, by the way, when he comes to you, welcome him and honor him because he will bless you.

They were reconciled. You know, I often hear people wonder, how come so many of my secular non-Christian friends seem to be better people, seem to be so much more moral people than some of the Christians I know.

[19:00] And you know, often that's true. I have some very generous, caring, and compassionate neighbors who live in our apartment building who aren't very interested in Christianity.

And on the one hand, it's a mark of God's common grace, isn't it? That even people with no interest in God still bear his image in generosity, in kindness, in faithfulness.

But you know, on the other hand, I find one thing that's not so common in our world, and it's mercy. It's forgiveness. I don't see a lot of that in the world.

Do you? And that's one reason why a church relying on God's mercy and living it out will be such an evangelistically potent place.

Paul and Barnabas and Mark, they eventually forgave and reconciled. That's the power of knowing God's mercy in Jesus. So how do we become a church that's deep and wide, that's strengthening in the faith and increasing in numbers, that's theologically rich and missiologically effective?

[20:19] First, we rely on God's sovereign mercy, that it's his work in and through us, not ours. But you know, by itself, that can seem pretty passive, can't it?

Are we just supposed to sit around doing nothing? Kicking up our heels, brewing our fancy coffees, checking our Twitter feeds every 15 minutes?

I don't even use my Twitter account and I get Twitter emails. What's up with that, by the way? You know, the book of Acts, not to mention the rest of the Bible, would suggest just the opposite, that this sovereign God works ordinarily through means and he invites us into his great drama of redemption and gives us a role to play.

So while we rely on God's mercy, we're also called to use a good godly strategy and that's what we see in the next paragraph, in chapter 16, verses 1 through 5. If we want to grow deep and wide, first we rely on God's mercy and second, we use a good godly strategy.

In the beginning of chapter 16, Paul, along with Silas, revisits the churches he had planted on his first journey. And now there's a lot we learn about solid strategic mission in this whole section of the book of Acts, some of which we'll have to come back to in later sermons.

[21 : 45] I mean, think about it. First, Paul's planting churches. That's key, right? He's not just running outreach events but starting healthy local churches. And next, he's doing it in cities. That is, he's finding the cultural or political center of a region, starting a movement there, because he knows that then it will naturally spread to the surrounding towns and regions.

Those are just some overarching things we see in Acts about good gospel mission. But you know, here in the beginning of chapter 16, we see some more specific things that are equally critical. people. And especially if those churches are going to mature in breadth and depth. In other words, think of it like this. If church planting in sort of cultural political centers is a sort of 40,000 foot view of Paul's strategy, if that's what it looks like from the air, then what Luke is going to show us here is what Paul's strategy looked like on the ground, in the trenches, in the day-to-day operations. And quickly, there are three things that we see here about a good godly strategy. First, there's faithful delivery of the message. Look again at verse 4. As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decision that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem.

Now, if you were here two weeks ago, we looked at chapter 15, where the church had this great theological debate about what was required for someone to be accepted by God and welcomed into his family.

[23 : 10] And what the church decided there, on the basis of what God had said in scripture and what God had done, in their midst, what they decided was that salvation wasn't just for the Jews.

It wasn't just for the circumcised. No, rather, actually, salvation comes to everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, solely and freely through faith in Jesus Christ.

That it's not based on race, but it's based on God's grace. And here we see Paul and Silas faithfully delivering this message to the churches, this message of liberating grace, and the churches grow.

And it's interesting that the word deliver here is actually the same word that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 15, remember Greg talked about that last week, which really describes the handing down of authoritative teaching without any tampering or any tweaking.

In other words, they're saying, this is what the church believes and will always believe, we don't need to change it, here it is. Now, as we think about this today, how often are we tempted to tweak or maybe cover up certain elements of the core message of the gospel?

[24 : 31] And sometimes this even happens through good intentions, doesn't it? We want people to come to know God in Christ, we want them to hear the gospel as actually the good news that it is, but that can actually sort of end up, we can end up shying away from certain things that we think might be kind of a little less than palatable that they might not want to hear.

But what we see here is that faithful delivery of the message brings good fruit. Now, of course, we have to contextualize, we have to speak in ways that people understand, and we have to address the questions that they have, but the message itself, this message of the gospel that you can say in a thousand ways, it doesn't change.

That what Jesus' apostles taught under his authority and what we have preserved in the New Testament is a message of life-giving power that we don't need to tweak or improve or bring up to date.

And what we find again and again is that this message that doesn't change, doesn't actually sit among us as a relic, a sort of antiquarian relic that, oh, that's nice, I can't believe people believe that, but no, it comes among us.

And it does now exactly what it did then. It liberates and it frees and it heals. You know, this is one of the reasons why our preaching on Sunday mornings is mainly expository.

[26 : 01] expository. That is, we take a text and we move through it section by section and teach the main point of each passage Sunday after Sunday. We're not doing that because we want to bore you all to death.

You know. But we're doing that because we want to make sure that we're delivering faithfully this liberating good news of Jesus with all its implications.

You know, if we skipped around from verse to verse, verse, or even worse, if I just shared some warm devotional thoughts from my week, not only would that be pretty boring after a while, trust me, I'm not a very interesting person.

It would be boring. But you know, it wouldn't actually feed our souls. Friends, I wonder that the books that you like to read and the speakers that you like to listen to, are they teaching God's word clearly and accurately?

In that book that you read, is it a lot of expounding of scripture or is it a lot of sort of cherry picking of verses and then running away with an idea? Just like Paul and Silas faithfully delivered the apostolic message, that should be our strategy too.

[27 : 21] But it also involves not just sort of faithfully delivering the message, but it also involves personal investment. Look again at verses one through three.

Luke introduces us to another key player in the story of the early church, Timothy. And Paul takes a personal interest in this young man and chooses to intentionally invest in him.

Now, what's happening here, this sort of personal investment, is not just for missionaries and not just for church leaders. At one level, Paul taking Timothy along with him is just a heightened example of healthy discipleship.

Paul's modeling something for us here. He's a more mature person in the faith, identifying a younger brother or sister, and then investing in him or her personally.

to see him or her grow towards maturity in Christ. Friends, this is what a healthy church actually looks like. Where there's a culture of this sort of thing.

[28 : 30] Where there's a culture of personal investment and intentional discipleship. A culture where we want to spend time with each other to see one another grow. You know, I hope that in the coming years, our church becomes more and more a place where every member has a Paul in their life, as it were.

Someone building into them. And everybody has a Timothy in their life too. Someone that they're building into. And everybody has a Barnabas or a Silas or two in their life.

A good friend, maybe at the same stage as you, spurring you on. Wouldn't that be a beautiful thing? That the gospel wasn't just something we talked about, but something we lived out in relationship with one another.

Some change, some growth, some progress towards Christ's likeness will only happen in that context. We need to be close enough to one another so we can imitate one another.

As we imitate Christ. So brothers and sisters, let me ask you, who are you building into? Is there someone younger in the faith here in our church family that you think you could invest in personally?

[29 : 48] Of course, you might be thinking, I have no idea where to start. That sounds nice on paper, but no one ever disciplined me. How do I actually do that?

Well, here's a good way to start. First, start praying for the people that you know in the church. Maybe start with your small group, for instance. And is there anyone there younger than you or younger in the faith?

And then pray for that person and invite them out to lunch on Sunday. And in the course of your conversation, be sure to ask them two questions. One, hey, what's God been teaching you through our small group lately?

Or if they're not in your small group, hey, what's God been teaching you on Sundays? What have you been learning from the book of Acts? How's it been challenging you? What's been new? And second, ask them, hey, how can I pray for you this week?

And then, actually pray for them that week. Right? And in a week or two, follow up with what you talked about and prayed about and keep the conversation and the prayer going.

[30 : 55] Doesn't have to be rocket science, but it could be revolutionary. Now, if in a week's time, someone asks you to lunch next Sunday, and they ask you these questions, don't get all weirded out.

Uh-oh, they're discipling me. They must think I'm really immature in the faith. This is weird. Look, be thankful that God's starting to use your church family for what God designed it to do, to grow you up in the faith.

Be glad that God's starting something in your life. And, of course, once a relationship like this gets off the ground, there's all sorts of things you can do together. You can read a good Christian book together.

There's plenty downstairs in the bookstall. Just pick one. Randomly. Close your eyes. Grab one. It'll be edifying. Just kidding. Think of ways you can serve together, right? Or pick up a, take up a particular need that you see in the world or in our inner city and start to pray about it together intentionally, regularly.

Or maybe do that in your workplace. That's just a few. But, of course, building into someone like this takes time, doesn't it? And isn't it time that we all feel like we don't have enough of?

[32 : 14] But, you know, on the one hand, I think if you start with people you already have some kind of connection with, I bet you'll find it's not as hard as you think to get that time together.

And remember, too, look, everybody has to eat. Everyone has to eat. Meals are a great time to do this sort of thing. Read the Gospels. Jesus was always eating with people.

He knew they had to eat. He wanted to get time with them. So he ate with them. It's a very Christ-like thing to do. Grab a meal. Start discipling each other. But, you know, on the other hand, I hope you see that this is worth making the time and sacrifice for.

Because, first, it's a surefire way that God will grow you. You know, often it's only when we step out to minister to others that God shapes and matures us in the deep ways that he really wants to.

And that's very exciting to think that when we step out into something that might be a little scary and a little risk-taking, God's going to meet us there and change us more and more. But it's not just good for you.

[33 : 20] Friends, this is also an eternal work. You have the chance to impact someone for their spiritual and eternal good.

Is there any joy comparable to that? Personal investment. That's the second part of Paul's strategy. But the last thing we see here, not just faithful delivery, not just personal investment, but also costly identification. identification. At the end of verse 3, Paul has Timothy circumcised.

Welcome to the team. And you know, of course, it's not because Paul thinks Timothy has to get circumcised.

That was, I mean, as we said, that was settled at the Jerusalem Council once and for all. Timothy was free to be circumcised or not. It wasn't a requirement for salvation, but he willingly undergoes it. Why? For the sake of sharing the gospel with, as Luke says, the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

[34 : 32] 1 Corinthians 9 that we read earlier, that Malcolm read for us, is a really helpful cross-reference here. There we heard Paul say, I'm willing to become like the Jews in order to win the Jews to Christ.

And I'm willing to become like the Gentiles to win the Gentiles to Christ. Not like them in their sinful practices, but like them in their culture. And I'm willing to become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

I do it all for the sake of the gospel, he says. That I might share with them in its blessings. And here we see this principle being played out in Timothy's life.

He's willing to become more Jewish, as it were, in order to win the Jews, to be an insider in their culture. And no doubt, adult circumcision was a painful procedure.

And yet for Timothy, the joy of sharing in the gospel blessings with new converts was greater in his mind than the pain of circumcision.

[35 : 35] He was willing to joyfully accept the temporary cost for the sake of that eternal gain.

Friend, I wonder, have you ever considered how you might become more like your neighbors?

Not in their sin, but in their culture, in order to love them and show them the grace of Jesus. Have you ever thought about how you might become more of an insider to their world in order to love them with the love of Christ more effectively?

Even if doing so is costly. You know, for missionaries, this often requires learning a new language and dressing in different clothes and eating new foods.

But what would it be like for your neighbors? That's who God's calling you to know and to love and to be an ambassador to. What would be an example of this?

Well, let's say you have a neighbor who reads the New York Times religiously every Sunday. And something that they've read always comes up when you talk with them.

[36 : 44] I have some neighbors like that. Do you? Well, would we be willing to get a subscription and read it in order to enter into their world and to get to know them and to love them well?

Would you listen to their music? Would you follow their sports team? Would you try their food? Would you frequent their restaurant or their local hangout? Would you do all that for the sake of sharing in the joys of the gospel?

And of course, it's easy to see why we don't do this. After all, costly identification is just that, right? It's costly. It takes time and it takes money and it takes energy.

It takes space in our schedules. And besides, wouldn't I rather be listening to my music? After all, it's way better than theirs. Wouldn't I rather be eating at my restaurant or cheering for my sports team or reading my newspaper or just staying in my culture?

It's not just costly, but it's inconvenient. It takes me naturally away from what I feel most comfortable with. But friends, remember that there once was a time when someone took notice of you and he saw everything that made up your life.

[38 : 06] All of your likes and dislikes and all of your family background and he saw all of your cultural uniquenesses and differences. And even more than that, he took notice of all your sin and all your rebellion.

And in love, he left everything that was comfortable. He left everything that he called home in order to come and identify with you.

Not just in your humanity, but also in your sin. And he didn't just become like you. He actually took your place. He became sin.

Your and my sin. So that in him, you could become his righteousness. And three days later, God raised him from the dead to show that that work was complete.

You see, friends, Jesus identified with us at the most tremendous cost. And it has resulted in our eternal good.

[39 : 15] For the joy set before him, Hebrews says, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of God, welcoming all who come to him.

Friends, how could we not go knowing him? How could we not go and identify with others so that we might share with them in the blessings of the gospel?

It is the most natural thing in the world for Christians to do that. So friends, this is the strategy. This is it. Deliver the message faithfully.

Invest in one another personally. And identify even when it's costly. For in doing this, why is this a, it's not just a good strategy, it's a godly strategy.

Why? Because it's exactly what Jesus has done for us. And so Luke shows us that when we rely on God's mercy and when we take up this Christ-shaped strategy, that's the path to growing deep and wide as a church.

[40 : 19] Friends, imagine if that's what Trinity became in the coming months and years. What if this became a place where we thought deeply about God, where his grace was brought to bear on all of life, where we grew deep, strong, living roots in the depths of the gospel?

But what if this was also a place where the spiritually curious were welcomed and engaged? What if this were a place where new believers were multiplying and encouraged to grow and ask questions and work through their doubts?

What if this is a place where we went out with boldness and with creativity to raise spiritual questions and to open doors for conversations about Christ? Friends, that's the church that God's calling us to be.

And that's the church that by his grace he's making us to be. And as we come to the table in just a minute, it's here that we get to remember the center of it all.

Christ crucified for you and for me. And here we get to experience, to taste and see the depths of God's wisdom and power and love on display in their fullness at the cross.

[41 : 23] But at the table we're also reminded of how wide it goes. Because here we see that everyone who repents and believes is welcome to find their place in his family and to come to feast at the table.

Friends, let's pray. God, we pray that you would help us to do just what we see in this passage. Lord, make us a church that's deep and that's wide. Lord, we need your Holy Spirit and we need your gospel to make that true. So Father, take these things and seal them in our hearts as we come to the table.

Lord, impress them deeply upon us, we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.