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DEVELOPING AN EVANGELISM MINISTRY AT  
ATLANTA BAPTIST CHINESE CHURCH

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

DEVELOPING AN EVANGELISM MINISTRY AT  
ATLANTA BAPTIST CHINESE CHURCH

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For the glory of God

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## PREFACE

About 25 years ago, one late night in spring in Chengdu, China, a young man left the bar and staggered on his bicycle to return to his rental home. Before he got home, he fell under a big tree beside the road. Early the next morning, an old man passing by woke him up, and he got up in a daze and rode away. A few years later, the young man moved to Beijing and continued to pursue his dream of being a musician. He played guitar in bars and nightclubs. He and his band friends would sometimes go swimming in an artificial lake called Hou Hai in Beijing at night, and they would jump into the water drunkenly after drinking.

In his first year in Beijing, the young man fell in love with a girl. She asked him if he wanted to follow her to an underground church. That was the first time in his life that he walked into a church, saw the Bible, met Christians, and heard the gospel. Half a year later, this young man's numb soul was finally shaken from doubting and despising the gospel to being awakened by the gospel, and he felt unprecedented freedom and hope. He repented and decided to follow Christ.

That young man is me. Since I entered the church, many incredible things have happened in my life. The next year, I married the girl who invited me to church. The gospel saved me and changed my career and life. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Acts 4:12). This statement is true. Who has the power to awaken a sleeping and perishing soul? When I was approaching 40 years old, I thought I was wasting my life and had no interest in doing anything. I wanted to study theology. Although it was not uncommon for Chinese people to come to the United States at that time, for a man who was nearly 40 years old, married, did not understand

English, and had children, studying in the United States was completely crazy and impossible.

After I applied to several seminaries, only the International Department Admissions Officer of Liberty University sent me a student visa and told me that I had zero chance to study in the United States unless God wanted me to. Again, I experienced a seemingly impossible event in my life: in 2013, I arrived in the United States and began a long, hard, and exciting life of studying abroad. I spent one and a half years studying the English language, three and a half years studying music, and three years studying theology. After I completed my Master of Divinity at Liberty, a seminary classmate told me that The Southern Baptist Theology Seminary had a program for doctoral ministry. Soon, I sent an application to SBTS and received a reply. In the same year, 2020, I started working as a full-time pastor and continued my half-time studies in doctoral ministry.

The gospel can save a person's soul and change a person's life. Unfortunately, many church ministries now lack the focus on life reconstruction, and many busy church ministries do not shake peoples' empty souls at all. In many cases, the focal points of church ministry have been completely lost. First, a church should help believers, strengthen their faith, encourage them to rely on God through faith, and practice the gospel they have heard. Second, a church should help unbelievers witness the power of the gospel, preach the vital nature of the gospel, and lead them to confess their sins and repent. This is God's command and promise to everyone who follows him.

All we should do is to obey God and proclaim the complete gospel sincerely. God has called people to repent and follow him throughout history, and he still calls people to repent and follow him today. Just like God is working in China, among a nation that rebels against God and resists God, he chose and changed me, a prodigal son, and gave me the opportunity to study his Word full time and made me his vessel. God also chooses other people to follow and serve him. I hope this project can bless those who

read it and help a church's ministry to focus on spreading the gospel and become a life-changing church.

I thoroughly enjoyed my study of Applied Theology and was blessed by related courses established by SBTS, including Ecclesiology, Biblical Theology, Historical Theology, and Practical Theology. These courses have helped me deepen my theological research. In particular, I can actually apply what I have learned from those courses to my pastoral work and church ministry. For instance, studying ecclesiology helped me to develop the overall doctrine of the church by considering crucial biblical, theological, historical, and contemporary cultural issues that influence ecclesiology. Also, it enhanced my ability to understand the purpose, characteristics, purity, unity, and discipline in the church. In my second year of leading Atlanta Baptist Chinese Church, I encountered an urgent need to update the original church constitution and bylaws. I gained much constructive information about the government, ordinances, and ministries of the church from my study of ecclesiology and was able to update the constitution and bylaws. I also got a lot of valuable information and resources by searching the SBTS Library online.

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Paul Akin, who helped me build a church ministry project. At the beginning, I had no idea how to set up a project and choose a topic. Thank you to Dr. Akin for giving me a lot of guidance and help through this project. Thank you especially to my tutor, Mrs. Jennifer Stec. She spent a lot of time helping me correct the grammatical mistakes and paragraph structure in my paper and helped me plan the progress of my paper. I was given clear and very professional guidance and academic help during this project. Because of her professional and careful guidance, my studies progressed smoothly.

Thank you to the professors who taught me during my studies in SBTS. I have benefited in many ways in my life from the teaching of Professors Gregg R. Allison, Matthew D. Haste, Andrew T. Walker, and Timothy Paul Jones.

I am grateful to Victory Baptist Chinese Church of Rochester and Atlanta Chinese Baptist Church, where I worked full-time, as they supported my part-time studies. I am especially grateful to several churches for their financial support during my seminary studies: Atlanta Chinese Baptist Church, Mandarin Baptist Church of Los Angeles, and Grace Christian Church of Virginia.

Thank you to my wife Yanping Yu for silently supporting me and giving me great comfort and encouragement during my studies and ministry work. Thanks to her for inviting me to an underground church many years ago in Beijing. Since I faced Jesus, my life has never been the same again and is full of miracles.

Tao Yang

Atlanta, Georgia

May 2024

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In September 2022, I became the full-time teaching pastor at Atlanta Baptist Chinese Church (ABCC) in Duluth, Georgia. ABCC is comprised of Chinese people from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and America, and as such, is uniquely positioned to reach the Chinese communities in the Atlanta area. ABCC needs a practical evangelical strategy for addressing the challenges facing today's church members. ABCC leaders have earnestly prayed that the congregation will return to God's Great Commission and meet the spiritual needs of fallen souls. ABCC needs to rebuild its vision of gospel-focused evangelism, discipleship, and biblical ministry through the faithful teaching of God's Word, which challenges members to share the gospel and make disciples.

#### **Context**

ABCC was founded in 1987 at Briarlake Baptist Church and later joined Lilburn First Baptist Church with the goal of sharing the gospel with the Asian community. In 2017, ABCC merged with Great Commission Chinese Church and acquired the current Duluth location near Atlanta. There are around one hundred registered members of ABCC, but the attendance in Sunday worship service during the COVID-19 pandemic averaged thirty members. The church closed during the pandemic, and every ABCC ministry moved online. Although the church owned a beautiful building in the business center of Duluth, the empty podium, chapel, offices, and children's rooms brought great sadness. Since the pandemic's end, some members have returned to participate in physical worship and activities. However, the congregation suffered from a

lack of consistent fellowship, preaching and teaching, Bible study, and evangelistic outreach.

To appreciate the challenges facing ABCC and the necessity of this project, one must understand the cultural context of our Chinese church. Most of the members of ABCC are over the age of sixty, although an increasing number of young people have started to attend ABCC, which is an encouraging sign of growth. Four different Chinese groups make up our church membership. The first group is American-born Chinese who speak English and sometimes (but not always) another form of Chinese. The other three groups are (1) mainland Chinese immigrant families who speak Mandarin, (2) Taiwanese immigrant families who speak Mandarin with a different accent, and (3) Hong Kong immigrant families who speak Cantonese. Although these groups are technically all Chinese and share similar foods, history, culture, clothing, and ancestors, they are different in many ways. Second and third-generation children of immigrants are often American-born and influenced by American culture as well.

Some of our older members can still clearly remember escaping mainland China with their parents just before Chairman Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established rule over China in 1949. Others are descendants of those who escaped to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other Asian countries like Indonesia and Malaysia. Since the CCP has been in control, mainland China has endured totalitarian rule. The CCP strictly controls the ideological messages of education and news outlets, and they have significantly suppressed other religions.<sup>1</sup> Mainland Chinese have been taught to hate

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<sup>1</sup> Commenting on the CCP's control of their ideological message and its dissemination, Kerry Brown, Director of the China Studies Center at the University of Sydney, writes, "The CCP puts a lot of effort into crafting its ideological message, in fact, and this is testified by the network of Party Schools across the country, at the central and provincial level, the time devoted to training even the most senior cadres in ideological work and the imperatives of both the fourth- and fifth-generation leaders to get their ideological messages right." Kerry Brown, "The Communist Party of China and Ideology," *China: An International Journal* 10, no. 2 (August 2012): 52. On CCP suppression of other religions, Jie Kang writes, "From 1958 there was a total reversal of government policy, with all religious activities forbidden, even those of the officially sanctioned religious organizations whose temples, churches and mosques were forced to close. . . . Public religious expression was therefore completely suppressed." Jie Kang, *House Church Christianity in China: From Rural Preachers to City Pastors* (Basingstoke, England: Springer, 2016), 4.

Western democracy, the “cancer” of capitalism, and Christianity, which they liken to spiritual opium.<sup>2</sup>

People who live in Hong Kong and Taiwan have been exposed to and therefore influenced more by secular Western democracy and Christianity. From 1841 to 1997, Hong Kong was a colony of the British Empire. In 1997, Hong Kong returned to Chinese control after a century and a half of British colonial rule. Britain and China signed a “one country, two systems” policy agreement between China and Hong Kong that would be in place until 2047. However, this agreement has proven worthless as the CCP does not allow any other ideology or political system to exist that could threaten its regime and control.

Taiwan and Hong Kong residents have had more freedom to visit and immigrate to the Western world, especially North America. Consequently, many Chinese churches in North America were established by people from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Since December 2001, China has been a member of the World Trade Organization, which forced the Chinese government to open global trade and travel between mainland China and many other countries.<sup>3</sup> As a result, many mainland Chinese have pursued

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<sup>2</sup> In 2018, New Jersey Congressman Christopher H. Smith testified on China’s war on Christianity and other religions:

The activity in China is not new. After the People’s Republic was established in 1949, all religion was severely suppressed. Religions were viewed by the Chinese Communist Party as a threat to their rule, as an organizing principle besides that of the Party was condemned.

China embraced the Marxist ideology of religion as [the] opium of the masses and as a tactic for foreign influence in China. The Communist Chinese Party viewed Christianity as part and parcel of Western imperialism in China during the 100 years of humiliation, beginning in the 1840s. Religious freedom continued to be severely repressed during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. (*China’s War on Christianity and Other Religious Faiths: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations of the Committee on Foreign Affairs*, 115th Cong. [September 27, 2018] [statement of Christopher H. Smith]).

<sup>3</sup> To gain other member countries’ support for their petition to join the World Trade Organization, China had to negotiate agreements with a number of WTO countries, which included increasing the ability of its citizens to travel and work or study abroad. For more information on China’s concessions, see Government Accountability Office, *World Trade Organization: Status of China’s Trade Commitments to the United States and Other Members*, GAO/NSIAD-00-142, May 16, 2000, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/nsiad-00-142.pdf>.



opportunities to study abroad and immigrate to other countries. Even though many Chinese parents do not have a chance to go abroad, they send their children to the West for education, to make a new life, and to have the opportunity to change their futures. Though these events and the subsequent immigration should present a greater opportunity for the church to evangelize the Chinese, the Chinese are heavily influenced by the past and are reluctant to consider Christianity.

ABCC has strengths and weaknesses, and both are opportunities for growth in knowing and sharing the gospel. Though many churches have seen a decline in younger members, ABCC has experienced an increase in the number of youth and young adults attending the church. The former pastor and the leaders of the church knew the importance of youth ministry, so they hired a part-time English pastor in 2019 to encourage and disciple the younger generation. The youth ministry has a weekly Bible study group and meets for an English-language worship service every Sunday morning. Through these ministries, the youth have built healthy relationships with each other, and, more importantly, a biblical worldview has been built into their lives. The younger generations bring energy and vibrancy to this church, and this project can build on this energy and encourage a positive dynamic between the youth and the older people in the church, who can offer wisdom and direction for life and faith.

The second strength of ABCC is its multicultural background and location. The different regions, cultures, and languages of ABCC's members make it possible to reach Chinese people of various backgrounds. A large number of Chinese immigrants live in Georgia, and there are significant concentrations of Chinese people in cities within a thirty-minute driving radius of Duluth, including Johns Creek, Suwanee, Buford, Lawrenceville, and Lilburn.<sup>4</sup> Duluth is a major retail shopping center; Costco, Sam's

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<sup>4</sup> Several cities near Duluth have a Chinese population greater than 10000, including Duluth (26,600); Johns Creek (76,728); Suwanee (15,355); Buford (12,225); Lawrenceville (28,546); and Lilburn (11,596). USA.com, "Georgia Chinese Population Percentage City Rank," accessed December 28, 2022,

Club, Best Buy, and famous Asian supermarkets are very close to the church. However, even though many Chinese families have lived in America for over thirty years, many have never walked into a church or heard the gospel. Their souls and thoughts are chained by secular philosophies and worldviews like atheism, evolutionism, nihilism, and socialism. Every Sunday, they come to this area to buy food for physical nourishment when spiritual food for their eternal nourishment is so much more available in this context than it would have been in China. ABCC is the best location to reach them with the hope of the gospel.

ABCC has also faced many challenges, including difficulties inherited from the past. The former pastor, who served for approximately ten years, died of cancer in 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic began in late 2019/early 2020, and during this time, ABCC did not have a Chinese pastor to lead the church ministry. For three years, spiritual growth and ministry development was stagnant. Some members of ABCC have been attending church activities for years but still have not built a strong foundation of faith in God's Word.

The church organized events to help members connect during and after the pandemic, including picnics, hiking trips, and fellowships. However, most of these social events had little to no evangelistic purpose, revealing another weakness at ABCC: the lack of desire and eagerness to share the gospel. It is easy for some members to find the energy to share political opinions through social media, but they have little interest in sharing the gospel. Though it is not wrong for Christians to want to influence and change public places, if they do not have a strong and growing faith in Christ, they can easily be influenced by those who live and think unbiblically. Christians should be more attracted

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[http://www.usa.com/rank/georgia-state--chinese-population-percentage--city-rank.htm?hl=&hlst=&wist=&yr=8000&dis=&sb=DESC&plow=&phigh=&ps=.](http://www.usa.com/rank/georgia-state--chinese-population-percentage--city-rank.htm?hl=&hlst=&wist=&yr=8000&dis=&sb=DESC&plow=&phigh=&ps=)

to the Word of God, more attracted to unity in Christ (Eph 4), and more focused on Jesus's command to make disciples.

### **Rationale**

The last command Jesus gave to his disciples was to make disciples (Matt 28:18–20). The Great Commission extends to every follower of Jesus Christ. To reach souls for Jesus Christ, ABCC members must be convinced of the truth of the gospel, its power to bring people to salvation (Rom 1:16), and its ability to unify believers under the banner of Christ. This project is timely and necessary for three reasons.

First, ABCC has experienced recent membership growth and renewed relationships since the pandemic, and this is a good time to focus on building a stronger foundation in the gospel. God has provided a way for sinners to be reconciled to him through Jesus's death on the cross, which paid the penalty for our sins (1 Cor 15:1–6). To follow Christ and grow in spiritual maturity and wisdom requires listening to him through reading and studying his Word and obeying his commands. Every believer, from the new believer to the spiritually mature, should preach the gospel to themselves daily, following Jesus's greatest command to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30).

Second, ABCC believers who are convinced of the truth of the gospel recognize the purpose of evangelism because they have experienced the power of the gospel unto salvation (Rom 1:16) and are motivated to tell others of the salvation offered through Jesus Christ. In so doing, they are obeying the second greatest command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). If we never share the gospel with our non-Christian neighbors, can we truly say that we are loving them? Scripture says that unless one repents of his sins and trusts in the saving work of Jesus, he will die in sin and spend eternity in hell (1 Thess 1:10). If ABCC claims to love others, then our purpose

must be to share the gospel that separates light from darkness, truth from lies, and the true God from idols.

Third, ABCC needs to be reminded of the gospel's ability to unify believers under the banner of Christ. As mentioned, four different Chinese groups make up ABCC's membership. We are diverse in age, experience, background, culture, and maturity. ABCC has both spiritually mature members and those who are newly walking with Christ. We have also endured the challenging years of the pandemic in which we, along with the entire country, observed division and strife among Christians and in the broader culture. ABCC will benefit from a close examination of how the early church faithfully endured during times of strife, political division, secularism, and persecution and yet continued to spread the gospel. The book of Acts provides many examples of Christians praying, reading, obeying, and following God's Word. The early church grew in their knowledge of Christ and their understanding of God's Word, and Christ's purpose for the church (the Great Commission) was the highest priority of their ministry. ABCC will benefit from the early church's example of standing fast in the unity and purpose created by the gospel.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this ministry research project was to help members of Atlanta Baptist Chinese Church understand the necessity of personal evangelism, share their faith with others, and win converts to Christ.

### **Goals**

The completion of the following four goals determined the success of this project.

1. The first goal was to assess the current understanding of evangelism among the members of ABCC.
2. The second goal was to develop a series of eight sermons based on the book of Acts to introduce biblical evangelism and train current members of ABCC.

3. The third goal was to increase the participants' understanding of evangelism by delivering the Acts sermon series.
4. The fourth goal was to develop a strategic plan for evangelism education and personal evangelism practice at ABCC.

A defined means of measurement and a benchmark of success determined the successful completion of each goal. The research methodology and instruments used to measure the success of each goal are detailed in the following section.<sup>5</sup>

### **Research Methodology**

The first goal was to assess the current understanding of evangelism among the members of ABCC. Prior to the sermon series, fourteen members of ABCC, including three leaders, completed a survey of their current knowledge and practice of evangelism.<sup>6</sup> This survey was designed to show the strengths and weaknesses in their knowledge and inform the curriculum development and delivery in goals 2 and 3. This goal was considered successful when fourteen members of ABCC completed the initial assessment.

The second goal was to develop a series of eight sermons based on the book of Acts to introduce biblical evangelism and train current members of ABCC to be evangelistic. This series was intended to help the members understand the mission of the church, the signs of a healthy church, how to share the gospel, and why every follower of Christ should be a disciple-maker.<sup>7</sup> The series included homework to help participants better understand God, his Word, and the Christian's responsibility to obey the Great Commission. This goal was measured by an expert panel that included two deacons and a church ministry leader at ABCC. The panel employed a rubric to measure the biblical

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<sup>5</sup> All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

<sup>6</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>7</sup> See chapter 4 for a detailed overview of the curriculum, which was delivered in Chinese.

accuracy, scope, pedagogy, and practicality of the sermon series. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level.<sup>8</sup>

The third goal was to increase participants' understanding of evangelism by delivering the Acts sermon series. The series trained current members to be disciple-makers and encouraged each church member to share their testimony and use their spiritual gifts to serve others. This goal was measured by conducting a post-series assessment in which participants demonstrated a change in understanding based on the material presented. A statistical analysis was conducted on the data gathered from the pre- and post-series surveys.<sup>9</sup> This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference in the post-series assessment scores.<sup>10</sup>

The fourth goal was to develop a strategic plan for evangelism education and personal evangelism practice at ABCC. This goal was measured by two ministry leaders, a youth pastor, and a deacon at ABCC who used a rubric to appraise the effectiveness of the plan, communication processes, and training elements. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level on the rubric.

### **Limitations/Delimitations**

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre-series survey was dependent upon the respondents' ability to be open and honest about their knowledge of evangelism and understanding of disciple-making principles and practices.

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<sup>8</sup> See appendix 2 for the survey and results.

<sup>9</sup> See the tables in appendix 3 for the data gathered in the pre- and post-series surveys.

<sup>10</sup> See appendix 5 for the *t*-test results and chapters 4 and 5 for analysis and review of these results.

Some individuals are reluctant to fill out assessments if required to provide their personal information. To mitigate this limitation, the respondents' assessments were completed anonymously. Second, the effectiveness of the training was limited by the consistency of attendance. Participants were encouraged to attend the entire series because it would have been difficult to measure their increase in knowledge without consistent attendance.

Two delimitations were placed on this project. First, the length of the project was limited to eighteen weeks, consisting of two weeks for the initial assessment, one week to amend the sermon outlines and complementary LifeGroup instructions, two weeks for review by the expert panel and subsequent modifications to series content, eight weeks to implement the sermons and LifeGroup curriculum, two weeks for post-series assessments, and three weeks to evaluate the project. Second, because of the content-heavy nature of the sermon series, the increase in knowledge from goal 3 relied on data only from those who attended a minimum of six sermons.

### **Conclusion**

Salvation only comes from Jesus Christ, and everyone who repents and confesses their sin before God and trusts in God to forgive their sin will be saved by God's mercy. Knowing and sharing the gospel is God's plan to impact this world because the gospel changes people's lives and brings light and hope to a dark and hopeless world.

The second chapter of this project details the biblical and theological basis for developing an evangelism ministry program by exegeting Matthew 11:28–30, the call to share the gospel with unbelievers, and Acts 10, the early church's role in spreading the gospel. Chapter 3 explicates the importance of teaching sound doctrine and protecting the ministry of preaching. It also addresses what occurs when believers pursue hope and fulfillment outside of God and the danger of offering "cheap grace" or a reductionistic gospel to those in desperate need of forgiveness and rescue from sin. Chapter 4 recounts

the implementation of the project itself. Chapter 5 evaluates the effectiveness of the project based on the completion of the specified goals.



CHAPTER 2  
THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR  
DEVELOPING AN EVANGELISM  
MINISTRY PROGRAM

Two passages from the New Testament (NT) provide a clear command for the development of an evangelism ministry. Matthew 28:18–20 shows that evangelism is the responsibility of everyone who believes in Christ. Christians are to share the gospel with sinners to bring them into God’s redemptive plan, make them disciples of Christ, and teach them how to make disciples. Acts 10 demonstrates that God’s redemptive plan is not only for Israel but for all nations. In this example, God calls his people, establishes the early church, and sends them to share the gospel from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth. The purpose of this chapter is to exegete these two NT passages and demonstrate that to confront the spiritual darkness of this fallen world, Christians must recognize God’s supremacy over earthly kingdoms and their responsibility to share with the world that the gospel is the only hope for humanity.

**The Great Commission**

Matthew’s Gospel begins with Jesus’s genealogy and continues to tell the story of Jesus’s miraculous birth, childhood, baptism, temptation, preaching, crucifixion, and resurrection. The last chapter of Matthew records a conversation between Jesus and his disciples in which Jesus declares his authority and expands the disciples’ understanding of God’s redemptive plan:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:18–20)

Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God who fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament, reveals God's desire to call people to himself through the evangelistic ministry of ordinary people who love him. The Father has invited his followers to be part of his preparation for Christ's return and future kingdom.

### **The Meaning of Commission**

Matthew 28:18–20 is commonly called the Great Commission, but what does it mean to be commissioned? The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines commission as “the act of granting certain powers or the authority to carry out a particular task or duty.”<sup>1</sup> There are two roles in this definition: the person granting the authority and the person carrying out the task. Connecting this definition with the Great Commission, we can say that Jesus has granted authority and empowered his disciples to proclaim the gospel and make disciples of all nations. Christopher Wright articulates, “The Great Commission implies an imperative, a mandate. So, it also presupposes an authority behind that imperative.”<sup>2</sup> The disciples had recognized Jesus as their Master, and even the crowds were “astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority” (Matt 7:28–29). After healing the paralytic, Jesus further revealed “that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Matt 9:6). Matthew 10 describes Jesus's commission to the disciples: “Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.” Now, Jesus, the sovereign Creator, had authorized and empowered his disciples to carry out his mission of redemption in the world following his ascension.

Those who carry out a particular task or duty are often called ambassadors. Indeed, Paul uses this word to describe Christ-followers: “Therefore, we are ambassadors

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<sup>1</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), s.v. “Commission.”

<sup>2</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 51–52.

for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (1 Cor 5:20). Every disciple is as an ambassador of the kingdom who is commissioned to share the gospel, the good news of Christ’s victory. Michael Horton writes that describing the disciple as ambassador is “taken from the language of the battlefield, *euangelion* means ‘good news’ of military victory, which was brought back to the capitol by a herald or ambassador. The Great Commission begins not with an imperative, a plan, a strategy for our victory in the world, but with the announcement that Christ has conquered sin and death.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus is the exemplar for us in fulfilling this task. His Father gave him a mission to accomplish, as Jesus stated, “But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me” (John 5:36).

Jesus fulfilled his mission from God, and he gave the same mission to his disciples. Shortly after his resurrection, Jesus tells them, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21). Acts tells of the spread of the early church through the testimony of many disciples, and Paul’s epistles tell us of the continuation of the commission and the spread of the gospel to the next generation. Paul told Timothy, “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:1). Although many generations have passed since Jesus commissioned his disciples, we too are ambassadors who are granted the same authority to share the gospel with the nations.

### **The Nature of the Commission**

The Great Commission is “great” in that it is all-encompassing. The commission was not limited to certain people, a certain place, or a certain time. This

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Horton, *The Gospel Commission: Recovering God’s Strategy for Making Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 62.

section will explain that the Great Commission was (1) given to the church as (2) the fulfillment of God’s covenant to his people to save them, (3) a model for building up the body of Christ through new disciples who are taught Christ’s commands, (4) includes all nations, and (5) a task to be pursued until Christ’s return.

### *Given to the Church*

Although Jesus personally commissioned his eleven disciples before his ascension, his command extends to every follower of Christ. We know this because “all nations” could only be reached by many generations of disciples evangelizing until the “end of the age.” To accomplish this required the power of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus had promised to his followers in Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

After the fulfillment of this promise, the early followers of Christ joined together to learn of Christ, worship him, break bread, and pray with one another. Acts 2:47 says that the “Lord added to their number day by day those were being saved.” As evidenced by those who heard Peter’s sermon and the disciples speak during Pentecost, God called believers from all different nations and ethnicities. These new disciples were part of the early church. Gregg Allison describes the church: “The church is *missional*. It is the body of divinely called and divinely sent ministers proclaiming the gospel and advancing the kingdom of God.”<sup>4</sup>

As many traveled back to their home countries and advanced the kingdom of God, they made more disciples and built what is often called the universal church. This is the church that Jesus had promised to build, “and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). The *Baptist Faith and Message* refers to the universal church as

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<sup>4</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 140.

“the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.”<sup>5</sup> Wayne Grudem describes the universal church simply as “the community of all true believers of all times.”<sup>6</sup> All those who believe in and follow Christ are part of the universal church and are responsible for obeying and fulfilling the Great Commission.

We are part of this universal church—brothers and sisters with those early believers who broke bread with one another in the early days of the church. However, we are also part of the local church, which is described by the *Baptist Faith and Message* as “an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth.”<sup>7</sup> The local church is God’s gift to those who have and will call on Christ and are recipients of God’s covenant promise to save those he loves through the blood of his Son. As such, the church—universal and local—is charged with fulfilling his Great Commission.

### *The Fulfillment of God’s Covenant*

The covenant God makes with his disciples follows a long line of covenants God made with his people, including the Adamic covenant (Gen 3:14–19), the Noahic covenant (Gen 9), the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:2–3), the Mosaic covenant (Exod 19; 24), and the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:25). The new covenant was prophesied by Isaiah (Isa 55:3; Jer 31:31–32) and fulfilled by Christ, who said, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20). Allison writes, “In one sense, from

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<sup>5</sup> Southern Baptist Convention, *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, accessed January 28, 2024, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/>.

<sup>6</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 858.

<sup>7</sup> Southern Baptist Convention, *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*.

the created order to human beings, every relationship in which God has been engaged has been structured according to some type of covenant.”<sup>8</sup> God brings more people into relationship with him through the Great Commission, and only those disciples who are in covenant with him can make disciples who enter the covenant with him.

New disciples signal their entrance into the covenant with God in several ways. Allison mentions two covenantal signs that take place in the local church: “baptism, the sign of entrance into new covenant relationship with God and into the covenant community, the church; and the Lord’s Supper, the sign of ongoing new covenant relationship with God and the covenant community, the church.”<sup>9</sup> In addition to the signs of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, disciples also obey God’s commands, as Allison states, “The new covenant features binding obligations, which some have summarized as ‘the Great Commandment’ (Matt. 22:37–40) and ‘the Great Commission’ (Matt. 28:19– 20); Paul’s expression for the sum of these covenantal obligations is ‘the law of Christ’ (Gal. 6:2).”<sup>10</sup> Today, when people are baptized in repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, they become part of the body of Christ through the church and are commissioned to proclaim the gospel.

### *Building Up the Body through Christ’s Teaching*

Jesus told his disciples to baptize new believers and teach them all he had commanded (Matt 28:19–20). This creates a new generation of disciples who can make disciples. When new believers are baptized in repentance and faith (Rom 6:4), they are at peace with God through Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1). They then begin to learn what it means to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18).

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<sup>8</sup> Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 103.

<sup>9</sup> Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 78.

<sup>10</sup> Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 78.

They join the body of Christ, the local church (Eph 1:23), learn to build up the body (Eph 4:12), relate to one another as members of the body (1 Cor 12:27; Eph 4:16), and pursue unity with the body (Eph 4:1–3). They also recognize that the head of the body is Christ (Eph 5:23), and the head of the body has given them one mission (Matt 28:20): to multiply.

### *Includes All Nations*

The Great Commission has no geographical or ethnic restrictions; the scope includes all nations and all peoples. Jesus sent out his disciples to “be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Although the first disciples were Jewish, the church began to grow and added many Gentile disciples. The apostle Paul emphasized that he received the authority and calling from Jesus to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles: “For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:12). We see the fulfillment of the commission in Revelation 7:9–10, as John records, “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!””

### *A Task Pursued until Christ’s Return*

Although God exists outside of time, his redemptive plan will be completed and culminate in Christ’s return. Until then, we are to fulfill his commission until the end of the age. At the end of Matthew’s Gospel, we see the commissioning of the eleven disciples. At the end of the book of Acts, we see the living body of Christ continuing to grow and spread to Jerusalem, Judea, and the ends of the earth. At the end of the Bible, the book of Revelation emphasizes that Jesus is coming soon. D. A. Carson writes, “In

this sense, the gospel of Matthew is not a closed book until the consummation.”<sup>11</sup> To give the Great Commission to his disciples has been God’s plan “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4). In *Sojourners and Strangers*, Allison notes that

the missional character of the church signifies that it moves centrifugally; the church (spatially) has a universal aim. This can be seen in Luke’s use of Jesus’ words to his disciples—“and you will be my witnesses . . . to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8)—as a programmatic statement for his writing, which continues to express and shape the missional telos of churches today. Furthermore, the eschatological dimension of the church indicates that it possesses a finality; the church (temporally) has an ultimate (or terminal) end. This comes into view most clearly in John’s apocalyptic vision of the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21–22).<sup>12</sup>

Though God’s redemptive plan started with Israel, he did not plan for it to be exclusive to the Jews. His salvation was always intended to flow through Israel to the peoples and nations of the earth. This is reflected in his covenant with Abraham, to whom God said, “And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:3). In the fullness of time, God sent his Son to be a light to all people. We see this reflected in the words of Simeon when he meets the infant Jesus in the temple, Simeon said, “For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the sight of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:30–32).

God’s plan continues with his disciples until the end of the age. David Bosch states, “Our missionary practice is not performed in unbroken continuity with the biblical witness; it is an altogether ambivalent enterprise executed in the context of tension between divine providence and human confusion (cf Gensichen 1971:16). The church’s involvement in mission remains an act of faith without earthly guarantees.”<sup>13</sup> Without God’s revelation, no one can find God, and no one can worship God. It is impossible for man to worship a God he does not know. This is why Paul wrote to the Romans, “How

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<sup>11</sup> D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, rev. ed., Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins, 2017), 737.

<sup>12</sup> Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 53.

<sup>13</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th anniv. ed., American Society of Missiology Series (New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 9.



then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’” God will raise up people to preach the gospel in any age; it is our privilege to obey his command and fulfill his commission.

### **For All Nations: The Gospel’s Movement**

The book of Acts demonstrates how the apostles obeyed God’s calling and led the early church to spread the gospel to the nations. In his sermon during Pentecost, Peter said, “Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). On hearing Peter’s sermon, many people believed and became witnesses of the gospel, following the Great Commission to make disciples to the nations. The stories of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8), Paul’s conversion (Acts 9), and the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10) are examples of how the Holy Spirit moved through men to accomplish God’s plan.

### **Acts 8 and 9**

In his sovereignty, God has ordained and orchestrated the movement of the gospel throughout the world. In the first few chapters of Acts, the gospel was preached from Jerusalem to Samaria, Caesarea, and Damascus. As the gospel spread geographically, it also began to spread to different ethnicities. Acts 8 tells the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, who was likely “a proselyte or near-proselyte to Judaism,” as he had come to Jerusalem to worship God.<sup>14</sup> Verse 26 says that the angel of the Lord told Philip to “rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” Upon arrival, the Spirit prompts Philip to meet an Ethiopian eunuch,

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<sup>14</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, *Luke-Acts*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 227.

an important official in charge of the treasury of the queen of Ethiopia, who was reading Isaiah the prophet. When he asks Philip to explain what he is reading, “Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus” (v. 35).

This is one example of the development and growth of the church—driven by God’s plan and guidance through his Holy Spirit. In Acts 9, Saul, a Jew of Roman birth and identity, was “still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (vv. 1–2). In the next verse, as Paul “went on his way,” he met the Son of God, and this former persecutor of the church was converted and later became a primary messenger of the gospel to the Gentile world.

## **Acts 10**

Acts 10 is an important turning point in the history of redemption as the gospel goes out to the Gentiles, demonstrating that God’s salvation is not only for Israel but for all nations and peoples. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Cornelius, a Gentile centurion in the Italian regiment, met the apostle Peter. In this encounter, Cornelius heard the gospel of Jesus Christ through Peter, and through Cornelius, God helped Peter understand the truth that the gospel was given to all people, the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Later, Peter uses this encounter to explain to the Jerusalem Council and the circumcised believers how God was at work among the Gentiles: “If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” (Acts 11:17).

### *The Faithful Centurion*

Caesarea was the administrative center of the Roman Empire and ruled over Judea. Each Italian battalion had about six hundred soldiers, with one centurion per one hundred people. Cornelius was a devout man with an open heart to the God of Israel; he

had a religious life, read the Scriptures, and led his family to fear God. Even though he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly (Acts 10:2), he did not understand salvation. At that time, it was very rare for a Gentile to accept the Jewish faith in this way. Acts 10:3 tells us that Cornelius “saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, ‘Cornelius.’”

Rather than preaching the gospel directly to Cornelius, the angel asked Cornelius to find the apostle Peter (Acts 10:4–5). He wanted Cornelius to understand that no one can be saved by his own passion and zeal. Even if a person has religious enthusiasm and participates in religious activities, there is no guarantee he or she is saved. If people could be saved in this way, there would be no need for the gospel. Peter himself had just testified to the council of rulers and elders and scribes in Jerusalem: “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Salvation depends on God’s grace, not one’s enthusiasm. Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matt 7:7). Cornelius sought God in fear and humility, and God revealed himself to him through Peter’s witness.

### *The Obedient Apostle*

God had a two-fold purpose in leading Cornelius and Peter together. First, through this encounter, Cornelius heard the gospel of Jesus Christ through Peter. Second, through Cornelius, God helped Peter understand the truth that the gospel was given to all people, the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Peter, like many of the Jews, was skeptical about the notion of salvation being offered to the Gentiles. According to Acts 10:9–16, Peter experienced a vision of a great sheet filled with all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. This sheet was bound at the four corners and descending towards him, down to the earth. Luke records that God told Peter, “‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything

common or unclean.’ This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again” (Acts 10:13–16 NKJV). Peter knew that in the Scriptures, God is holy, so he should not defile himself with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth (Lev 11:44–45). He also could remember the words of Christ: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt 5:17).

Although the Scriptures do not detail what animals he saw, Peter understood that the animals were unclean. While Peter wondered about the meaning of the vision and why he should now consider these unclean animals clean, Cornelius’s messengers, all Gentiles, came to his door. The Holy Spirit prompted Peter to meet them, and Peter obeyed and invited them into his house. This was a shocking development, as Jews believed that the Gentiles were contaminated under the curse and avoided communication with Gentiles. For Peter to receive Gentiles into his home was an indication of Peter’s obedience to the Holy Spirit.

Peter then went to Caesarea to see Cornelius and his relatives and close friends (vv. 23–28). When Peter met Cornelius, he testified, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean” (v. 28). Peter recognized that through this divine revelation, God had changed his (Peter’s) understanding of salvation. David Garland comments, “Peter understands that it was not simply about labeling food as impure or unclean but about labeling people that way.”<sup>15</sup> Peter comes to a new understanding of God’s redemptive plan—and the Great Commission. Darrell Bock writes, “The vision symbolizes that what separated Jews from Gentiles is now removed.”<sup>16</sup> Recognizing that God has brought them together for this purpose, Peter

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<sup>15</sup> David E. Garland, *Acts*, Teach the Text Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 120.

<sup>16</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 390.

admits to those who have gathered, “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (vv. 34–35). Peter then preached the gospel to everyone in Cornelius’s house (vv. 37–41), emphasizing the Great Commission: “He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (vv. 42–43).

Because of Peter’s increased understanding and immediate obedience, all of Cornelius’s family was saved. This was a vital lesson for Peter because he was the leader of the church. If he did not understand God’s universal salvation, he could not lead the church in God’s way and would not have been able to support Paul’s future ministry to the Gentiles. Later in Peter’s ministry, he received the Gentiles and went into their homes, demonstrating a clear understanding of the all-encompassing nature of the Great Commission.

### **The Hope of the Gospel**

Paul wrote in Romans 8:22 that “the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.” The church can respond to this groaning, showing the world that “the creation itself [can] be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21) through faith in Jesus Christ. This response must take place internally, as members of the church continue to preach the gospel to themselves, and externally, as members of the church preach the gospel to unbelievers.

### **The Gospel Is the Hope of Those Who Believe**

Many people think it is only important to preach the gospel to unbelievers, and those who already believe in the Lord do not need to hear the gospel. However, everyone

needs to hear the gospel, including Christ-followers who should continue to remind themselves of the truths of the gospel. The book of Acts records how Jesus preached the gospel to his disciples after his resurrection. The disciples' lives were renewed after they witnessed the resurrection of Jesus and heard the full gospel. Nearly half of Jesus's twelve disciples were fishermen. Although they had followed Jesus for three years, they did not fully comprehend Jesus's identity and his mission of salvation. When Jesus retaught the gospel to his disciples after his resurrection, they changed and transformed from doubtful, selfish, and cowardly ordinary people to those who "turned the world upside down" to fulfill the Great Commission.

Jesus said that in this world, his disciples would face tribulation (John 16:33). Spiritual warfare is a reality, yet the church and its members are not prepared for much of the spiritual warfare that is being waged against it. Pastors face numerous challenges within the congregation, including broken relationships with family members, political differences that divide members, individuals who need counseling, and much more. Although many pastors have completed theological courses, they lack the necessary spiritual training, wisdom, and sometimes courage to preach the Bible and lead the congregation in the face of spiritual battles. Pastors and church leaders are not the only ones facing this dilemma; every Christian has been called to participate in this spiritual battle. If a Christian does not fight with knowledge of the truth, he or she has already lost. Joe Thorn, writes, "Preaching the gospel to ourselves is not simply the act of studying the Bible (though we can preach to ourselves in that act), but it is actively calling ourselves to believe the promises of God in Jesus His Son. We preach to ourselves through the disciplines of prayer and meditation on Scripture."<sup>17</sup> To confront the spiritual darkness of this fallen world, every Christian must learn to recognize the authority of God's Word, his

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<sup>17</sup> Joe Thorn, "Preaching the Gospel to Yourself," Ligonier Ministries, December 25, 2014, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/preaching-gospel-yourself#:~:text=Preaching%20the%20gospel%20to%20ourselves%20is%20not%20simply%20the%20act,prayer%20and%20meditation%20on%20Scripture.>

sovereignty over earthly kingdoms, and his sustaining presence through his bride, the church. When Christians recognize his sustaining power and grace, they respond in obedience to his command to share with the world that the gospel is the only hope for humanity.

### *Recognizing the Authority of God's Word*

The Bible is the only true authority on which Christians can base their lives. Second Timothy 3:16–17 says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” Theologian John Frame writes, “Divine authorship is the ultimate reason why Scripture is authoritative. Its Authority is absolute because God’s Authority is absolute, and scripture is his personal word to us.”<sup>18</sup> The Bible is the foundation for understanding why we have conscience and reason, distinguishing between good and evil.

Christians demonstrate the gospel to the world when they live side-by-side with unbelievers according to biblical principles. God’s Word constantly reminds people of the sorrowful situation of mankind after being far away from God. When people come to faith in Christ, they wake from their sins and their fascination with themselves and realize that the world was destroyed by the fall of man. They return to the truth from all kinds of deceptive philosophies and worldviews to find the real meaning and value of life. Although believers will continue to struggle with sin, “Preaching the gospel to ourselves is calling ourselves to return to Jesus for forgiveness, cleansing, empowerment, and purpose. It is answering doubts and fears with the promises of God.”<sup>19</sup> Recognizing the authority of God’s Word and studying and meditating on his Word helps Christians

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<sup>18</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God, A Theology of Lordship*, vol. 4 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 165.

<sup>19</sup> Thorn, “Preaching the Gospel to Yourself.”

learn to view the world from a biblical perspective rather than viewing the Bible and their faith through a worldly perspective.

### *Recognizing God's Sovereignty*

The Bible says that God, who is omniscient and omnipotent, is sovereign over the universe. Christians should emphasize God's authority, which is higher than any earthly kingdom and human authority. The prophet Daniel declared that "to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" (Dan 7:14). The Bible constantly reminds us that he is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. God is not neutral concerning any king of the earth; "he changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding" (Dan 2:20–21).

God is the true deliverer, and his coming kingdom requires people's patience and hope in faith. Richard Neuhaus writes, "Faith is our trusting response to risk. In relation to the imponderables of the future, faith takes the form of hope."<sup>20</sup> Faith is not another form of knowledge; it is a life based on the promise of God and the love of Christ. Faith allows us to rest in God's sovereignty. We know the promises of Romans 5:3–5 to be sure: "Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." When resting in God's sovereignty, the church can stand firmly to publicly preach God's love, mercy, salvation, and judgment so that everyone who hears knows that God's authority is above all others.

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<sup>20</sup> Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 13.



*Recognizing Christ's Presence  
through His Church*

The Bible says that many things will happen to the church as time progresses, including wars (Matt 24:6), earthquakes, famines and pestilences (Luke 21:11), tribulation (Matt 24:9), betrayal (Matt 24:10), false prophets (Matt 24:11), increased lawlessness (Matt 24:12), and the antichrist (1 John 2:18). This is why Jesus told his disciples (and the church), “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20). Until we receive the eternal life that Jesus promises (John 6:35–40; 10:28), God has given us a family of believers to help us grow spiritually, encourage and exhort one another, wage war against sin, and share the gospel with a dying world.

Of course, the church is not alone in these endeavors; it cannot fight in its own strength. Jesus promises to give his church the Holy Spirit, who, among other descriptors, is a teacher (John 14:26; 1 Cor 2:13), guide (John 16:13), comforter (John 16:7), encourager (Acts 4:31), sustainer (Eph 1:13–14), and protector (Acts 16:6–7). This promise reminds the church that Christ is the King of kings who will provide adequate guidance and protection during the end of the age.

We can also be sure that Christ will continue to build his church, his “holy city” (Rev 21:1–2). Michael Horton writes, “It is not what we make of Christ, or of the world, but what Christ makes of us that makes his kingdom evident in the world. We may build all sorts of things. We may build movements, personalities, programs, and publicity-generating organizations. However, only Jesus can build his church.”<sup>21</sup> It is God’s grace to us and gift to us that we are part of this disciple-making process. This is also an encouragement, because we can be sure that God will build his church despite us. Even when we make mistakes, Jesus assured us that he would still be with us. Frederick Dale Bruner comments,

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<sup>21</sup> Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 210.

If Jesus' presence is ours right up into (heōs) Jesus' return, the Last Judgment, and the absolute end of this aeon's history, then we can endure the great tribulation in which we now live, and we can bring mission into the world amid all the tests of the end (Matt 24:13–14). Jesus' promise of accompaniment "right up into the end" means the invincibility of his church and the indefectibility of his apostolic message (16:18). It means that we will make it.<sup>22</sup>

The church is the manifestation of Christ's kingdom on earth. It must be set apart, different from the world. Likewise, followers of Christ must strive to be reflections of his image. Just as Cornelius learned through his encounter with Peter, we can learn to recognize our tendency to prioritize religious practices over pursuing knowing God and his Word. Just as Peter learned through Cornelius, we can examine our motives for sharing or not sharing the gospel and make sure there is nothing in us that could "stand in God's way" (Acts 11:17). Michael Hickey says, "As the church and as the community of the people of God, we signify the presence of the risen Christ, of his Kingdom, and of his Spirit of saving love: 'Now you are Christ's body and individually parts of it' (1 Cor. 12:27)."<sup>23</sup> As Christians, we must preaching the gospel to ourselves and help those in the church who have a weak foundation of faith by preaching the gospel to them and helping them grow in the truth.

### **The Gospel Is the Only Hope for Sinful Humanity**

Many people die every day without the gospel. Some have heard and rejected the gospel. Some even join a church for a while and profess to be Christians, only to leave because they think the church is divorced from reality, with antiquated ways. When they leave the church, their thoughts and behaviors return to the secular world. Some people have grown up in church, heard many stories, and learned about characters from the Bible, but they have not effectively applied God's Word in real life; they have not

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<sup>22</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, vol. 2, *The Churchbook: Matthew 13–28*, rev. and exp. ed. (Chicago: Eerdmans, 2007), 257.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Hickey, *Get to the End: A Catholic's View of the End Times* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2016), 67.

practiced their faith. Many people live their entire lives never having heard the truth of the gospel. The gospel liberates people from all kinds of bondage, errors, and human thoughts. It is a privilege to be part of the body of Christ and part of God's redemptive plan to share with all of these groups that the gospel is the only hope for humanity.

When people do not know Jesus, nothing in the world can fill the emptiness and loss in people's hearts. They may be like the eunuch, having wealth, honor, and status that are enviable and coveted in the eyes of others, but hiding hidden pain, sorrow, and humiliation in his life. They may trust in human, social, and political systems to meet their needs, even though sinful humans create and implement these systems. These systems may "bring about temporary benefits, but only God's blessings are perfect, unchangeable, and unreplaceable."<sup>24</sup> Money and power cannot change human nature; only the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom 1:16).

Interestingly, the book of Acts has no ending. Luke recorded the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome despite heavy persecution of the disciples who bore the good news. Two thousand years after the stories of Peter, Paul, and the founding of the early church, God is still moving through the church, and his disciples are still obeying his commission. The church has persisted without the support or recognition from earthly nations, kings, authorities, and systems. Missionaries have been delivered up to tribulation and put to death for his name's sake (Matt 24:9), yet "this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations" (24:14).

At this time, the church in America is free to preach the gospel to those who are bound in sin. We are surrounded by those who need to hear the good news about the resurrection of Jesus. We know that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim 1:15) and that those who "confess with [their] mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe

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<sup>24</sup> Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 8.

in [their] heart that God raised him from the dead, [they] will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” (Rom 10:9–10). Jesus is the only hope for this world, the Son of God who defeated death so we might live.

### **Conclusion**

The whole of Scripture points to Jesus Christ as the only way sinners can be reconciled to a Holy God. This chapter has exegeted two passages from the New Testament that provide a clear command to develop an evangelism ministry that encourages and exhorts disciples to make disciples, in obedience to the Great Commission. Matthew 28:18–20 shows that evangelism is the responsibility of everyone who believes in Christ. Acts 10 demonstrates that God’s redemptive plan is not only for Israel but for all nations. In these examples, God calls his people, establishes the early church, and sends them to share the gospel from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth. To confront the spiritual darkness of this fallen world, every Christian must learn to recognize the authority of God’s Word, his sovereignty over earthly kingdoms, and his sustaining presence through his bride, the church. When Christians recognize his sustaining power and grace, they respond in obedience to his command to share with the world that the gospel is the only hope for humanity.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROJECT

In the modern age, when one talks about the church, most people think of a building or perhaps a Sunday service in which a pastor preaches and they passively listen. This is very different, however, from the early church's understanding of the church. Frank Viola says that "the notion of a sermon-focused, pulpit-to-pew, audience-styled 'church service' was alien to the early Christians."<sup>1</sup> Michael Green writes, "The early church knew nothing of set addresses following certain homiletical patterns within the four walls of a church. Indeed, for more than 150 years, they possessed no church buildings."<sup>2</sup> The physical form and organization of have changed over time, but the core function and mission of the church have not changed since the church was founded by Jesus Christ.

To rightly understand the core function and mission of the church, some vital questions must be considered: (1) What is the church? (2) What is the church's mission? (3) How does the church fulfill this mission? (4) What factors affect the modern church's ability to fulfill its mission, and (5) What are the greatest challenges in contemporary evangelism ministry? This chapter begins by providing the biblical definition of the church, the mission of the church, and the manner in which the church is called to complete the mission. This chapter then addresses in greater detail the factors that can affect the modern church's ability to fulfill this mission, including the importance of

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church: Pursuing the Dream of Organic Christianity* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008), 51.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Eerdmans, 2004), 184.

teaching sound doctrine and protecting the ministry of preaching. This chapter concludes by examining some of the current challenges to contemporary evangelism ministry, including the temptations to pursue material satisfaction instead of spiritual maturity and offer cheap grace instead of the full gospel.

### **What Is the Church?**

The word “church” is first mentioned in the New Testament in Matthew’s Gospel. After Peter recognized Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of the living God, Jesus said to him, “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matt 16:18). Jesus Christ is the foundation of the church. He is the head of the church, and the church is his body, as Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:22–23: “And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

The church is God’s people, the communion of saints, those who have been redeemed and saved by the blood of Jesus Christ through repentance in faith in Christ. In his book, *The Church*, Mark Dever describes the church as the public expression of the gospel.<sup>3</sup> They are seen as the body of Christ and are filled with the Holy Spirit. It is a covenant community not only with God but also with other followers of God. Because Jesus Christ is the foundation of the church, it is essential for each believer to consider how he or she contributes to building up the body of Christ.

The church is God’s chosen instrument to proclaim the gospel and advance the kingdom of God. The church is not defined by and does not flourish based on a visible building, its programs, or a dynamic pastor. It flourishes by being faithful to God’s word, calling, and by being focused on the Great Commission. Hans Urs von Balthasar says, “The great movements and reforms of the church, in the present and future, will not be

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<sup>3</sup> Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible*, 9Marks (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2012), 40.

initiated by . . . panels and boards but by saints, the ever unique and solitary ones who, struck by God’s lightning, ignite a blaze all around them. This process is totally different from skillful organization.”<sup>4</sup>

Gregg Allison lists seven characteristics of the church: it is doxological, logocentric, pneuma-dynamic, covenantal, confessional, missional, and eschatological. Allison maintains that the church is unique, “assembled as a historical reality (located in space and time) and possessing a certain hope and clear destiny while it lives the strangeness of ecclesial existence in the here-and-now.”<sup>5</sup> The church is established and led by God to fulfill his divine purpose and redemptive plan in human history.

### **The Mission of the Church**

A constant struggle for many churches is to stay focused on its mission and purpose in the world. Today, the church faces all kinds of pressures from the secular world. Some church leaders have attempted to effect change by becoming more influential in politics. The church today is facing a severe challenge from those who would have the church depart from its original mission to proclaim the gospel. The church must consider what is its most important task: changing the world through social and political means or changing people’s hearts through the power of the gospel. Frank Viola says, “The church was born from and sustained by spiritual life instead of constructed by human institutions, controlled by human hierarchy, shaped by lifeless rituals, and held together by religious programs.”<sup>6</sup> No matter how fast a church grows, how many people attend, and how successful it becomes in the world’s view, if a church pursues worldly measures to grow, it will move farther away from its mission to reflect

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<sup>4</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, trans. Andrée Emery, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 42.

<sup>5</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 31–32.

<sup>6</sup> Viola, *Reimagining Church*, 51.

the glory of Christ and his gospel to the world.<sup>7</sup>

Changes in social or legal systems may temporarily control society's sinful behaviors, but they will not change humanity's sinful nature. Only the gospel changes lives. Gary Badcock states,

There is no doubt that the main task for the church in face of the stresses of the present time is to return to its heart, to leave aside its obsession with matters of political influence, and to form or reform itself as a proper place of prayer, mission, and renewal. But this is a massive task: its inception would require nothing less than "God's lightning," and its realization would involve nothing less than the renewal of the church as a whole, since so much of what people call sacred would need to fall by the wayside.<sup>8</sup>

If people do not surrender before God and confess their sins, even the best social and legal systems will eventually be corrupted by the fall. Instead of focusing on political change or civil rights reforms, church ministry must focus on the mission: proclaiming the gospel that changes the hearts of people.

### **Proclaiming the Gospel**

The church today must focus on Jesus's command to call people to repent from their sinful lives and follow Christ. The call of repentance comes through the people of God proclaiming the good news of the gospel to a lost world. People will have real freedom when they surrender themselves, their rights, and their freedom to God. As Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matt 16:24). The church's mission is to proclaim the true dignity and freedom of humanity that exists only in repentance of sin, belief in Jesus Christ, and obedience to God.

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<sup>7</sup> Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church*, CCT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 112.

<sup>8</sup> Gary D. Badcock, *The House Where God Lives: Renewing the Doctrine of the Church for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 15.



## Making Disciples of All Nations

In *Saving Souls, Serving Society*, Heidi Rolland Unruh and Ronald Sider write that “a church’s mission provides a framework for its identity, establishing the institutional boundaries of ‘who we are’ and ‘how we do things.’ It also frames a moral order for action by the congregation corporately and its members as individuals.”<sup>9</sup> The gospel changes people’s lives, and the new Christian’s identity becomes that of a disciple of Christ. F. F. Bruce notes, “As members of a reputable family will have the family’s good name in mind as they order their public conduct, so members of the Christian society will have in mind not only the society’s reputation in the world but the character of him who called it into being and the purpose for which he so called it.”<sup>10</sup>

Since a person’s actions and his identity are inseparable, the church’s mission includes coming alongside those people and discipling them toward Christlikeness. The root word of discipling is “disciple.” In the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Daniel Treier and Walter Elwell write, “The characteristic name for those who gathered around Jesus during his ministry was ‘disciple.’ He was the teacher or master; they were his disciples (*mathētai*), a term involving too much personal attachment to be adequately rendered by ‘pupil.’ The name carried over into Acts, where it frequently has the general sense of ‘Christian’ (cf. Acts 14:21).”<sup>11</sup> To disciple someone means to help them “hear, understand, and obey Jesus’ teaching.”<sup>12</sup> This means helping new believers understand the purpose of the Christian life and change the manner in which they live. It helps people develop godly characteristics like patience, love, and endurance; it even shows

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<sup>9</sup> Heidi Rolland Unruh and Ronald J. Sider, *Saving Souls, Serving Society: Understanding the Faith Factor in Church-Based Social Ministry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 130.

<sup>10</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 334.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell, eds., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 341.

<sup>12</sup> D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, rev. ed., Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins, 2017), 734.

them how to endure persecution. The Christian's life becomes characterized by actions of invisible faith, as Christ said, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:16). The mission of the church to help the new Christian become like Christ, in turn, the mission of that Christian then is to make disciples of Christ.

James writes, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (Jas 1:22). If people call themselves disciples of Christ, they are called to do more than listen to the Word; they are called to obey. Every Christian is responsible to share the gospel with unsaved people and make disciples for Christ. Unruh and Sider maintain that "mission is not just a guide for congregational life but also a core product of that life."<sup>13</sup> The core of church ministry is to make disciple makers, and any church activity is to finish this purpose. When a church misses this main point, the church fails in its mission.

### **Scriptural Examples of Evangelism and Discipleship**

Christ-followers can look to the ministries of Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul for important lessons on evangelistic methods and training new believers to be disciples. During Jesus's earthly ministry, he shared the gospel with people, appointed twelve disciples who were always with him, and trained and sent them to share the gospel with unsaved people. Jesus not only called them to follow him but also to preach the gospel (Mark 3:14). In Matthew 28:19, Jesus repeated the Great Commission to all his followers to make disciples of all nations. Jesus provided an ultimate example of discipleship through his earthly ministry. He trained his disciples in numerous subjects: truth (Matt 4:16; 16:13), mission (Matt 28:18–20), faith (Matt 8:23–27; 9:1–8, 23–26), spiritual power (Acts 1:8), vision (John 4:34–36), cost (Matt 16:24), commitment (Matt 8:18–34),

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<sup>13</sup> Unruh and Sider, *Saving Souls, Serving Society*, 130.

debate (Matt 12:1–12; 12:15–18), conduct (Matt 5:1–10), and denying oneself (Mark 8:34). Ultimately, he trained them by example (John 13:15). Jesus used a variety of methods to train his disciples, and most of them became evangelists of the gospel and pillars of the church. Church ministry requires comprehensive training to turn an ordinary Christian into a disciple-maker. Pastor J. T. English writes, “The local church is meant to be the primary spiritual guide for disciples who are on the journey of growing deeper in the love and knowledge of God. The local church is the place where we are formed, equipped, and sent out to make more disciples.”<sup>14</sup>

Paul also offered many teachings and exhortations for spiritual training. For example, Paul trained Timothy to follow his manner and purpose of life (2 Tim 3:10), be longsuffering (Col 1:11–12), and be an imitation of Christ (1 Cor 11:1). He encouraged Timothy to be an example to the believers in word, conduct, love, spirit, faith, and purity (1 Tim 4:12). All these teachings come from the Scriptures, which offer detailed training to fulfill the Word of God and pursue personal spiritual growth, mission-focused ministry, and correct church governance.

### **Factors Affecting the Mission of the Church**

There are many factors affecting the church’s ability to proclaim the gospel and make disciples in the modern age. Some of these factors are failures of the church to focus on maintaining sound doctrine and examining those who lead the church, especially pastors. The church today is confronted by a secular world that hates the gospel, but it is also challenged by some inside the church who refuse to maintain the integrity of the gospel message and communicate it in its fullness. This section addresses the importance of teaching sound doctrine and protecting the ministry of preaching.

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<sup>14</sup> J. T. English, *Deep Discipleship: How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus* (Nashville: B&H, 2020), 49.

## **Teaching Sound Doctrine**

God has given his church a great honor to proclaim his truth and fight a spiritual battle against sin and death. We are proclaiming the gospel on a battlefield that involves the heart and the mind. People will pursue idols to satisfy the emptiness and helplessness of their hearts. People may be attracted to a “religious lifestyle,” but their hearts are still empty, and their souls hunger for truth. Though godly leaders urgently call these churches to repent, turn from their wrong teaching, and preach God’s Word faithfully, some ungodly church leaders stray from the Word and open the door to secular worldviews and traditions, unbiblical theology, and godless examples.

Central to this fight is the battle for truth. Truth is the immune system of the church. There is a similarity between the church’s immune system and the healthy human immune system. The greatest threat to human health is damage to the immune system. When the immune system is failing, even a tiny bacteria can be a deadly threat. When the body’s immune system is damaged, it not only fails to recognize harmful bacteria or unhealthy cells, but it also can harm or kill good bacteria and normal cells, resulting in paralysis and even death. Similarly, a church with a healthy immune system is one that holds fast to the truth, the Word of God. In his High Priestly Prayer, Jesus prayed that his Father would protect his disciples and sanctify them through his Word: “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:15–16). When it does not make every effort to hold to the truth, it is impossible to resist error, false teachers, and a false gospel. When a church holds to sound doctrine, it stands firmly; when a church loses the purity of the gospel, it loses its foundation and cannot exist within the purpose of Christ. The only church that can remain healthy enough to win the spiritual battle is one that correctly preaches truth.

God has given authority to the church to proclaim his gospel and make disciples, which can only be done by rightly dividing his Word. Though it may seem that

threats to the church's immune system are likely to come from outside the church, the church will also face internal challenges. This was evident in the Corinthian and Galatian churches that received Paul's letters. The Corinthian church suffered from disunity (1 Cor 11:19), heresy (1 Cor 15), and a reluctance to discipline members who were practicing immorality (1 Cor 5:1). The Galatian church had been infiltrated by Judaizers who were trying to add to the gospel (Gal 2:11–21). Paul challenged these churches to proclaim the gospel as he delivered it to them (1 Cor 1:10–4:21) and reject a false or incomplete gospel (Gal 1:9; 5:1). Only complete and correct doctrine changes people's lives and protects God's church.

When people modify orthodox doctrine and remove the parts that people do not want to hear, the remaining parts may sound good and be inoffensive, but the message has been rendered worthless. Paul reminded Timothy to guard sound doctrine by saying, "Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you" (2 Tim 1:13–14). Paul used the word "guard," a military term, to refer to a soldier who needs to use his own life to protect what is entrusted to him. Likewise, the apostle John warned against any attempt to increase or decrease the prophecies in the Scriptures (Rev 22:19). God calls pastors and ministers to preach and teach what the Scriptures have written, so their work is not to improve and change it. All revisions to the original Scripture are deviations from and betrayals of the truth.

### **Protecting the Ministry of Preaching**

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul emphasized three negative influences in the church. First, he recognized the disobedient believers who are foolish and ignorant. Second, he recognized people who learn God's Words but are never able to understand the knowledge of the truth. Third, he recognized the false leaders who have a form of godliness but have corrupt minds and resist the truth. He calls this last group a great

danger to the church, saying “their teaching will spread like gangrene” (2 Tim 2:17) and “they destroy the faith of some” (2 Tim 2:18). Paul knew the examples of the Old Testament; he knew God was repulsed by false prophets, who “prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray” (Jer 23:13).

Paul wrote to Timothy, “There will be terrible times in the last days” (2 Tim 3:1). He listed many things that will happen during the last days, but though there could be many causes of difficulties, dangers, disasters, and despair, Paul did not write about natural disasters, poverty, pestilence, famine, or war. He did not mention the climate or controversies related to ethnicity, gender, or politics. Instead, Paul wrote that “men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Tim 3:2–4). To whom was Paul referring? Was he describing people outside of the church or inside the church? John MacArthur writes,

Paul’s description of these seasons of danger is specific. In this context, *men* does not refer to mankind in general or to the unsaved world but to members, especially leaders, in Christ’s church, *men* who not only claim the name of Christ but claim to be His ministers, His prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists. These *men* are apostate leaders in apostate churches.<sup>15</sup>

Paul did not give a beautiful picture of the ministry to Timothy; he candidly listed the corruption and sin hidden in the church in the end times. Many people not only called themselves followers of Christ; they also played a leadership role in the church and did not have a faith consistent with what appeared on the outside.

Paul described these men as “having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people” (2 Tim 3:5). They only appeared to have a religious life; there was no real spiritual power in their lives. Paul condemned them as

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<sup>15</sup> John MacArthur, *1 and 2 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 29 (emphasis original).

lovers of themselves, lovers of money, and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. They were of greater danger to the church than non-believing blasphemers, persecutors, and men who hated the church. They “oppose the truth, [they are] men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith” (2 Tim 3:8). Paul warned the elders at Ephesus of a similar danger: “I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock” (Acts 20:29). This is consistent with Jesus’s message in the parable of the weeds in Matthew 13:24–30. The weeds are the people of the evil one; the heads of wheat are the people of God. Jesus revealed that before the final judgment, the weeds would grow with wheat in the church until the end of the age.

To avoid these false teachers, churches must examine those who would be in positions of leadership to ensure they are called to the ministry, they are not ashamed of the gospel, and they demonstrate their faith in deeds.

### *Called to Ministry*

“Do not enter the ministry if you can help it.”<sup>16</sup> In a lecture on the call to ministry, Charles H. Spurgeon quoted his mentor, Joseph Alleine, to challenge young people who were considering the ministry. Commenting on this lecture, modern theologian Charles Swindoll asked, “Why would Spurgeon find this advice so helpful that he would express it to a room full of students preparing for ministry? If he loved the Lord and enjoyed his vocation as much as he did, why would he discourage anyone so bluntly? It is because no one should pursue ministry hurriedly or unadvisedly or without the assurance of a divine call.”<sup>17</sup>

The work of ministry is a calling from God. As Paul said, “How can anyone

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<sup>16</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (1875, repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 23, quoted in Charles R. Swindoll, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, Swindoll’s Living New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 245.

<sup>17</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, Swindoll’s Living New Testament Commentary 5 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 246.

preach unless they are sent?” (Rom 10:15). In *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work*, Derek Prime and Alistair Begg define the pastorate by saying, “It is vocation, the answering of a specific call from God. It is the highest calling in Christian service.”<sup>18</sup> Paul knew his calling, saying, “And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher” (2 Tim 1:11). Paul prefaced a list of qualifications for a pastor by saying, “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Tim 3:1). Paul confirmed God’s calling to Timothy: “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession” (1 Tim 6:12).

Serving God and his church does not depend on personal ability, wisdom, or experience. Pastoral ministry is not like any other occupation, business, or organization. Other occupations may operate through people’s organizational management, methods, and human strategies, but the ministry of the church builds on Christ and his Word. The minister obeys God’s call and submits to his will. Prime and Begg write, “Christian leadership is paradoxical where the leader is not the boss but a servant—someone who follows in the footsteps of Him who washed the disciples feet.”<sup>19</sup> As Spurgeon suggests, if someone thinks he or she can do something to help God, this person should stop working in ministry.

Paul reminded Timothy that every preacher was always in the presence of God, not just man: “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word” (2 Tim 4:1). As a person called by God, a minister must first face the triune God and then preach the gospel to people. God judges people’s motivations, evaluates their public conduct, and examines their private lives. The purpose of preaching is to glorify

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<sup>18</sup> Derek Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2004), 17.

<sup>19</sup> Prime and Begg, *On Being a Pastor*, 17.



God and not for personal gain and ambitions. The motivation of all ministries of the church is to glorify God and finish his redemptive plan, not please people to gain their praise. Every minister's thoughts, behaviors, and motivations are exposed before God. Our Lord said, "I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer 17:10).

Without God's calling, the minister will not have the authority, spiritual wisdom, or power to preach and teach sound doctrine. Without the calling of God, the true purpose is corrupted by human desire, and the mission is compromised; the minister does not fear and obey God, and ministry work is merely to fulfill his passions and desires. Frank Viola reminds those who are called to ministry that their roles are temporal and subject to the will of God. When planting a church or encouraging an existing congregation, the apostles kept in mind their "long-range goal. Namely, to equip a local body of believers to function under the headship of Jesus Christ without the presence of a human head (1 Cor 14:26; Eph 4:11–16). For this reason, an apostle always ends up leaving the church on its own."<sup>20</sup> Churches must examine those who say they are called to leadership to ensure they are living a life in obedience to God and submission to his will. Even if the visible building and the programming were to disappear, as was the case during the pandemic, the Christ-followers in the church should still be able to "preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Tim 4:2).

### *Not Ashamed of the Gospel*

Paul said, "So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God" (2 Tim 1:8). Paul taught there would be terrible times in the last days, and both Jesus and Paul

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<sup>20</sup> Viola, *Reimagining Church*, 50.

said that following Christ would come at a cost, requiring Christians to conquer their fears. Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). The author of Hebrews wrote, “For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2). To take up the cross of Christ is to turn shame into honor by following the Son of God who triumphed over death. Today’s churches must look for leaders who focus on the call of Christ to unashamedly share the gospel and make disciples for God’s kingdom.

The testimony of Jesus, including his teachings, his life, his earthly ministry, and his death on the cross were very shameful in the view of Greco-Roman culture. A Jewish farmer from Galilee—a manual laborer—was accused by the Jewish religious leaders of violating the Jewish law, for which he was whipped, humiliated, and finally crucified. Charles Swindoll describes the Greco-Roman view of Christ’s resurrection:

In first-century Ephesus, the eastern epicenter of Greek philosophy, the idea of resurrection would have been far more “shameful” than death on a cross. To the Greek way of thinking influenced by Plato, all tangible matter is detestable. This realm of substance we inhabit on earth is but a substandard shadow of the perfect realm of pure idea or thought. Humans, then, are divine sparks trapped within prisons of fleshy matter, and death is a liberation. Freed from its captivity in the realm of substance, the mind can fly to its true home in the realm of idea. Therefore, to the Greek mind, resurrection—the reunion of mind with body—was absurd (cf. Acts 17:30–32). More like a curse: It was incarceration repeated. “Why,” they wondered, “would anyone want that?”<sup>21</sup>

Even modern secularists view these aspects of Christ’s life, ministry, death, and resurrection as shameful and unnecessary. They are contrary to what society finds “acceptable.” Most of the time, people are happy to associate with a person who has a good background, achievement, ability, and wealth because being with that person could bring honor. On the contrary, people do not want to associate with a person who has a humble status, is poor, and has a “failed” life because being with him could bring shame.

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<sup>21</sup> Swindoll, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 176.

They see the idea of denying self, daily taking up the cross, and following someone else (Luke 9:23) as contemptible.

Unfortunately, some churches and pastors who are under the influence of a secular worldview share the same view of Jesus Christ. They are ashamed of Jesus and his teaching, and they do not want to pay the cost of being associated with Jesus and his commands. However, Paul's challenge to Timothy is applicable to the church: "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God" (2 Tim 1:8).

Preaching an unpopular, shameful, and costly gospel is a significant challenge for Christians of every age. If the Bible could be rearranged, many people would put Jesus's teaching about loving your neighbor as yourself at the top, and man's fall and God's punishment at the bottom. Yet, leaders have been called by God to faithfully teach the gospel that calls people to repent from their sinful lifestyles.

### *Demonstrating Faith in Deeds*

Though churches rightly emphasize sound doctrine and preaching, the testimony of faith in deeds is sometimes neglected. If faith has no witness in actual actions, then faith is just a doctrine without life. Faith becomes alive and powerful when knowledge and action are organically combined. James said, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead" (Jas 2:26). In the Gospels, Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites because they would not put into practice what they preached. The leaders of the church need to be good examples in front of the whole congregation. When leaders cannot practice their faith with concrete actions, the ministry of the church will be difficult to carry out. When pastors lead the congregation through prayer, rightly preach the Word of truth, and live a godly example, the church can flourish because it is being led in obedience to God.

## **Challenges to Contemporary Evangelism Ministry**

In his second letter to his protégé, Timothy, Paul warned, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2 Tim 4:3–4). Rather than sound teaching, people would pursue their own passions. These selfish passions would become an idol, replacing a fear of God. Through the ages, Satan uses all types of idols and false promises to deceive people into rejecting God. Though there are numerous challenges to contemporary evangelism ministry, two will be addressed in this section: the pursuit of satisfaction in any source other than God and offering cheap grace instead of the full gospel.

### **Pursuing Satisfaction Apart from God**

When church leaders pursue any person, idea, or thing instead of pursuing God, the whole congregation is led astray and in danger of losing the protection of God. For instance, when a church starts to pursue personal rights and religious rights that have been used by partisans to attack Christianity, God’s people are in a dangerous situation. People are tempted to believe a new political leader could offer them religious freedom and rights, and they forget that Jesus Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through [him]” (John 14:6). Real freedom is not offered by the government but by God alone. Christians who live in China and North Korea are unable to proclaim their human rights and freedom under tyrannical Communist regimes, but they can proclaim peace in any situation (John 16:33) and freedom in Christ (John 8:31–36; 2 Cor 3:17). True faith helps Christians overcome the fear of death because they are alive in Christ (2 Cor 5:1–8; Eph 2:5).

Pursuing satisfaction outside of Christ can also mean a reliance on self or on one’s works. Jesus’s first disciples were all observant Jews and ardent monotheists. Yet, Michael Green describes them as “the hardest people in the world to convince that God

had come to this earth in the person of Jesus to share his life with humankind.”<sup>22</sup> Their reliance on obedience to the law and ritual was totally changed by Jesus. Paul called himself “a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless” (Phil 3:5b–6). Yet he also said he was the ultimate example of how a blasphemer and the worst man in the world is delivered by God:

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. (1 Tim 1:13–15)

However, God saves the sinner, and in him, we have our satisfaction. We are totally powerless to deliver ourselves from sin and death. When we understand this, we can comprehend John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” The Lord who conquered the power of sin and death and continues to build his church is our deliverer.

### **Offering Cheap Grace**

The gospel directly condemns the sinful nature of humans and calls people to repent. This message is difficult, “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense” (1 Pet 2:8). The sinful nature of humanity is selfish, narcissistic, arrogant, greedy for money, and unholy. It is not in the nature of humans to desire repentance. Rather, as Paul wrote, “For though they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thoughts became vain, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Rom 1:21).

Among the many causes of misery, danger, difficulty, disaster, and despair that Paul enumerated in the last days, the worst crisis he described was one of faith, a result of the church’s teaching to tickle men’s ears, raise their comfort level, and overlook their

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<sup>22</sup> Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 11.

sins. John MacArthur claims, “The most serious and lamentable aspect of such rejection of God and His Word is that the danger comes from within the church.”<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, some church leaders do not fear God more than man and are ashamed of the testimony about our Lord. They water down the message of the cross and offer “cheap grace.”

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”<sup>24</sup> As Bonhoeffer expressed, Christian faith does not compromise; rather, it often requires paying a price. Bonhoeffer scholar Koert Verhagen writes,

In an early English translation of *Discipleship*, we find one of Bonhoeffer’s most memorable formulations: “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” However, this translation is actually an expanding paraphrase of the more terse German, which, when translated more literally, reads: “Every call of Christ leads to death.” For Bonhoeffer, the way indicated by the call to discipleship is a way that begins with death.<sup>25</sup>

This is consistent with what Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” (Matt 16:24–26). This is not a popular message in our culture, where people have itching ears and desire to pursue teaching that suits their own passions (2 Tim 4:3).

When confronted with trouble, faith based on cheap grace crumbles, leading

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<sup>23</sup> MacArthur, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 26.

<sup>24</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 127.

<sup>25</sup> Koert Verhagen, “Christology’s Counterpoint: Bonhoeffer on Knowing the Christ Who Calls,” in *Bonhoeffer and Christology: Revisiting Chalcedon*, ed. Matthias Grebe, Nadine Hamilton, and Christian Schlenker, T&T Clark New Studies in Bonhoeffer’s Theology and Ethics (London: T&T Clark, 2023), 176.

people to experience a crisis in faith. MacArthur goes on to describe the congregation that becomes comfortable with cheap grace:

In many churches who once preached sound doctrine, evils that God’s Word plainly and repeatedly condemns are touted as acceptable. Women are ordained to ministries the Bible restricts to men, and radical feminists even reject the idea of God as heavenly Father. Homosexuals not only are welcomed without reproof or repentance into church fellowship but also are welcomed into the pulpit. . . . Consequently, the preacher whom they least like to hear brings the message they need most to hear.<sup>26</sup>

This is why Paul tells Timothy to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim 4:2). There are many people regularly attending church today who are deceived by Satan, but there is still a possibility of redemption. As Paul encouraged Timothy, those in evangelism ministry must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach and gently instruct opponents, “in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will” (2 Tim 2:24–26). Even those deceived by Satan still have the opportunity to repent and be led to know the truth. This requires the faithful preaching of the whole gospel.

### **Conclusion**

The author of Ecclesiastes says, “What has been, it is what will be, and what has been done, it is what will be done. So, there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl 1:9). Rebellion against God and resistance to the truth have been present in the world since Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3). For a church to maintain the holy presence of God, it must preach sound doctrine and preach all truth, including repentance and remission of sins (Luke 24:47), salvation (Rom 10:10), and Jesus’s crucifixion (1 Cor 2:2) and resurrection (Luke 24:46). No matter how many people

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<sup>26</sup> MacArthur, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 45.

attend, how professional the singing, how many programs it has prepared, and how wonderful the pastor's preaching, God and his glory are not present in a church that fails to proclaim the gospel. Frank Viola describes the hollowness of a church without God's presence: "When God's presence left the holy tent, the tent became nothing more than a hollow shell accompanied by an impressive exterior. Even though the Lord's glory had departed, worshippers continued to offer their sacrifices at the empty tabernacle, never noticing that God wasn't there (1 Chron. 16:39–40; 2 Chron. 1:3–5; Jer. 7:12–14)."<sup>27</sup> Nothing can satisfy the hollowness of people's empty hearts and set them free from sin except Jesus Christ. Nothing can bring people to know God, experience his presence, and receive his blessings except the gospel.

This chapter began by defining the church, its mission, and how it completes that mission. It then addressed the factors affecting the modern church's ability to fulfill this mission, including the importance of teaching sound doctrine and protecting the ministry of preaching. This chapter then examined some of the current challenges to contemporary evangelism ministry, including the temptations to pursue material satisfaction instead of spiritual maturity and offer cheap grace instead of the full gospel.

It is a privilege to be called by God to participate in his earthly work in our lifetimes, yet our work is temporary. Michael Green wrote that "the Church is the society which only lives when it dies, only grows when it gives its heart away."<sup>28</sup> The early church endured "many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). It did not have full-time ministers, Sunday schools, children's ministries, and youth programs. Due to the threat of persecution, some early churches were not able to establish traditions, celebrate special days, and meet in a visible building. As this world changes and the culture grows more hostile to the gospel, the modern church and its pastors and disciples

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<sup>27</sup> Viola, *Reimagining Church*, 63.

<sup>28</sup> Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 184.



must also prepare to endure many hardships in evangelism ministry. The church must remain focused on its mission, as summarized in Paul's final words to Timothy: "Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season" (2 Tim 2:4).

## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter provides a description of the implementation of this ministry research project at Atlanta Baptist Chinese Church in Atlanta, Georgia. The purpose of this ministry research project was to help members of Atlanta Baptist Chinese Church (ABCC) understand the necessity of personal evangelism, share their faith with others, and win converts to Christ. It is very important to keep the ministry of church focused on the spread of the gospel because this is the command of Christ and the purpose of the existence of the church. Among the many challenges faced by ABCC, evangelism can be a turning point for the entire church's ministry to grow and experience God's grace and presence. Jesus not only gave a command but a promise to his people: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20). In just over a year since God led me to pastor ABCC, this church that was almost closed has taken a new direction. Some families who had left returned to the church, and God also added believing families to the church. The church has grown from about 40 people to more than 80 people at present. Over the last year of pastoring this church, I aimed to focus the church's ministry on two primary aspects: sharing the gospel with unbelievers and developing leaders who can make disciples of Christ.

#### **Project Preparation**

I began to prepare for this project at the beginning of my doctoral program. From the conception to the final implementation of the project, I spent a lot of time in study and prayer. In order to effectively address the challenges and needs of the ABCC, I communicated often with leaders of ABCC to get support from the church. After I

received feedback from my SBTS supervisor, tutor, and my church leadership, I started to refine the sermons and implementation plan for the project, which enabled me to better define curricula development and set specific teaching dates.

### **Inviting Project Participants**

Before the training started, I sent an announcement to inform all church members about the project and encourage them to participate in this special training. Even though all church members were invited to participate, the attendees were primarily new members of the church. The new members were more active in learning, while the older church members were not as actively involved. However, fourteen members were able to participate from start to finish: completing the pre-series survey, attending the teaching sessions, and completing the post-series survey. Most of the participants were enthusiastic about the training, participated in group discussions, and stayed after class to ask questions and continue conversation.

### **Pre- and Post-series Survey Development**

To measure the change in participant understanding before and after delivering the evangelism curriculum, I developed the pre- and post-series survey.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of administering this survey before the training was to better understand what existing church members knew and believed about the Christian faith, including What is the church? What is the mission of the church? What is the gospel? and What is the Great Commission? Even Christians who have been in the church for a long time sometimes struggle to answer these basic questions about the Christian faith. A true relationship with Christ is required before someone can grow spiritually and before they share the gospel. For many born-again Christians, revisiting the foundations of their faith is not a waste of time. If people do not have true faith in Christ, they should not be asked to share the

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 1.

gospel because evangelism is an expression of life in Jesus Christ. The pre-series survey helped me identify where people were in their understanding of the Christian faith and purpose of evangelism so that I could better prepare to serve and teach them in the sermon series.

### **Pre-series Survey Data Analysis**

I administered the pre-series survey to the participants on September 1, 2023, one week before the training began, and I spent the following week compiling and examining the results. The survey results revealed the participants' understanding of the gospel and their spiritual status. Through the survey, I realized that only three participants had received basic biblical training, and no one had attended evangelism training. It is challenging, but revealing to ask questions of people who have no prior no biblical training and have not learned how to share the gospel effectively. For example, question 20 in the pre-series survey asks participants to "briefly define church." Only one person mentioned that the church is a community of those who are called by God, and one person mentioned that the church is the body of repentant and saved people in Christ. Most people mentioned that the church is a group of people who gather to worship God. According to Scripture, the church is the community of those with new life in Christ, those who have been called out and have repented of their sins and trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation. Contrary to popular thought today, the church does not exist simply to connect people. This simple example helps provide context for this project.

The survey also revealed that 14 percent of ABCC members evangelize at most once per month (see table 1). Almost half of the members evangelize only once per year.

Table 1. Pre-series survey participant response concerning evangelism

	<b>Survey Question</b>	<b>never</b>	<b>1/yr</b>	<b>6/mo</b>	<b>1/mo</b>	<b>Always</b>
11	How often do you attempt to share your faith?	5	2	2	2	3

When asked why they do not evangelize more often, the number one answer given was that they were afraid they would not know how to answer people’s questions (see table 2). The second highest reason was that they were afraid of how people would respond to them.

Table 2. Pre-series survey participant response concerning what prohibits evangelism

	<b>Survey Question</b>	<b>Fear of how others will respond</b>	<b>Not knowing how to answer questions</b>	<b>No motivation for sharing</b>	<b>Other / Misc.</b>
13	What is the greatest obstacle to your evangelism?	8	3	1	2

As part of the pre-series survey, participants also answered ten questions using a 5-point Likert scale, where SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, U = Undecided, D = Disagree, and SD = Strongly Disagree. The pre-series data in table 3 demonstrates that most participants did not have the confidence to share the gospel. They worried about being refused, although everyone was willing to receive more training in how to effectively share the gospel.

Table 3. Pre-assessment participant response concerning evangelism

	<b>Survey Question</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>
24	The result of living a life in obedience to the gospel is holiness.	2	4	6	2	
25	I am comfortable when talking with someone about the death and resurrection of Jesus.		3	4	5	2
26	I know how to identify different groups of people (unbelievers, people seeking God but not saved, believers).		3	4	6	1
27	Many people in the church also need to hear the gospel.	1	4	7	2	
28	I am comfortable talking to unbelievers about Christianity.	1	3	3	4	3
29	I am ready to share my testimony of faith.	1	2	4	6	1
30	I can explain what Jesus accomplished on the cross.	1	2	3	7	1
31	I know how to explain what the Bible says about sin.	1	2	5	4	2
32	I can explain how Christianity is different from other religions.	1	2	5	5	1
33	I am comfortable sharing why God hates idolatry and its effects on people's lives.	1	1	4	4	4

It was very important and helpful to know every participant's understanding of the church, their faith, spiritual growth, and the purpose of evangelism. The pre-series was a good tool to understand the background of the participants and to help me make needed adjustments to the sermon series in the hope that the post-series survey would demonstrate an increase in understanding in these areas.

### **Curriculum Development and Review**

To develop church members in the areas of evangelism, I created a biblical curriculum that was designed to be delivered in eight weeks of Friday night Bible studies. When writing the curriculum, I used the book of Acts to introduce biblical evangelism

and focus on how the early church preached the gospel and overcame the challenges they faced in evangelism. The material for each week's sermon was evaluated by a panel of three qualified reviewers.<sup>2</sup> Each reviewer evaluated one week of material using a rubric I developed for the project. These reviewers included two deacons at ABCC and a leader of church ministry at ABCC. I provided each reviewer with a sermon manuscript. All three panel members participated in the project, including evaluating the project and participating as learners in the project. They knew the course plans and objectives and provided valuable advice.

### **Summary of Project Implementation**

The dates for the project implementation covered an 8-week period between September 8, 2023, and October 27, 2023. As previously noted, fourteen individuals attended the sessions. The following sections outline the main ideas of the evangelism education in each week of the project implementation.

#### **Week 1: Ordinary People**

The person who preaches the gospel must be a person who has repented and has a reborn life, which is the foundation for knowing Jesus and obeying the Great Commission. There were two main points in this lesson. First, every disciple of Jesus should understand that Jesus is a reigning King (Matt 28:18), but he was also a suffering servant (Luke 22:35–37). Every disciple should be prepared to face suffering for the proclamation of the gospel and defense of the truth. Second, in the early church, those who followed Christ were foolish and despised according to the world's standards. In the NT, Jesus chose to use ordinary people to accomplish his mission of redemption, and today he will continue to use ordinary people who repent and believe to complete his redemptive plan.

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix 2.

This lesson presented two key points of preaching the gospel. First, Jesus came to this world in a way that was despised by the world (John 1:10–11). The gospel we share must not only prepare people’s hearts to receive grace and peace from Christ, but also prepare them to endure suffering for Christ. Second, the way Jesus chooses people and uses people is different from the way the world values people. Jesus can change lives that are despised and abandoned by this world. We can share with people the hope and blessing that comes from following Jesus.

### **Week 2: Sharing the Gospel with Disciples**

Many people think it is only important to preach the gospel to unbelievers and that those who already believe in the Lord do not need to hear the gospel. However, everyone needs to hear the gospel, including Christ-followers who should continue to remind themselves of the truths of the gospel. The books of Luke and Acts records how Jesus preached the gospel to his disciples after his resurrection. The disciples’ lives were renewed after they witnessed the resurrection of Jesus and heard the full gospel. Nearly half of Jesus’s twelve disciples were fishermen. Although they had followed Jesus for three years, they did not really understand Jesus’s identity and his mission of salvation. When Jesus clearly explained the gospel to his disciples after his resurrection, they transformed from doubtful, selfish, and cowardly people to bold evangelists. They went from being ordinary unlearned men from Galilee who were later described as turning the world upside down.

This lesson presented two key points of preaching the gospel. First, there are many people in the church who need to hear the gospel, just like Jesus preached the gospel to his disciples after his resurrection (Luke 24:44–45). You can find those Christians who have a weak foundation of faith, preach the gospel to them, and help them grow in the truth. Second, although there were other people in the Bible who were resurrected from the dead (2 Kgs 8:5; John 11:43–44), they still had to face physical



death. Jesus was the only person to rise from the dead and never die again. He defeated death, and said he did this of his own accord: “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again” (John 10:18–19). No one showed their power in a way that gave up his or her authority; only Jesus did this.

### **Week 3: Sharing the Gospel with a Lame Man**

God has a different perspective towards people than the world. The world looks at what a person possesses, but the Bible reminds readers that God looks at the heart (1 Sam 16:7). The story of Peter making the paralytic walk helps the church today understand that the focus of evangelism is the salvation of human souls. Through this story, people see that when a person does not know God and pursues selfish and wrong desires, he or she is like a paralytic who cannot be independent and relies on others and the charity of this world to survive. Although many people in modern times do not have disabilities and do not beg on the streets, if people do not know Jesus, their lives are no different from that of the beggar in the street. Although Peter did not have a small amount of money to give, he said, “I do have something else I can give you. By the power of Jesus Christ from Nazareth, stand up and walk!” (Acts 3:6). This power enabled the paralyzed man to live a new life, and this power brings salvation to all who believe.

This lesson presented two key points of preaching the gospel. First, everyone has a precious soul (Gen 2:7); this is why Jesus loves us and came to save us. Every human being is made in the image of God and thus is precious in the sight of God (Gen 1:27). This is the reason we need to share the gospel. Second, the great need of humanity is not physical, it is spiritual.

#### **Week 4: Sharing the Gospel with the Ethiopian Eunuch**

The Holy Spirit led the church to spread the gospel to cities outside Jerusalem. The repentance of the city of Samaria and the salvation of the Ethiopian eunuch became turning points for the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles. God's universal plan of salvation was becoming more clear through the book of Acts. Studying this lesson helps disciples understand that when people do not know Jesus, nothing in the world can fill the emptiness in their soul (John 14:6). Just like this eunuch, behind the wealth, honor, and status that was enviable and coveted in the eyes of others, there was hidden pain, sorrow, and humiliation in his life. Second, without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, people do not have spiritual wisdom and cannot understand the Bible (1 Cor 2:11). If people want to seek the true God, they must have God's guidance. This lesson presented two key points of preaching the gospel. First, God is our greatest satisfaction, and nothing in this world can bring us the satisfaction that only God can give us.

#### **Week 5: Sharing the Gospel in a Divided City**

Paul and Barnabas successfully completed their first missionary journey and returned to the church in Antioch. The Lord performed miracles and wonders through their hands, and many Jews and Gentiles received the gospel and converted to Christ. In addition, in the face of constant persecution and obstruction, Paul and Barnabas still strengthened the church and preached the power of the gospel. This lesson shares an important message that the gospel can divide a city and society. This division is positive and constructive and is an inevitable result of the work of the gospel. The gospel must separate light from darkness, truth from lies, and the true God from idols. Although Rome was a military, political, and philosophical power at that time, the people influenced by Roman culture were not much different from the Turkish people living on the island of Malta: they were bound by wrong beliefs and actively worshiped false gods and people. The gospel liberates people from all kinds of bondage, errors, and human thoughts, and

enables them to be free.

This lesson presented two key points of preaching the gospel. First, the gospel can bring true freedom, freeing people from all kinds of superstition and wrong thoughts and behaviors (John 8:32). Second, after the fall of man, the human heart became a factory of idols, creating all kinds of idols to satisfy the emptiness and helplessness of the heart. The gospel leads us to worship the only true God and be free from idols (John 17:3).

### **Week 6: Sharing the Gospel in Athens**

Christians should learn to view the world from a biblical perspective rather than viewing the Bible and Christian faith through this world's perspective. The world saw that the city of Athens was famous for its arts, sports, and politics, but in the eyes of Paul, what lay behind this city of idols was the depravity of the human heart, spiritual immorality, ruthlessness in political competition, and superstitious religion. Hidden behind the philosophies humans boasted about were ignorance and greed as well as the despair and loneliness deep in their souls.

Evangelists need to distinguish between human religious fervor and the way of life revealed in the Bible. The Athenians had religious fervor and religious needs but did not truly worship God. Without God's revelation, no one can find God, and no one can worship God. It is impossible for man to worship a God he does not know. This lesson presented two key points of preaching the gospel. First, the Word of God reveals what is in a man. Hebrews 4:12 reads, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The Word sheds light on the darkness of sin: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Second, a person or nation may have a pious religious life but not have a real relationship with God. It is impossible for a human to worship a God they do not know (Matt 15:8).

## **Week 7: Sharing the Gospel in Jerusalem**

The last few chapters of Acts are about how Paul defended his faith in Christ. Paul quoted the Old Testament to prove that Christ is God and that when he [Paul] persecuted the church, he was persecuting Christ. The core of Paul's defense was to prove that the salvation of the Gentiles was God's original will *and* the calling of the Jewish ancestors, so he did not violate the Old Testament Law. Paul's defense had no political motivations or violent tendencies, so Christianity posed no threat to Rome. Although Paul used Roman law to defend himself, he knew that the true judge was God. This was also God's plan for him to take the gospel to Rome as a prisoner.

This lesson presented two key points of preaching the gospel. First, to worship God, we must worship God in his revelation, not human religious enthusiasm (1 Cor 15: 14). Second, changes in geography, age, occupation, knowledge, and wealth may temporarily satisfy, but they cannot deliver a person from their sinful condition. Real change comes from responding to Christ: obeying God and fearing God (Eccl 12:13–14).

## **Week 8: Sharing the Gospel in Rome**

The end of Acts does not record Paul standing before Caesar for trial, nor does it record the end of Paul's life. The book of Acts is intentionally unfinished because its purpose is to record how the gospel was preached from the Jews to the Gentiles as Jesus commanded. Rome was not the end of the world but a beginning. The book of Acts ends with the formal beginning of the work of the gospel. Paul declared to the Jewish religious leaders in Rome that he was imprisoned because of "the hope of the Israelites" (Acts 28:20), awakening them from waiting in vain for an earthly kingdom to welcoming God's Kingdom. The book also declares to the world that Jesus Christ is the real hope for everyone, allowing people to repent and abandon their sins to turn to Christ.

When the Jews rejected the gospel, God chose and transformed Paul—a fanatic who once resisted Christ and persecuted the church—into a powerful messenger of the gospel. Although Paul had no freedom in prison, the gospel was not forbidden. The

gospel will not stop because of people’s rejection and persecution. God will raise up people to preach the gospel in any era. This lesson presented three key points of preaching the gospel. First, those seeking and holding on to the truth will pay a price (Matt 16:24). Second, Jesus Christ is our true hope (John 4:13). Third, human rejection and denial cannot stop the spread of the gospel (Acts 28:31).

### **Post-series Survey and Analysis**

The purpose of this ministry research project was to help members of Atlanta Baptist Chinese Church understand the necessity of personal evangelism, share their faith with others, and win converts to Christ. The third goal of the project was to increase the participants’ understanding of evangelism by delivering the Acts sermon series. To determine if the participants’ understanding of evangelism increased after the sermon series, I administered the same survey given prior to the series and compared the pre- and post-series survey scores. Fourteen participants completed the post-series survey within one week. I spent another two weeks sorting and reviewing the pre- and post-series data.

Table 4 demonstrates that between the pre- and post-series surveys, the mean scores increased for all questions related to the knowledge and confidence in evangelism.

Table 4. Post-series survey mean change concerning evangelism

	Survey Question	Pre-series Mean	Post-series Mean	Change
24	The result of living a life in obedience to the gospel is holiness.	3.43	3.71	+0.28
25	I am comfortable when talking with someone about the death and resurrection of Jesus.	2.57	3.36	+0.79
26	I know how to identify different groups of people (unbelievers, people seeking God but not saved, believers).	2.64	3.50	+0.86
27	Many people in the church also need to hear the gospel.	3.29	3.57	+0.29

	Survey Question	Pre-series Mean	Post-series Mean	Change
28	I am comfortable talking to unbelievers about Christianity.	2.64	3.43	+0.79
29	I am ready to share my testimony of faith.	2.71	3.36	+0.64
30	I can explain what Jesus accomplished on the cross.	2.64	3.71	+1.07
31	I know how to explain what the Bible says about sin.	2.71	3.07	+0.36
32	I can explain how Christianity is different from other religions.	2.79	3.14	+0.36
33	I am comfortable sharing why God hates idolatry and its effects on people's lives.	2.36	3.14	+0.79

In addition to the questions about knowledge and confidence related to evangelism, I included some questions about personal spiritual life growth, which is an important condition for preaching the gospel. I also added some questions about unavoidable issues related to sin and idols. I found that some participants were reluctant to share about sin and idols because these messages make people feel uncomfortable. However, sharing the complete gospel message without compromising is necessary for evangelism. These questions can help participants prepare to share the full gospel and avoid the prosperity gospel. Through learning, each participant increased their knowledge related to evangelism, increased their ability to identify groups of people to evangelize, and increased their confidence in sharing about their personal testimony, sin, and idols.

Overall, all of the participants increased in every metric, so that is a good outcome. Third, the t-test that showed a positive, statistically-significant increase in knowledge for every participant because the p-value of .0024 was less than 0.05 and the absolute value of the t-Stat (16.3296) was greater than the t-Critical value (1.770933). Overall, this shows that this project was a success!

## **Going Forward: Identifying the Evangelistic Community**

The fourth goal of this project was to develop a strategic plan for evangelism education and personal evangelism practice at ABCC. Part of this goal was to help participants learn how to identify potential groups of people to evangelize. I developed a graphic to help ABCC members identify potential groups of people to evangelize.<sup>3</sup> I have found that some members of ABCC with a weak foundation of faith often regard people who just visited church a few times as believers. As a result, Christians with confused beliefs do not recognize when people who say they are Christians want to be baptized but do not understand the gospel and are baptized without repentance. Some people do not believe the gospel, and they know they do not believe. Some people believe and know they have been saved through faith in Christ. However, there are some people in the church who do not believe and think that they do. These people are also the main gospel targets ignored by the church.

The graphic in figure 1 visually demonstrates four evangelistic groups that the church may reach. This can help each member understand the potential evangelistic targets in their lives and help them evangelize in a planned and strategic manner. They can also know their own situation and growth goals.

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<sup>3</sup> An online search on identifying evangelistic communities reveals many similar graphics of four and five circles. My graphic is four circles, but it is based on a five-circle graphic described in a church bylaw document written by an underground church in China. For safety reasons, I cannot provide the name or exact location of this church.

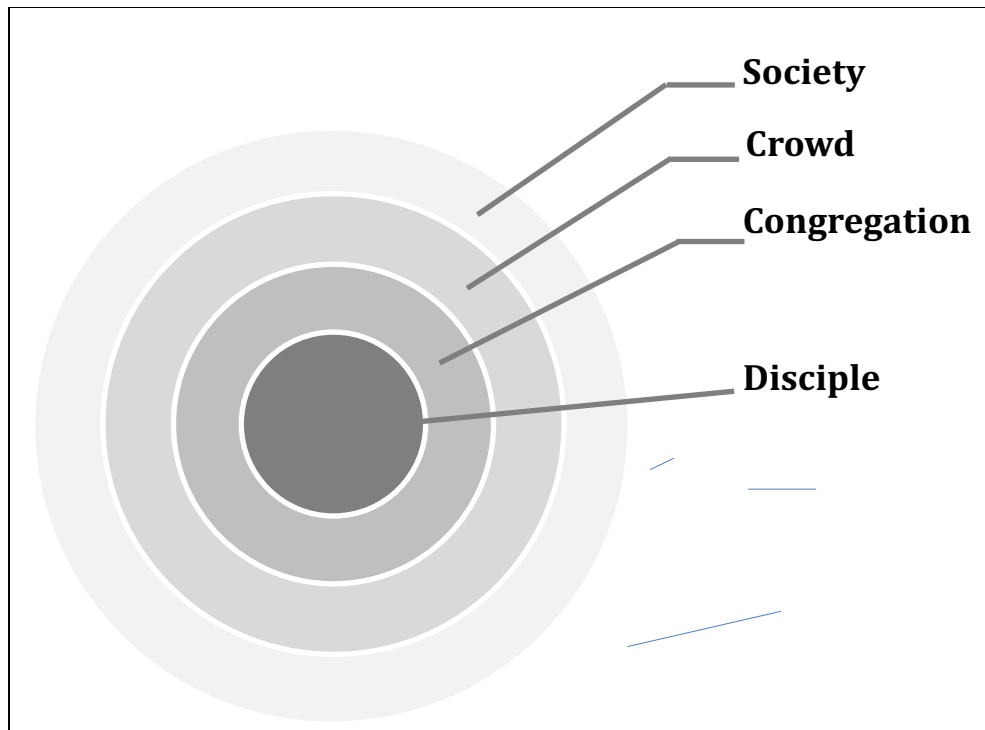


Figure 1. Potential groups to evangelize

1. **Society:** Refers to the unbelievers around us. Although Jesus calls disciples to preach the gospel to the end of the world, he calls disciples to start with the people they can reach first: family members, friends, neighbors, and colleagues who have never heard the gospel or come to church. This is the first starting point for missionary goals.
2. **Crowd:** People who have come to church at least once have heard the gospel but do not believe it. These people may be present at Sunday services, including unbelievers, church members, and nominal believers.
3. **Congregation:** Due to the historical growth of ABCC, the members of the church could be divided into two groups. The first group of people have repented, been baptized, and have real spiritual life. The second group of people are those who are only baptized and have superficial religious activities but are without any real salvation and connection with Jesus Christ.
4. **Disciple:** The goal of the church is to lead existing members to become committed disciples: participate in at least one small group, fellowship, or weekly meeting outside of Sundays, and have a stable Bible reading time, prayer life, and tithe.

At the end of lesson 6, I explained this message to help participants understand and identify the different evangelical groups they would encounter in their lives. I also saved this information to a file and uploaded it to the church's WhatsApp group, ensuring that not only could the participants see it, but every church member could



see it as well. Among the participants, the church leaders benefited the most. They knew how to identify different groups of people who need evangelism, as well as their stages and levels of faith, so that the church can provide spiritual guidance and pastoral care effectively. Participants could also assess which group they belong to. If they were just members of the church, then through study, they knew they should have more commitment to Jesus to be his disciples. One must be a disciple of Jesus in order to be a disciple who leads disciples.

### **Practicing Evangelism**

As the members of ABCC grow in their ability to identify and know the evangelistic community, they join the unending process of practicing evangelism. I have invited every project participant to join the ministry of sharing personal testimonies in 2024. We will begin by practicing giving our testimonies. On the last week of each month, after the Sunday sermon, two people will share their life testimonies in front of the congregation. They can invite their unbelieving family, friends, and neighbors to come to church to hear how they experienced God's grace, how they were transformed by the gospel, how they faced struggles and failures in faith, and how they overcame challenges through faith in Jesus Christ. Six people who participated in this project responded that they would like to share their testimony in front of the congregation.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this ministry research project was to help members of Atlanta Baptist Chinese Church understand the necessity of personal evangelism, share their faith with others, and win converts to Christ. This chapter described in detail every step taken to implement this ministry research project, including project preparation, curriculum development, implementation, and data analysis. This project has begun to fulfill its purpose of encouraging disciples to spread the gospel and impact the surrounding

community. The results of this program have had a positive impact on both individual spiritual life growth and the church ministry.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Every person needs to know there is a way out of a sinful lifestyle through repentance and faith. Every person needs to know he or she can be reconciled to the Father because of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Every disciple who has received salvation needs to grow in spiritual maturity and obedience, including obeying the Great Commission. As a result, this project was designed to equip the members of Atlanta Baptist Chinese Church (ABCC) to understand personal evangelism, share their faith with others, and win converts to Christ. This chapter will assess the project by giving careful attention to its purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses. The chapter will also offer recommendations for future implementation as well as theological and personal reflections.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The purpose of this project originated from observing that many members of ABCC's community, including longtime members and new believers, have struggled to define the purpose of the church and articulate the truth of the gospel. As a result, many members do not know how to lead someone to Christ through sharing the gospel. As we live in a society that is increasingly secular and resistant to the truth of God's Word, our church must learn the purpose of the church, the truth and power of the gospel, and how to share it with others. This project was timely in that it met ABCC's present need to equip the members of the church to understand personal evangelism, share their faith with others, and win converts to Christ. Overall, the purpose of this project was fulfilled and will be described in the following sections. The pre- and post-surveys enabled me to

understand areas where our members struggled to understand the gospel, the church and its mission, and what it means to make disciples. The project implementation built up the body of Christ by addressing each of these areas. We now have a ministry plan to put into practice in terms of what was learned through this project.

### **Evaluation of the Project's Goals**

The purpose of this project was considered successful with the achievement of four distinct goals. The first goal was to assess the current understanding of evangelism among the members of ABCC. The second goal was to develop a series of eight sermons based on the book of Acts to introduce biblical evangelism and train current members of ABCC. The third goal was to increase the participants' understanding of evangelism by delivering the Acts sermon series. The fourth goal was to develop a strategic plan for evangelism education and personal evangelism practice at ABCC.

#### **Goal 1 Results**

The first goal was to assess the current understanding of evangelism among the members of ABCC. Fourteen current members, including three leaders at ABCC, completed the survey. Collecting this survey data was necessary to understand church members' beliefs. This helped determine and adapt the training content to address the real challenges and needs of church members concerning evangelism practices. The pre-series survey showed that almost half of the participants had not received any theological or evangelical training. This revealed why most members of ABCC did not have a good theological foundation and did not know how to share the gospel. Based on the completion of the pre-series survey and the collection and analysis of the quantitative data, the first goal was successfully met.

#### **Goal 2 Results**

The second goal was to develop a series of eight sermons based on the book of

Acts to introduce biblical evangelism and train current members of ABCC. The sermon series was described in chapter 4, and English translations of the sermons (which were delivered in Chinese) are in appendix 7. Based on the design and development of the eight evangelism-focused sermons from the book of Acts, the second goal was successfully met.

### **Goal 3 Results**

The third goal was to increase the participants' understanding of evangelism by delivering the Acts sermon series. The process of preparing sermons was one of personal reading, thinking, praying, and researching information. The whole teaching process was exciting and involved interaction with the participants. During the learning process, participants not only increased their knowledge of the Bible and theology, but also built the confidence and courage to share the gospel. Through after-class questions, I was able to find out whether they had truly grasped the content they learned. This goal was considered successful when, after administering the post-series survey, analysis of the results revealed that the participants had increased in their knowledge of evangelism.

### **Goal 4 Results**

The fourth goal was to develop a strategic plan for evangelism education and personal evangelism practice at ABCC. There were three steps in this section: (1) Increase Knowledge and Confidence in Evangelism, (2) Know the Evangelistic Community, and (3) Practice the Plan. The ministry plan is outlined in chapter 4. A panel consisting of two church ministry leaders, a youth pastor, and a deacon at ABCC evaluated the ministry plan to ensure it was biblically accurate, sufficiently thorough, clear in presentation, and practical. The panel determined that it met or exceeded the sufficiency standard for implementation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 6 for the ministry plan evaluation rubric results.

## **Strengths of the Project**

The first strength of the project was that it was rooted in Scripture. It is vital to lead a congregation by exalting the authority of Scripture and helping each participant learn how to find answers in and principles from the Bible. God reveals himself in his Word (Ps 119:160; Isa 55:9–11; Matt 5:17–18; Luke 24:25–27; John 5:39), and his Word is profitable for every aspect of living (2 Tim 3:16). Building a biblical church culture means looking at the world and our lives through a biblical lens rather than looking at the Bible through the world's standards. Focusing on the authority of God's Word and its power in the Christian's life was vital to the project's success.

The second strength of this project addressed a specific weakness of ABCC: evangelism. Much of this struggle relates to many members of ABCC not having a solid biblical and theological foundation. A large percentage of the church had not received any theological training or training in how to evangelize. Even if some people shared the gospel, they did not follow biblical principles. Even if some people invited others to church, their lives showed they were not interested in the gospel and the truth. The project, therefore, was immensely practical for the overall health of the ABCC membership. It has ignited the entire congregation's enthusiasm for evangelism; we now have a ministry plan (see chap. 4) that helps members identify people in their lives who are in need of the gospel. Most importantly, this project has motivated the entire church to seek the truth in God's Word, build their faith in Christ, and practice evangelism.

The third strength was that the program helped congregants to be aware of their own spiritual shortcomings and real needs. Most church members at ABCC lacked a systematic approach to Bible study. The surveys and series helped participants recognize the importance of developing an accurate theology of evangelism and a correct conception of the church. Without a foundation in the Word, a person can find it difficult to identify their own spiritual obstacles and areas in which they need to grow. It also makes it challenging to identify when someone has the appearance but not the substance

of faith. Many churches have members who have attended church for a long time but still do not have faith in Christ. We want to encourage all ABCC members to study God's Word and examine themselves. This project was helpful in pursuing this.

### **Weaknesses of the Project and What I Would Do Differently**

The weakness of this project is on the practical side: I did not have a plan for participants to immediately implement the series content by putting it into practice. To be sure, this series focused more on biblical teaching, but the participants did not have an opportunity to practice what they learned in real life within the context of the project timeline. The project helped participants develop in biblical knowledge and evangelism confidence, and it was good for this foundation to be laid. However, if I were to repeat the project, I would make some changes to improve the actual practice of evangelism.

First, I would add a section that addressed religious belief systems that our members are likely to encounter. It would help our members to understand these systems and their errors. Several participants had expressed anxiousness about answering friends' objections to the Christian faith. This comes in part because they come from different religious backgrounds, and some of our members are unfamiliar with those beliefs, the errors of those beliefs, and how to respond with grace and the truth of God's Word. When disciples understand a person's religious background and practice, they can give a more appropriate and accurate gospel message to answer the unbeliever's questions and obstacles that prevent them from accepting the gospel.

Second, this project could help participants learn to share a brief personal testimony so that they are ready to share at any time and share quickly if needed. Every Christian should be able to share a personal testimony with their family, friends, and colleagues. A personal testimony may include describing their worldview and values before they believed in the Lord and how the gospel changed them and brought them to saving faith in the Lord. One of my goals after this project is to help members practice

sharing their personal testimonies in small groups, in front of the church, and during church visitation to other members and to people who have visited the church.

### **Theological Reflections**

As I researched and developed this project, I was able to reflect on several important truths. First, Christ is the head of the church, and the purpose of the church is to fulfill the Great Commission given by Christ (Eph 5:23). God's Word is the foundation of our church and our personal spiritual lives. Second, the ultimate goal of the gospel is to love God and to love others (Matt 22:37–39). John 15:35 says, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” If people call themselves Christians but do not obey and follow Jesus Christ, their lives reveal that they do not truly love God. I want ABCC to continue to lead its members to examine their hearts (Ps 139:23–24; 2 Cor 13:5–7), grow and mature in the Word of God, and demonstrate their love for others by sharing the gospel. Third, I want to encourage the congregation: as God is faithful, he will continue to work in us to accomplish his will (Phil 1:6). He works in a way the world rejects and uses people the world despises. His ways seem paradoxical, but they are always powerful; his ways are higher than our ways (1 Cor 1:18–31).

### **Personal Reflections**

Second Timothy 3:16 says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” As a pastor, my first identity is that of a Christian, a follower of Christ. I have been converted and renewed by the Word of God. I want our ministries at ABCC to be informed by the Word, not secular influences. There are churches that value membership numbers, the amount of giving, and building programs. I want ABCC to value the growth of each member's personal spiritual life, our growth together as the



body of Christ, and our commitment to pursue evangelism in our community and around the world.

I believe this project generated spiritual growth and confidence to evangelize in our congregation. Before the series, some participants admitted they did not know how to share the gospel with their friends. Moreover, some participants had previously expressed concerns about not being able to answer their friends' objections to the Christian faith. Throughout the series, several participants shared with me how much they appreciated the series and how they were already implementing it in their contexts. While the long-term fruit of this project is unknown, at this point, the church is heading in the right direction as it seeks to help its members share the gospel according to biblical principles while their spiritual lives mature in God's truth.

### **Conclusion**

God gave his holy Word and his Spirit to the church as the source of power to grow in him and be obedient to his command. His Word should be the foundation of our lives and the foundation of our Atlanta Baptist Chinese Church. No matter how many people there are in the church or how beautiful the building is, if it is not built on the foundation of the Bible, it will just be like wood, hay, and straw. Once it encounters a storm or any turmoil, it will collapse. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:13, "Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is." Christ has laid the foundation, and every Christian is responsible for building on this foundation in preparation for Christ's return and his righteous judgment. It is our privilege to lead people to Christ, to make disciples as Christ commanded, and to show them that building on the foundation of belief in Jesus Christ and obedience to his Word will enable them to endure to the end.

APPENDIX 1  
EVANGELISM ASSESSMENT

The following instrument is an evangelism assessment. Some general questions are followed by a ten-question survey measured by a 5-point Likert scale. The instrument's purpose was to assess each member's current knowledge and practice of evangelism.

## EVANGELISM ASSESSMENT

### Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess your understanding of evangelism and your practice of evangelism. This research project is being conducted by Tao Yang under the direction of the Professional Doctoral Studies office at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and again at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses.

*Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. By checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research. Indicate below your agreement to participate in this project.*

I agree to participate.

I do not agree to participate.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Participant Information

1. Have you received God's gift of salvation? Would you explain in more detail?
2. Do you want to build a closer relationship with God? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the purpose of your life?
4. Have you read the whole Bible once? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Have you followed our church's daily Bible reading plan? \_\_\_\_\_
6. How many hours a week do you read your Bible for personal study or devotions?
7. Do you pray every day? \_\_\_\_\_
8. How many years have you been a member of ABCC? \_\_\_\_\_

### To be answered after the sermon series:

9. How many of the eight sermons did you listen to? \_\_\_\_\_
10. How many of the eight LifeGroups did you attend?

### Evangelism Confidence

1. Circle the answer that best indicates how often you attempt to share your faith.

never      once a year      once a month      once a week      2 times a week

2. Have you ever received evangelism training?    Yes      No

If yes, what type of training did you receive?

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3. Place an X next to the greatest obstacle to your evangelism.

I'm fearful of how they'll respond to me.

I'm fearful I won't know how to answer their questions.

I don't think evangelism is my job.

I'm too busy.

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Assessment: Part 1

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing an 'X' next to your answer.

4. To what age group do you belong?

- a)  20–30
- b)  31–40
- c)  41–50
- d)  51–60
- e)  61–70
- f)  75+

5. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

6. How long have you been a Christian?

- a)  1–5 years
- b)  6–10 years
- c)  11–20 years
- d)  21+ years

7. How long have you been teaching God's Word in either a corporate or a classroom setting?

- a)  1–3 years
- b)  3–5 years
- c)  5–10 years
- d)  10+ years

8. Are you currently serving as a ministry leader or teacher of other believers?

- a)  Yes
- b)  No

9. Is memorizing Scripture a present practice of yours?

- a)  Yes
- b)  No

10. Briefly define church.

11. Briefly define what it means to be a Christian.

12. Briefly define biblical evangelism.

Please see the next page.

**Assessment: Part 2**

**Using the following scale, please write the number that best corresponds to your beliefs in response to the following statements:**

SD – Strongly Disagree

D – Disagree

DS – Disagree Somewhat

AS – Agree Somewhat

A – Agree

SA – Strongly Agree

#	Question	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24	The result of living a life in obedience to the gospel is holiness.						
25	I am comfortable when talking with someone about the death and resurrection of Jesus.						
26	I know how to identify different groups of people (unbelievers, people seeking God but not saved, believers).						
27	Many people in the church also need to hear the gospel.						
28	I am comfortable talking to unbelievers about Christianity.						
29	I am ready to share my testimony of faith.						
30	I can explain what Jesus accomplished on the cross.						
31	I know how to explain what the Bible says about sin.						
32	I can explain how Christianity is different from other religions.						
33	I am comfortable sharing why God hates idolatry and its effects on people's lives.						

## APPENDIX 2

### SERMON SERIES EVALUATION

The following evaluation was provided to an expert panel of two deacons at ABCC and a leader of church ministry at ABCC. This panel evaluated the sermons to ensure they were biblically accurate, sufficiently thorough, clear in their presentation, and practical. All three panel members participated in the project, including evaluating the project and participating as learners in the project. They knew the course plans and objectives and provided valuable advice. The evaluation on the next page provides the results of the panel's review. The results in each column represent the number of panel members assessing an aspect of the curriculum at a particular rating.



Name of Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Sermon Series Evaluation</b>					
<b>1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Biblical Accuracy</b>					
The sermons were sound in their interpretation of Scripture.			1	3	
The sermons were faithful to the theology of the Bible.			1	3	
<b>Scope</b>					
The sermons sufficiently covered each issue they were designed to address.				4	
The sermons sufficiently cover a biblical pedagogical methodology.			1	3	
<b>Accessibility</b>					
Each sermon was clear, containing a big idea.				4	
Each sermon provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.				4	
<b>Practicality</b>					
The sermons clearly detail how to share the gospel.			2	2	
At the end of the series, participants will be able to better share reasons for believing in Jesus.			1	3	

### APPENDIX 3

#### PRE- AND POST-SERIES LIKERT SURVEY RESULTS

The following tables provide each participant's pre- and post-series Likert survey scores, along with the total score per question and the mean, mode, and standard deviation per question. This data was used to perform the t-test in appendix 5.

Table A1. Pre-series Likert survey results

<b>Partic. No.</b>	<b>Q24</b>	<b>Q25</b>	<b>Q26</b>	<b>Q27</b>	<b>Q28</b>	<b>Q29</b>	<b>Q30</b>	<b>Q31</b>	<b>Q32</b>	<b>Q33</b>	<b>SUM</b>
Partic 1	5	4	4	3	4	3	4	5	4	4	40
Partic 2	3	2	2	3	2	2	3	3	3	2	25
Partic 3	3	2	1	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	21
Partic 4	5	4	4	4	3	5	3	4	5	3	40
Partic 5	3	1	2	3	1	3	2	2	2	2	21
Partic 6	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	17
Partic 7	4	4	3	4	5	3	2	3	3	3	34
Partic 8	4	3	3	5	1	4	5	4	4	5	38
Partic 9	4	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	34
Partic 10	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	16
Partic 11	3	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	1	22
Partic 12	4	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	3	3	35
Partic 13	3	3	2	3	3	2	1	1	2	1	21
Partic 14	3	2	3	3	2	2	2	3	3	2	25
Total	48	36	37	46	37	38	37	38	39	33	389
Mean	3.43	2.57	2.64	3.29	2.64	2.71	2.64	2.71	2.79	2.36	27.79
Mode	3	2	2	3	2	2	2	3	3	2	
StdDev	0.938	1.016	0.929	0.825	1.277	1.069	1.082	1.139	1.051	1.216	

Table A2. Post-series Likert survey results

<b>Partic. No.</b>	<b>Q24</b>	<b>Q25</b>	<b>Q26</b>	<b>Q27</b>	<b>Q28</b>	<b>Q29</b>	<b>Q30</b>	<b>Q31</b>	<b>Q32</b>	<b>Q33</b>	<b>SUM</b>
Partic 1	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	4	45
Partic 2	3	3	3	3	4	3	4	3	4	2	32
Partic 3	3	3	2	3	3	3	4	2	3	3	29
Partic 4	5	4	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	4	45
Partic 5	3	3	4	4	1	3	3	2	2	3	28
Partic 6	2	2	3	2	3	2	4	2	1	3	24
Partic 7	5	4	4	5	5	4	3	3	3	4	40
Partic 8	4	4	4	5	2	5	5	4	4	5	42
Partic 9	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	41
Partic 10	4	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	25
Partic 11	3	3	2	3	4	2	4	3	2	1	27
Partic 12	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	40
Partic 13	4	4	2	3	3	3	2	1	2	2	26
Partic 14	3	2	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	32
Total	52	47	49	50	48	47	52	43	44	44	476
Mean	3.71	3.36	3.50	3.57	3.43	3.36	3.71	3.07	3.14	3.14	34.00
Mode	3	4	4	4	4	3	4	3	3	4	
StdDev	0.914	0.929	1.019	0.938	1.158	1.008	0.825	1.207	1.167	1.099	

APPENDIX 4

MEAN CHANGE IN PRE- AND POST-SERIES  
LIKERT SURVEY SCORES

No.	Survey Question	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Difference
24	The result of living a life in obedience to the gospel is holiness.	3.43	3.71	+0.29
25	I am comfortable when talking with someone about the death and resurrection of Jesus.	2.57	3.36	+0.79
26	I know how to identify different groups of people (unbelievers, people seeking God but not saved, believers).	2.64	3.50	+0.86
27	Many people in the church also need to hear the gospel.	3.29	3.57	+0.29
28	I am comfortable talking to unbelievers about Christianity.	2.64	3.43	+0.79
29	I am ready to share my testimony of faith.	2.71	3.36	+0.64
30	I can explain what Jesus accomplished on the cross.	2.64	3.71	+1.07
31	I know how to explain what the Bible says about sin.	2.71	3.07	+0.36
32	I can explain how Christianity is different from other religions.	2.79	3.14	+0.36
33	I am comfortable sharing why God hates idolatry and its effects on people's lives.	2.36	3.14	+0.79

APPENDIX 5  
T-TEST RESULTS

<b>T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means</b>		
	<i>Pre-Test Total</i>	<i>Post-Test Total</i>
Mean	27.785714	34.000000
Variance	74.950549	60.769230
Observations	14	14
Pearson Correlation	0.99048327	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	13	
t stat	-16.32968268	
P(T<=t) one-tail	.00241E-8	
t Critical one-tail	1.770933	
P(T<=t) two-tail	.04820E-8	
t Critical two-tail	2.160368	

## APPENDIX 6

### MINISTRY PLAN EVALUATION

The following evaluation was provided to an expert panel of four individuals: two ministry leaders, a youth pastor, and a deacon at ABCC. This panel evaluated the ongoing ministry plan to ensure it was biblically accurate, sufficiently thorough, clear in their presentation, and practical. The evaluation on the next page provides the results of the panel's review. The results in each column represent the number of panel members assessing an aspect of the curriculum at a particular rating.

Name of Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Ministry Plan Evaluation</b>					
<b>1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
The goals of the ministry plan are clearly stated.				4	
The need to grow in evangelism and disciple-making is clearly stated in the ministry plan.			1	3	
The material presented in the ministry plan is faithful to the Bible.				4	
The material presented in the ministry plan is theologically sound.				4	
The components of the ministry plan are well-organized and concise.			1	3	
A timeline for implementing the ministry plan is clearly stated.			1	3	
The number of people necessary for implementing the ministry plan have been stated.			1	3	
Obstacles that may hinder implementing the ministry plan have been stated.			1	3	
Overall, I believe the plan, when executed will promote more evangelism by ABCC's members.				4	



## APPENDIX 7

### SERMON SERIES TRANSCRIPTS

This appendix contains the eight sermons presented as part of this project. The sermons were preached in Chinese, but this appendix contains the English translations of each sermon.

## **Sermon 1**

### **Ordinary People**

“Acts most often is mined by those seeking models of authentic and vibrant Christianity. But Luke does not intend to provide models of leadership organization, for example, to be duplicated undeviatingly by contemporary churches.”<sup>1</sup> The main purpose of Luke was to show that God raised up the church and accomplished His redemption work in the early church through His followers who were powerless and despised by the world’s standards and vision. In other words, they were uneducated and untrained people who did not come from prestigious schools, no stable income, and lived at the bottom of society.

May people have a question if God did this in the early days of the church, is he still doing it now? This can help the church today to understand the way God works: He will continue to accomplish His work in a way the world rejects, use people the world despises. His way seems paradoxical but always powerful. Today, we will learn two important messages about evangelism through the book of Acts: Jesus and His disciples.

### **Know Jesus**

In Matthew 16:13-21, Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”, and Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” After severely reprimanding Peter, Jesus told his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised (ESV).

It is important to know who Jesus is. Jesus is the Christ, but He must suffer many things from human and be killed by them. In human’s thought, Jesus is a loser

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<sup>1</sup> David E. Garland, *Acts*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 25.

because a winner must stop suffer that caused by others and kill others who want to kill you. Some of his followers expected Jesus to bring political change or force to overthrow Roman slavery, so Israel could rebuild the once glorious Jerusalem and the kingdom of David. They believed the prophecy that God would raise up another king among David's descendants. Regrettably, Jesus not only failed to act in the expectations of those who followed him, but even more unexpectedly predicted his own death to his followers.

When the disciples first heard that Jesus had to go to Jerusalem to die, they were astonished and could not believe it. They originally thought that Jesus went to Jerusalem to sit on the throne of David, to be the king of the Jews, to restore the nation of Israel. Since then, the Jews can live a good life of independence, freedom, and prosperity. It is hard to accept that Jesus suddenly said that he was going to be killed. When Jesus opposed the corrupted religious leaders, the moral depravity and social injustice at that time, the religious leaders and secular authorities persecuted him and finally nailed him to the cross. Jesus was not only despised by religious leaders and Roman officials; he was also abandoned and denied by his disciples.

They only accepted the glorious and victorious Jesus but not the humble, weak, and humiliated Jesus who nailed on the wood. They only wanted to enjoy the glory of God with Jesus but refuse to suffer with Christ. They only wanted to get physical and visible protection through Jesus, but they didn't want to encounter what Jesus faced. In Acts 14:22, Paul was beaten almost to die and thrown out of the city. When Paul rose up, he went to the city to encourage the others. Paul said, "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

Application: Brothers and sisters, with the same questions and challenges, we can also ask ourselves: what kind of faith we have? what kind of Jesus do we know? have we accepted a weak and suffering Jesus, or we only accepted a Jesus with authority and victory? are we ready to face adversity and persecution? The moral decline of American society and the political changes in the whole world have made many people

see the fact that the life in North America, which was thought to be stable, comfortable, democratic, and freedom, is becoming unstable, unreliable, undemocratic, and unfreedom. When a person has determined to follow Jesus Christ, he or she must prepare to face the resistance and persecution from this fallen world.

Jesus not only failed to live up to the expectations of those followers, and he also went to people who were looked down upon by the world, such as tax collectors, prostitutes, fishermen, paralytics, blindman, dumb, demon-possessed people, lepers, and children. These people would not bring rewards to those who helped them, but Jesus became their friend, lived with them, and explained the heavenly gospel to them. Jesus encouraged them, built their hope to find support and help from God. Not only did Jesus fail to become the political leader, religious reformer, and social changer they imagined, but even more unexpectedly foretell his own suffering and death to his followers.

People have different ways to express or create opportunities to show their strength: strong muscles, not compromising to wrongs, upholding justice, protecting the weak, and so on. No one shows strength in a way that gives up his or her authority, but only Jesus. Jesus was born in weakness and lowliness (Philippians 2:6-8). The death of Jesus is a sign of victory to save His people (Isaiah 53:4). Darrell L. Bock says, “Luke’s appeal to God makes a claim of power but only because Luke was convinced God had really acted in history.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Know Disciples**

Most of disciples of Jesus did not have any profound knowledge and notable social status: a few were fishermen, a tax collector was hated by everyone, and a revolutionary. Their characters also have different flaws, such as arrogance, doubt, selfishness, and vanity. When people heard disciples of Jesus speak in his own language

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<sup>2</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 38.

in Jerusalem. Luke said, “They were amazed and astonished, saying, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?’” (Acts 2:6-7)?

In Acts chapter 4, priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees seized Peter and John because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. Next day, Rulers of Jerusalem, elders and scribes, high priest and his family interrogated Peter and John. Luke said, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).

Why did these unschooled and ordinary men make people look up? Even later, Paul and Silas were called men who turned the world upside down by sharing gospel and leading people to Christ in the city of Thessalonica. These disciples of Jesus all had a common characteristic, so they fully gave up the worldly values, and faithfully served Christ, passionately shared gospel, and hopefully waited God’s kingdom. Although they once misunderstood Jesus, after His resurrection, many disciples of Christ were changed by the gospel and became powerful and influential people. As Paul said, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (Ephesians 6:10). God could use everyone who follows Him, and God can change ordinary people to change the world. not only God worked in the history, and He also works nowadays in the same way. Bock, Darrell L says, “Luke’s appeal to God makes a claim of power but only because Luke was convinced God had really acted in history.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Who is Jesus? There’s no greater question than who Jesus really. The different perceptions of Jesus will lead to completely different lives and destiny. Many of Jesus’ contemporaries saw what he did and did not believe that he was God. In today’s age,

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<sup>3</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 38.

there are all kinds of data, historical documents, the whole Bible, and various translations, all of which cannot become the main way for us to know Jesus. Faith is always the only way to know Jesus. The biggest challenge facing modern people is confidence. Because their knowledge, social status, political ideas, wealth and health are useless at this important moment. Modern people's trust in God, if compared with the Old Testament era, there is no difference between people's trust in God in the early days of the church, they are the same.

### **Reflection and Questions:**

1. Who is Jesus in your life?
2. What is your goal of life? Are you willing to accomplish God's plan through your life?
3. Do you worry about your knowledge, social states, or any other defects? God can use anyone who wants to follow and obey Him, so God can change your life and empower you.
4. Do you prepared already to face the resistance and persecution from this fallen world?
5. Why did Jesus foretell his own death to his followers?
6. After you believed in the Lord, through your life, did anyone recognize that you had followed Jesus?
7. What two books did Luke write? What was the main point of the book of Acts?
8. Did Jesus choose his disciples because their lives were better than others?
9. Why were people surprised by what the disciples did?

## Sermon 2

### Sharing Gospel to Disciples

Everyone's life will be changed after heard the gospel, so nobody could stay the same as before. Either a man's heart becomes soft and humble in front Jesus Christ, or it becomes harder than before. As four Gospels showing, nearly half of twelve disciples of Jesus were fisherman turned the world upside down. What made those ordinary men who were skeptical, selfish, and cowardly people to become those who changed the world? How were their lives transformed? The answer is the gospel which has change many people's lives through the history. Everyone needs to hear the Gospel, including the disciples of Jesus who have heard the Gospel need to understand the whole salvation plan of God about the gospel. The book of Acts offers a great explanation how disciples of Christ renewed by the gospel.

The book of Acts which is classified as a history book has special meaning in the New Testament. Garland, David E says, "If one believes that Luke-Acts is a unified whole, then it follows that Luke considered the story of Jesus to be incomplete without the story of his church."<sup>4</sup> What does that mean that the story of Jesus will be incomplete without the story of his church? The four gospels focus on the identity, teaching, and calling of Jesus, and the book of Acts focuses on disciples of Jesus to continue the prestation of salvation story of God. Bruce, F. F. writes in his commentary of Acts, "The Acts of the Apostles is the name given since the second century A. D. to the second volume of a History of Christian Origins composed by a first-century Christian and dedicated to a certain Theophilus."<sup>5</sup> That means early church recognized the book of Acts as church history which relates to the redemption of God's plan from the Old Testament. Garland says,

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<sup>4</sup> David E. Garland, *Acts*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 27.

<sup>5</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 21.

Luke does not present the church as a new, replacement Israel composed of gentiles who now supplant the old people of God in salvation history. It is important to recognize that Acts does not depict Jews as a whole rejecting the gospel. The gospel meets with success among many Jews (5:14; 6:7; 13:47; 18:8; 21:20; 28:24 [cf. 4:21; 5:26]). For Luke, this success is vital if the prophecy of Scripture that Israel was to be a light to the nations.<sup>6</sup>

Did the disciples of Jesus know the prophets of Old Testament about a whole picture of God's redemption plan before Jesus' crucifixion? If not, when did they start to understand the meaning of the crucifixion of Jesus? In Luke 18:31-33, Jesus took His twelve disciples and told them about His crucifixion, Jesus said, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise." Did the disciples understand what Jesus said to them? No! They did not understand what Jesus told them. Luke says, "But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said" (Luke 18:34).

Not only the twelve disciples of Jesus did not understand at that time, and the woman who went to the tomb on the third day of crucifixion of Jesus did not understand the death of Jesus. Until the two angels asked and mentioned them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.' And they remembered his words" (Luke 24:5-8). They just remembered Jesus told them his death before, but they still did not understand the real meaning about the redemption plan of God through Jesus.

After Jesus's resurrection, two of disciples met Jesus and talked to him but did not recognize him. They knew Jesus was a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people (Luke 24:19) and the one to redeem Israel (Luke

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<sup>6</sup> Garland, *Acts*, 29.



24:21), but they did not understand the integrated redemption plan of God through the scriptures. Luke says, “Jesus said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27). Luke closes his second book by emphasizing the last teaching of Jesus to the eleven and those who were with them gathered together,

“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:46-49).

After the resurrection of Jesus and his final teaching, the disciples of Jesus began to understand the prophecy concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus that Jesus taught them before. What Jesus did was fulfilling prophecies and the promises of God to Israel through the Old Testament. During their three years following Jesus, the disciples saw him turning water into wine, calming storms, expelling evil spirits healing leprosy, paralysis, and even raising the dead. None of this built up the disciples’ full knowledge about Jesus and his death, and they did not fully know Jesus until after his resurrection and final teaching.

Jesus is the first person to rise from the dead and never die again, and his resurrection has completely rewritten the destiny of mankind. Death is no longer the end, and sin has lost its power. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, his death was no longer a sign of weakness but of power. Jesus says, “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father” (John 10:18). If the greatest human dilemma, the death, can be conquered by Jesus, then all other dilemmas can be solved by

him. The resurrection of Jesus also brought the world about a new era, the rise of the church. Disciples need to receive the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the Great Commission of the Gospel, and God will fulfill His covenant with mankind through His church.

Luke begins his Gospel by emphasizing an important connection that continuously and coherently shows through the Old Testament and the New Testament: God's Holy Covenant with Israel and prophecies of redemption in the Old Testament will be continued and completed by a King raised up among the descendants of David. For instance, Luke demonstrates the story of Zechariah in first chapter: his encounter with an angel, his journey from deafness to recovery; the birth his son, John the Baptist; and his prophecy. Zechariah worship God for having fulfilled the promise given to Israel through the prophets by sending a messianic redeemer.

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant. (Luke 1:68-72)

Darrell L. Bock says, "Zechariah has learned that even righteous men have something to learn from God."<sup>7</sup> Everyone should listen when God works or speaks, and everyone needs to know the whole picture of salvation of God. When we know more truth about God and His redemption work, we will surrender more to Him.

### Questions:

1. What is the gospel?
2. When did Jesus' disciples correctly understand about Jesus' crucifixion?
3. What did Jesus teach in Luke 24:25-27 and 44-49 about himself?
4. Do you understand the whole redemption plan of God?
5. Could you explain the connection between the OT and the NT?
6. Do you know the main point of book of Luke and Acts? What are their differences?

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<sup>7</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins, 1996), 49.

### Sermon 3

#### Sharing Gospel to the Lame

Wealth does not necessarily bring blessings, but it may cause people to lose their true original value. Human wisdom does not necessarily bring people the ability to distinguish right or wrong. Sometimes people's intelligence does not lead them to know the Creator who is the source of wisdom but instead to resist God. As Augustine of Hippo said, "In the Heavenly City, . . . man's only wisdom is the devotion which rightly worships the true God and looks for its reward in the fellowship of the saints . . ." <sup>8</sup> May God bless us through the story of Lame in Acts 3: 1-10 and give us the true wisdom that comes from Him.

Luke says, "And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple" (Luke 3:2). Why did Luke say this lame from birth was being carried? Because in the eyes of the world, it is impossible to heal this lame. This lame has nothing but the paralyzed legs, and he does not have hope to change his life. He is a person who completely depends on the outside world for living. He needs others to carry him to the gate of the temple gate every day, so even begging depends on the help of others. Why does Luke record this man? Is there anything special about him? Does he have any connection with the real modern world? What is the main purpose of this story that Luke wanted the modern world to know? Do people and this Lame have a commonality? If so, what is it? If we retell this story to people, what should we say?

The perspective of the Bible is always different from the perspective of the world. The world looks at what a person possesses externally, but the Bible looks at the essence of a person which is a person's life. So often, in trying to please the world,

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<sup>8</sup> John David Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 1): Engaging and Appropriating Models of Human Development," *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 3 (2019): 1.

people forget that we have the image of God, and we have a soul. That's why Jesus loves us because we have souls.

Hans Christian Andersen was a great Danish Christian writer, he is best remembered for his literary fairy tales. In his story, *The Little Mermaid*, Andersen tells a beautiful about human's soul. The Little Mermaid has falls in love with a human prince. She could live to 300 years old, but human beings can only live to 70-80 years old.

"If human beings are not drowned," asked the little mermaid, "can they live forever? do they never die as we do here in the sea?" "Yes," replied the old lady, "they must also die, and their term of life is even shorter than ours. We sometimes live to three hundred years, but when we cease to exist here we only become the foam on the surface of the water, and we have not even a grave down here of those we love. We have not immortal souls, we shall never live again; but, like the green sea weed, when once it has been cut off, we can never flourish more. Human beings, on the contrary, have a soul which lives forever, lives after the body has been turned to dust. It rises up through the clear, pure air beyond the glittering stars. As we rise out of the water, and behold all the land of the earth, so do they rise to unknown and glorious regions which we shall never see."<sup>9</sup>

The Little Mermaid made a very interesting wish, and she says, "Why have not we an immortal soul? I would give gladly all the hundreds of years that I have to live, to be a human being only for one day, and to have the hope of knowing the happiness of that glorious world above the stars."<sup>10</sup> Her grandmother warns her to stay away from humans because the value of human world and the mermaid world are different. Because the little mermaid fell in love with the human prince and she wants to have a human soul, eventually, she lost a palace under the sea with 300 years of life. The evil witch took the mermaid's voice, tongue, and her tail. When Little Mermaid had human legs, every step she took was like stepping on a knife edge with unbearably pain. At the end of the story, the daughter of the sea became the daughter of the sky in the foam. Andersen told the value and the mystery of life, and the truth that has been despised by the secular world through fairy tales.

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<sup>9</sup> Hans Christian Andersen, *The Little Mermaid* (Champaign, IL: Project Gutenberg, 1999), 5.

<sup>10</sup> Andersen, *The Little Mermaid*, 6

In the eyes of Jesus, humans are paralyzed, blind, rejected by the world, and deeply bound by sin, but everyone has a precious soul. Every human has an immortal soul, and that is what the little mermaid is willing to sacrifice everything for. This is a truth taught by the Bible that there is a precious soul in every human life. The disciples Peter and John, like Jesus, what they saw was not only the crippled body of this lame, but also the poor and precious soul. How an individual, culture or nation views life reflects the degree of its civilization. Respect for life comes from respect to God. An individual, group, government, or country that does not fear God cannot respect human life. Paul used two words to describe a person who is ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Ungodliness refers to the attitude towards God, and unrighteousness refers to the attitude towards people. A person who does not fear God is incapable of doing righteousness to others.

In verse 4 and 5, Luke says, “Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, ‘Look at us!’ So, the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.” What is this lame’s hope? Maybe he wanted to get some coins from someone else, or some mercy and consolation? What a poor man, his life relies on others’ mercy! The most practical and visible benefit for him is a handout of few coins. Unfortunately, Peter and the others don’t even have a few pennies to offer. A beggar also has the dignity and bottom line of begging, but Peter broke his only dignity and bottom line, talking to them without money. He did not know that although Peter had no pennies to give, but Peter had the power to help him to get up and walk. This is the power of salvation that enables the paralyzed man to live in a new life.

Which one is better: giving this lame a few pennies to keep his beggar life, or letting him to walk and follow Jesus? Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (Luke 3:6). Which life do you want to have: to keep your beggar life or to have a new life in Jesus Christ? Based on the gospel, people who do not have Jesus as his or her Lord, they are the slave of sin.

That means people who do not receive Jesus in their lives have the same life as a beggar. Maybe the difference is that some beg on the street, and some beg in the office, but there is no difference in the essence of their lives? God's great love will remove our beggar hearts and bring a new heart for everyone who fear Him. God said, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exodus 20:2-3).

Apostle Paul says, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4). People who do not have faith in Jesus are the blind, but Jesus will bring them in to the light. Many people do not know what they really need, just as same as the paralyzed man who didn't know his most urgent need. What does he really need: more pennies or more pity from crowd? What is really missing in his life? There was a lost soul hides in his empty, hopeless, pitiful eyes.

This is a very sad scene in life. There are many people, like this paralytic, struggling in the crowd at the gate of the temple but outside of God's grace. They rather want the charity of man than the grace of God. However, the difference between this lame and many modern people is that the paralytic admits that he is a beggar, while many people do not admit that their lives just like beggars.

In verse 7-8, Luke says, "And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God." Jesus has the power to lift a man who was born paralyzed and unable to walk, and he also has the power to change a life. Luke wanted that through the process of healing the lame man, people would see the invisible authority and power of Jesus that they could not see with their eyes. Jesus can change people's inner life instead of changing their external environment, he will bring people to receive a brand-new life.

In the early days of the church, the apostles could perform miracles and wonders, and no other disciple could perform miracles and wonders. In the New Testament there are no instructions or practices for healing and miracles. Miracles and wonders were a sign that leads people to God and the gospel but were not a necessary condition for changing people's lives. After the church was established, signs and wonders faded away. Repentance and Justification by faith are necessary for salvation. Christianity emphasizes the healing of the soul because visible disease and death of the body come from the corruption of the soul and sin.

Today, I want to encourage you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. Jesus wants people to understand him and receive a new life. Jesus doesn't want everyone to live like a beggar. He can give a new life to those born with disabilities, and he can give a new life to everyone who seeks him. This is the promise of God, and this is the power of the gospel. God does not only reveal his power, but he reveals himself. Every miracle of Jesus has never been the transmission of knowledge, but the giving of life, the renewal and sharing of life.

### **Questions**

1. Why did Luke write this man lame birth was being carried?
2. What did this lame man want from Peter and John? What did he receive finally?
3. What is the biggest dilemma or need of human?
4. How do you rate your life? What is the biggest dilemma of your life?
5. Do you want an inner change or outer change?

## **Sermon 4**

### **Sharing Gospel to Ethiopian Eunuch**

The gospel could change a person's life, a family, and a city from the dominion of demons and moral chaos to peace and joy because of people's repentance. The development of early church shows a picture that God's redemption plan will not be stopped by people's rejection, instead of those who reject the gospel lose the grace of God. For instance, the Israelites who claimed to be God's chosen people rejected Jesus, but God's redemption plan did not stop. God's grace is for all nations and all peoples, across races, cultures, status, and skin colors.

Today's message talks about an Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 9: 26-40. Based on the scriptures, this eunuch was a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, and he was in charge of all her treasure. He was to Jerusalem to worship, and when he was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. This Eunuch may have Jewish blood, and he was barren and was not qualified to worship God in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 23: 1 says, "No one whose testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off shall enter the assembly of the Lord." After Jesus' coming, everyone who truth will find (Mat 7:7).

### **Our Regret**

The powerful eunuch had unspeakable, pain, sorrow, humiliation, and regrets that he cannot say behind the enviable and desirable wealth, honor, and status in the eyes of others. All the things he can boast about in his life can't satisfy the unspeakable pain and regrets in his heart, because he knew that his enviable power and wealth were based on his own shame. As he grew older, he had no longer cared about how others think of his crippled life, and he concerned more about his life for the future. He wanted to seek true joyfulness and peace that he did not have. He earnestly wanted to know God and His words.



People strive for things that could bring happiness like health, beauty, family, fame, and wealth. But some people find that these things could not bring permanent happiness. Some philosophers believe that happiness is an illusory goal that people cannot achieve. Schopenhauer (extremely pessimistic philosopher) believes that "In general, nine-tenths of our happiness depends upon health alone. With health, everything is a source of pleasure."<sup>11</sup> In fact, he does not believe that people could have happiness because they are always in pain and boredom. Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis said, "People strive after happiness; they want to become happy and to remain so."<sup>12</sup> He also believed that the most intense experience of an overwhelming sensation of pleasure from sexual love. Freud's conclusions came from reason and science. Although these two influential philosophers gave completely different definitions of life and happiness, they are far from biblical happiness.

Another Christian writer, C.S. Lewis, believed that human's true happiness could only be found in relationship with God. He said, "God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. "<sup>13</sup> It is a pity that many people follow the pleasure of the first two philosophers, whether it is asceticism or bohemianism. Based on the Bible, without God, it is impossible for man to obtain true satisfaction, happiness, and peace. Nothing in this world can bring us the sense that only God can satisfy us.

This powerful eunuch was showing his inner desire for God. Although he cannot have a blood family on earth, he can enter a spiritual family that transcends blood

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<sup>11</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer: The Wisdom of Life* (Champagne, IL: Project Gutenberg, 2020). See chap. 2, "Personality, Or What a Man Is."

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Parisi, *Civilization and Its Discontents: An Anthropology for the Future?* (New York: Twayne, 1999), 76.

<sup>13</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2009), 50.

from his faith. Brothers and sisters, what kind of satisfaction are you pursuing? Unless we have a true relationship with God, we are looking for fleeting gratification and drinking water that will keep us thirsty. The powerful eunuch pointed out our regrets and he also re veiled our dilemma.

### **Our Dilemma**

In Acts 9:30, Philip asked eunuch, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” In verse 34, the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” The eunuch’s interrogations reveal the two plights of the entire human reality. First, humans have wisdom to understand earthly things, but no wisdom to understand spiritual things. Second, humans do not have spiritual wisdom to understand God’s words without the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In real life, people don’t love when we should love, and they do not hate when they should hate. Without spiritual wisdom, people even cannot discern right and wrong, and it is also difficult to resist the temptation and deception of sin. The spiritual wisdom in the Bible is often associated with obeying God and resisting sin. As apostle Paul said, “I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil” (Rom 16:19). The spiritual wisdom which is different with the wisdom of this age is manifested in obedience to God and resistance to sin. Paul talked about spiritual wisdom, and he said, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9). The Eunuch was seeking a wisdom that is unprecedented.

When Philip asked eunuch if he understood what he was reading, he honestly and humbly said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” He invited Philip to come up and sit with him to interpreter what he was reading from the Scripture. “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his

mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth” (Acts 8:32-33). After reading that, eunuch asked a very important question, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Then Philip told him the good news about Jesus with this Scriptures.

### **Our Hope**

Is this story a case of eunuch seeking God? Who is looking for who first: God or eunuch? Let us now revisit Philip’s encounter with the eunuch. First, the scripture says Philip was called by an angel from Jerusalem to Gaza, and then he saw eunuch was reading the scripture (26). Second, the Spirit told Philip to go over and join the chariot that eunuch sit in (29), then he heard him reading the scripture (30). The author of Acts clearly said that God positively seeks eunuch first. John 15:16 says, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you.” This is good news, and a hope for everyone because God actively reveal Himself to those who seek Him. If God did not reveal Himself to mankind, no one could find Him, know Him, or understand His will. Man’s efforts would be in vain if God had not revealed Himself to man.

The whole Bible tells a story that God reveal Himself to humans. God Called Abraham in Ur. Before God called Moses at Mount Sinai, He had protected him as a child. God chose General Naaman, and God chose 12 disciples. When God chose Saul, he was persecuting the church and disciples of Christ. In these histories, seemingly accidental, individual events and characters reveal an interesting thread and the same story about God and His redemption plan, that is, God oversees history, and he actively reveals himself to mankind. God is looking for people, and He wants us to know him, trust him, and obey him. The story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch was the same story that God was seeking His people.

After listening to Philip's explanation, eunuch was led by the Holy Spirit and responded to be baptized himself. Acts 8: 26 says, "And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, 'See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?'" Then Philip led eunuch to go down into the water and baptized him (28). Eunuch must be fulfilled with the joyfulness and hope from God who removes all sin and shame from his heart. He may have also read the last few chapters of Isaiah that he inquired about, which brought him great hope. In Isaiah 56: 3-5, the Lord says,

The Lord will surely separate me from his people; and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree." For thus says the Lord: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off."

What a great hope and blessing. All his regrets and incompleteness in this life will be renewed. Everyone who believes in God will be renewed to start a new life that is better than sons and daughters. The gospel could change a person's life and offer a true hope in the future.

### Questions

1. This eunuch serves the king and oversees the country's wealth. Does he have any regrets in his life?
2. Do you have any regrets in your life? Even all the things you boast about in the eyes of others will make you feel ashamed in the face of these regrets. (This question is about your communication with God)
3. What is this eunuch's dilemma? (See Acts 8:31, 34)
4. What is your biggest dilemma in studying God's word? How to break through this dilemma?
5. Did Philip set out after knowing the entire plan of God for the eunuchs? (See Acts 8:26)
6. When God leads you, should you wait until you know God's complete plan before obeying, or should you obey God first?
7. Was it a coincidence that Philip met the eunuch? (See Acts 8:30)
8. When the eunuch listened to Philip's explanation the scriptures he read, what was his decision? (See Acts 8:36)
9. Did God seek the eunuch first, or did he seek God first?

What is your biggest gain from this lesson?

## **Sermon 5**

### **Sharing the Gospel in a Divided City**

Luke clearly conveys an important message to readers, and he did not ashamed to claim a fact that the Gospel divides society. Luke said, “But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles” (Acts 14: 4). This kind of division has existed since the time of Jesus and the early days of the church. For instance, the gospel will separate the wise and the foolish (Rom 16:19), the good from the evil (Joh 3:19), flesh and spirit (Joh 3:6), and earthly things and heavenly thing (Joh 3:12).

What happens when a stone in a mud pit that has never seen the light is turned over? Those maggots that love filth and darkness will flee from the light. Sin in one’s life is like maggots hiding behind a stone, but God’s truth is like the light in the darkness, it can reveal all the hidden and unholy things in people’s hearts. No one can hide from the light of God. Psalm 139:7 says, “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?”

The Jews looked forward to God and His salvation which revealed in the Old Testament, but when God came in the flesh, they rejected God and his truth. Greece and Rome seemed to have a religious life and pursued profound philosophical and wisdom, but they did not have the spiritual wisdom to know God and His truth. Together they crucified Jesus Christ. Each person’s attitude towards the gospel reveals their inner true self, hidden behind their various masks.

#### **The Words of Life vs. the Words of Disruption**

After people listened Jesus’ preaching, the crowd appeared in divisions: some left him and some followed him. When Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel to Gentile cities, they also faced such divisions: some left, and some followed them. Acts 14:2 says, “But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the

brothers.” Poison someone mind mean to inspire or manipulate one to take a very negative and hateful view on someone or something. Christianity wants to liberate people from all kinds of wrong, superstitious, thoughts, culture, traditions, and the way of life that enslaves people’s bodies, minds, and souls, to makes them free. If people don’t have correct faith, they can easily be controlled and influenced by all kind of mistakes from the secular world to do evil things.

In the chaos of Iconium of chapter 14, what kind of people were easily confused, deceived, stirred up by others, and poisoned their hearts? Luke first introduced those who had heard and believed gospel including Jews and Gentiles. but those who did not believe were disturbed in their behavior and poisoned in their thinking. Proverbs 25:28 says, “A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.” How can a man control his own heart? Only when he trusts in Jesus and be illuminated by the light of truth, a man has the power to conquer his heart. If people do not accept Jesus as their Lord, they will be attacked and controlled easily by others at any time.

Verse 2 says, “The unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.” In verse 5, the unbelieving Gentiles who were poisoned by Jews followed Jews with their rulers mistreated Paul and Barnabas and to stone them. Then, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, and there they continued to preach the gospel. In the New Testament, many of the major disturbances were caused by the Jews. Jews were originally a group of people chosen by God to bless the Gentiles. When they rebelled against God and stayed away from God, they became tools of evil to prevent people to know God. Christians also fall under such temptations.

### **Valuing People’s Souls vs. Envious People’s Abilities**

At city Lystra, Paul and Barnabas encountered a man lame from birth (14:8). Paul looked intently at the lame man and commanded him to stand up (14:10), and he

said, “Stand upright on your feet.” The lame man not only stood but leaped up and began to walk (14:10). What kind of person will be noticed by others? Such paralytics are the most neglected in this secular worldview. However, in the New Testament, the gospel often manifests God’s love in the lives of these worldly neglected people through their simple faith.

The difference worldview between the Gospel and the world can be seen by looking at one corner of society. How a person treats the gospel can bring out two completely different attitudes toward this lame. Facing this paralyzed man, what the world sees was a paralyzed man, but Paul saw not just a paralyzed man, but his soul. The first chapter of the Genesis tells the world that man is created in the image of God, regardless of race, color, wealth, health, wisdom or ability. After the fall of Adam, people are jealous of those who are stronger than them, and bully of those who are weaker than them. In secular culture, such a theory of thought is promoted by many cultures.

The theory of eugenics emphasizes that the prosperity of a nation depends on the health of newborns. Killing those unhealthy babies is to ensure the healthy structure of society. Race science believes that some peoples are inferior to others. C. D. McConnell Says, “Racism believes in racial superiority, including the belief that race determines intellectual, cultural, and moral capacities.”<sup>14</sup> That means to control (elimination) of a certain race can guarantee the health of the whole human race. These two so-called modern disciplines have been promoted in the scientific, cultural, and political fields since the 19th century. People with physical and intellectual disabilities can be disposed of scientifically in a planned way. For instance, Sterilization initiated in 1934, and Euthanasia" initiated in 1939. These movements became the main historical and scientific basis of what is now the abortion movement.

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<sup>14</sup> Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell, eds. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 1306.

If there is no Christianity, who cares about a disabled person? 2,000 years ago, the Bible told the world that everyone is created in the image of God, and everyone has a soul, so human's health, wisdom, wealth, and status cannot replace the value of the soul. This world only envies people's abilities but doesn't care about people's souls. This world values the ability and creativity of the soul but does not care about the soul that creates value.

### **Worshipping True God vs. Making Idols**

After Lystra saw Paul make a man who was born paralyzed start to walk, they recognized Paul as Hermes and Barnabas they as Zeus (14:12). When the priest of Zeus took the bull and the garland to the gate of the city, they were preparing to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas with the crowd. Paul and Barnabas tore their clothes, rushed out into the crowd, and told them, "Men, why are you doing this? We also are men, of like nature with you, preaching to you to turn from these vain things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything that is in them" (14:15).

From the perspective of the secular world, the military, political systems, and philosophical thoughts of Greece and Rome were the most powerful and advanced at the time. Ironically, there is not much difference between these respectable, educated, thoughtful people who lived in big cities and with those who lived on the island of Malta mentioned in Acts 28, they all enthusiastically and actively worshiped false gods and people. When the Malta people saw that Paul was bitten by a snake but did not fall to the ground and died, they thought he was a god (Acts 28:3-6). The social civilization of the indigenous people of Malta is different from Greece and Rome, but from a biblical perspective they have something in common. Their hearts are bound by various selfish desires, and they can create idols at any time to meet their needs.

When people do not know the true God, no matter how well educated they are, how rich their material life is, and no matter how perfect his country's military, political



system, and social welfare are, they do not have true freedom and are ruled deeply by sins, selfish desires, ignorance, and superstition. When people do not know the true God, the more devout their beliefs, the farther they are from the truth. This is way Paul risked his life to preach gospel because he wanted people to turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them (14:15). Paul said, “Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (14:17). Paul reminded the Romans that God and His common grace can be known through the nature.

Paul’s ministry always brought people’s hearts to God, and he ensured that God would be glorified. Darrell L. Bock says, “That is what Paul preaches because he believes that the view is rooted in the activity and revelation of God. One cannot discuss Jesus without first establishing that God is one.<sup>15</sup> If the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are not preached, people will not repent and accept the gospel. If people do not repent, they will not be able to overcome the confinement of secular cultural and values. Without correct faith in God, the same people can praise you or stone you to death. If people follow God without the will to endure hardship, it will be difficult to maintain their faith in Christ. In today’s message, we have learned that Paul healed a lame from birth to show that God loves people who neglected by society. The gospel opposed the prohibition of idolatry, so Paul exhorted people to forsake vain things and return to the living God. The Gospel must have an impact on individuals and society because truth sets the soul free, false truth binds the soul.

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<sup>15</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 570.

## Questions

1. According to Acts 14:3-4, will the gospel bring divisions to society? Is this division okay? Why?
2. According to Acts 14:8-11, how did the local people respond to Paul when he restored the lame man?
3. How did Paul respond to those who wanted to worship him? (See 14:8-14-15)
4. Is it good to be worshiped as God by other people? Why?
5. According to Acts 14:11-13, what did the group of people who wanted to worship Paul do in verse 19?
6. Who is easily instigated and exploited by others? (See 14:2, 14:19)
7. Paul was almost beaten to death and dragged outside the city. Why did he go back to the city that rejected him after he woke up?
8. What should you do when someone praises you?
9. What should you do when someone hurts you?
10. What spiritual lessons have you learned from this lesson?

## Sermon 6

### Sharing the Gospel to Athens, an Idolatrous City

Paul walked into Athens with a mission of gospel, and the city of gods stirred his heart. Although the Athenians accepted all unknown gods, they offended a true God. Before the Greek gods and philosophers, Paul proclaimed the incarnate and resurrected Christ and urged people to repent and believe in the Lord.

### The City of Heaven

For the ancient Greco-Roman, all value meanings were related to the city-state. When Socrates faced the two choices of death and exile, he chose death because he did not want to leave the land and city-state that gave his life meaning. The Greco-Roman believed that the foundations of the ancient Greek and Roman were gods who gave them the power to protect them. But their gods were not eternal, not immortal, not divine, just like human beings. They did not believe in an immortal, omniscient, omnipotent, holiness, and incarnate God who resurrected from the dead. If a religion did not affect the king's rule, they tolerated any religion and accepted all kinds of gods, but only they cannot accept an only true God. Just like their perishable gods, their life, wisdom, reason, city-state, and country cannot escape the fate of decay and death.

Francis A. Schaeffer said, "Culture and the freedoms of people are fragile. Without a sufficient base, when such pressures come only time is needed— and often not a great deal of time— before there is a collapse."<sup>16</sup> Although Rome conquered Greece, it was destined to be destroyed like their gods and the Greek Empire. Facing the powerful Greek and Roman polytheism and philosophical system, Christianity has been trampled and persecuted and finally became the state religion of Rome, which is enough to witness

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<sup>16</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 18.

the infinite, personal, and life-giving God revealed in the Bible. In Paul's view, all value and meaning are related to the city-state of God.

### **Resistance to the Gospel**

We can simplify break-down Acts 17: Paul and Silas in Thessalonica (v1-9), Paul and Silas in Berea (v10-15), Paul in Athens (v16-34). There was a pattern in Paul's gospel ministry: some people accepted the gospel, while others resisted the gospel and persecuted Paul. When Paul shared the gospel to Thessalonica, he encountered the same situation. Acts 17: 4-5 writes, "And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd." When Paul and Silas left Thessalonica to Berea, Luke said, "Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.....But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds." (v11-14). The pattern of the Gospel being resisted runs through the entire Acts, and it also ran through history, so every Christian will face.

In this fallen world, God does not guarantee that Christians will not encounter injustice. What Christian should do is to rely on God in faith and face all kinds of disasters, adversity and persecutions. The world will use various methods to take away our faith, make us to abandon God, rely on ourselves, and return to the old way. Why was Paul able to firmly rely on God with such confidence? Because he knew God who is only almighty and righteous One. Brothers and sisters do not forsake God, and He will lead and protect you.

## **The City of Idols**

When Paul was walking through Athens, his heart was greatly distressed by the idols that were full of city. Athens was a powerful civilization and empire, and it also was the center of cultural in the ancient world. Ancient Athens reached the peak of human wisdom in medicine, politics, philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, and art. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, were all influential figures in history. Since the rise of skepticism, the golden age of Athens had been dimmed. When Paul walked into Athens at the first time, he was not moved by the exciting arts, sculptures, and spectacular theaters of Athens; nor was he afraid of being shocked by Athens' powerful political and military forces, profound philosophy. But Paul saw a different Athens. Behind the many idols were the depravity and greed of people hearts, the cruelty and ruthlessness in political competition, the superstition and filth in religion.

Behind the philosophy are human's arrogance, ignorance, selfishness, superstition, despair, and loneliness. In Paul eyes, human's wisdom was hollow and deceptive philosophy and the elemental spirits of the world (Col 2:8). Men saw Athens, the city of the gods, but Paul saw an abominable idol. Men saw a mighty Julius Caesar riding a war horse, but Paul saw Jesus Christ riding a donkey and wearing a crown of thorns, a King of kings.

Brothers and sisters, how do you see this world and what is going on in it? If you don't have faith in Jesus Christ, you can only see the modern cities full of tall buildings and the exaggerated appearance of modern people; but you can't see countless fallen, lonely and confused souls under the dazzling appearance. Paul saw the real situation of a city and a person because of his faith in Jesus.

## **To the Unknown God**

When Paul reasoned the gospel in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there (17:17), some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers saw him as a

babbler and a preacher of foreign divinities (17:18). Although ancient Greco-Roman had a powerful philosophy system, they did not know true God and true wisdom. R. C. Sproul said, “Aristotle said that there has to be a being who is the source of all motion, but who is not the result of someone else’s motion. So he postulated that the first or ultimate cause is God, as it were, whom he called the Unmoved Mover.”<sup>17</sup> When Paul entered Athens, what he faced was not Plato and Aristotle who believed in theism, but the pioneers of Epicureanism: Epicurus and Stoic. People who were influenced by Epicureanism believed suffering was evil and rejected suffering Christ. Athenians treated the gospel as a news.

Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious (Acts 17:22). Paul told them they were religious, but religion and Christianity are completely different thing. That’s why Christian college bible courses are classified as theology departments, not religion departments. Theology is the study of God, but religion is the study of man and a classification of anthropology and sociology. Religion is a discipline that starts from people’s experiences, rationality, and religious needs, but theology is a discipline that starts from God’s revelation. Many countries and cultures have religious elements, but there is no God. A person or nation may have a pious religious life, but it has no relationship with God. This is exactly what Paul saw in Athens. There were many temples of gods in the city of Athens, and people were passionate about religious affairs, but they had nothing to do with the true God. This situation is happening today. Many people have a religion lifestyle but do know God at all.

Then, Paul said to Athenians, “What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (17:23). First, the God who made the world and everything in it, and He

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<sup>17</sup> R. C. Sproul, “Thinking Deeply in the Ocean of Revelation: The Bible and the Life of the Mind,” 2010 Desiring God Conference, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/thinking-deeply-in-the-ocean-of-revelation-the-bible-and-the-life-of-the-mind>.

is Lord of heaven and earth (24). Second, God does not live in temples made by man (24). Third, God comes not to be served but to serve, and God gives to everyone life and breath and everything (25). Forth, God determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place (26). Fifth, God could be found, yet he is actually not far from each one of us (27). Sixth, we are God's offspring and everything relies on Him (28-29). Finally, Paul called people to repent that is only way to know true God to prepare His righteousness judge in the future (Acts17:30-31).

No matter how modern the city you live in, and how convenient your life is, without God, everything built by man will collapse. The meaning of life lies in knowing and following God. Thank God for giving us the opportunity to repent and set us free in His truth.

### Questions

1. According to Acts 17:6, what were the disciples called?
2. According to Acts17:16, why Paul was provoked in Athens?
3. How did Paul see the city of Athens when the world worshiped the buildings, philosophy, and political system of Athens.
4. Are there any idols in modern cities? Please list at least three.
5. What was the gospel preached by Paul in the eyes of the Athenian philosophers? (See 17:18, 21)
6. Can a person worship a God he does not know?
7. What is the difference between religious sentiments (fearing ghosts and gods in all things) and faith revealed in the Bible?
8. Is it good if a person worshiped all gods like the Athenians? Why?
9. Paul talked about several characteristics of God to the Athenians. Please list 3 of them. (See 17:24-31)
10. What spiritual lessons have you learned from this lesson?

## **Sermon 7**

### **Sharing the Gospel in Jerusalem (Acts 22)**

Acts chapter 22 is Paul's defense of the Word and the gospel work. First, Paul proved that Christ is the long-awaited Jewish Messiah by telling his Jewish background, experiencing receiving the mission on the road to Damascus. Preaching the gospel to the gentiles is a mission that God had given to the Jewish ancestors, so it is obedience to God. Second, Paul defended himself as a Roman citizen by using the rights granted by Roman law. Paul preached the Gospel to the Jews and gentiles as a prisoner, and he prepared a way for them to repent and return to God. At the same time, he also started the journey of defense to Rome, until the end of his life and fulfilled his mission.

In Acts 21, when Paul arrived in Jerusalem, the Jews tried to kill him and created a riot. Jews cried out and accused Paul, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." When they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. Tribune at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to arrest Paul, but he didn't understand why these Jews wanted to kill Paul, and what did Paul do to drive people crazy? Tribune responsibility was to prevent any threats to the Roman regime. While Paul was regarded as an apostate by the Jews and a political rebel by the tribune, he started his defense trip to Rome. Paul defended himself by two ways: the law of God and the law of Rome.

### **Defending God's Word by Jewish Law**

Paul started his defended by saying that "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today." (Acts 22:3). Paul's statements distinguished him from any politically motivation and violent



movement. In other words, Christians were no threat to Roman's rule. When he spoke in Hebrew, the core of the defense was not about Rome, but for Christianity. By narrating his history, Paul wanted to tell crowd that he was a Jew just like them and trained strictly for serving God. He obeyed the law and persecuted Christians. He thought that his zeal and violence were the way to glorify God.

Paul said, "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished (Acts 22:4-5).

Although Paul had a Jewish background and religious zeal for God, his action did not glorify God instead of against Him and persecute people who loved God. It is truth that people could not truly serve God through their religious zeal. Before God revealed himself to Paul on the way of Damascus, he did not realize that he was in enmity with God. Nobody could find God and glorify Him if God does not actively reveal Himself. People could not glorify God by their desire and religious zeal. C. S. Lewis said, "If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end; if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin, and in the end, despair."<sup>18</sup> When Paul was on the way to persecute the church and Christians, God stopped him and made him blind.

Paul said, "As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting'" (Acts 22:6-8).

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<sup>18</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 32.

Paul was shaken after hearing that he was persecuting Jesus because his religious zeal was not glorifying God but persecuting God. Paul immediately asked, “What shall I do, Lord” (Acts 22:10)? That was the biggest changing point in everyone’s life. The real change of a person does not come from his own willpower, determination, struggle, and knowledge, but how a person response to God when he or she encounters with God.

Brothers and sisters, on the way of following the Lord, have you ever said to God, “Lord, what should I do?” Paul’s first responding to God was to fear and obey Him. Fear God is not being afraid and keeping away from God but being obedient to God. When Paul said, “Lord, what should I do?” he prepared already to obey whatever God tells him to do. The way of the world is totally different from the way of faith to God. The way of the world is to tell you where to go first, but the way of faith is to obey whatever God tell you to do and wherever God tell you to go. Are you ready to obey God and experience more of His presence? The first step of experiencing God is to obey Him like Paul obeyed God first. Then God told him, “Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do” (Acts 22:10). God did not tell Paul a complete plan just asked him to go Jerusalem first. This is a pattern that how God leads his people always seeing in the Bible. Only by taking the first step in obedience to God, people can see God’s next plan and leading. Sometimes, God doesn’t give us a whole plan how He will lead us but lets us follow Him in our daily life.

In Acts 22:12-16, God sent a pious man named Ananias to tell Paul that he had been chosen by God to be a witness for Him to everyone of what he had seen and heard. Then Paul confessed his sins, denied his own religious zeal, and baptized by Ananias. Paul recognized that his Jewish identity and religious enthusiasm did not help him to draw closer to God until he experienced God. Just like Paul, many people deny what they did in the past when they encounter God. No one can honor God unless one knows God, and no one knows God unless God actively reveals Himself. Whatever, when a person

believes in the Lord, he or she must have a new worldview and purpose of life. Then Paul told crowd that God gave him more direction about his new mission. First, Paul must get out of Jerusalem quickly because they will not accept his testimony about Jesus Christ (Acts 22:18). Second, God gave Paul a new mission, He said “Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.” (Acts 22:20). Paul wanted to let Jews to know that God’s redemption plan not only for Jews but also entire nations around the world.

### **Defending God’s Word by Roman Law**

When Jews heard a new mission about Gentiles, they raised voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live” (Acts 22:22). The tribune still didn’t understand why?

The tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this. But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?” (Acts:24-25)

Rome at that time was a republic with a clear system of laws and enforcement. According to Roman law, punishment only executed on citizens after conviction. Before the conviction, Roman citizens were protected by Roman law and cannot be interrogated and flogged. Paul mentioned his Roman identity and protected himself with Roman laws. There is a real story in *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*. A Christian Attalus was led round the amphitheatre with a tablet carried before him, inscribed, “This is Attalus the Christian.”

The rage of the people would have had him dispatched immediately; but the governor, understanding that he was a Roman, ordered him back to prison: and concerning him and others, who could plead the same privilege of Roman citizenship, he wrote to the emperor and waited for his instructions. Caesar sent orders that the confessors of Christ should be put to death. Roman citizens had the privilege of dying by decollation; the rest were exposed to wild beasts.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> John Foxe, *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs: An Edition for the People* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1907), 27.

The ways in which Roman citizens died were protected by law. Many Christians torn by wild beasts. If Jesus had the identity of Rome, he might have avoided the torture of crucifixion. Slaves or people without Roman citizenship were willing to pay a lot of money for status. Like tribune who arrested Paul and flogged him paid a lot of money for Roman citizenship. Tribune asked Paul if a Roman citizen was, "I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship." "But I was born a citizen," Paul replied (Acts 22:28). When Tribune heard Paul was a Roman citizen, he was alarmed because he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains. In Paul's speech, the tribune knew that he was trained in strict knowledge. Here, Paul's Roman identity affected his situation, and tribune realized that he was breaking the law of Rome because he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains. So, the next day tribune released Paul and brought him to stand before the chief priests and all the members of the Sanhedrin, and he wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews. Paul's Roman citizenship protected him from being handed over to the Sanhedrin. Because tribune did not find Paul had violated to any Roman law, he had an opportunity to appeal to Caesar to bring the gospel into Rome in chains.

In Plato's book, *The Republic*, he mentioned four different governments: republic, democracy, oligarchy, and tyranny.<sup>20</sup> Rome built the best government, republic at that time, and its constitution was the foundation of government. The purpose of laws is to reward good and punish evil. If Roman law represents highest and most just law of humankind, this is the bad news for humans. Because Jesus, a sinless man, humbled himself and came into this world, was condemned and nailed to a cross by the highest and most just law of humankind. Paul said in Romans 3:10, "None is righteous, no, not one." According to the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, "Justice means punishing the offender in hopes of restoring the covenant, but the offender also must make retribution

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<sup>20</sup> Plato, *The Republic* (Warsaw: Ktoczyta, 2019), 211.

to God for restoration to be complete.”<sup>21</sup> Although Plato’s ideal country has righteousness and justice, he emphasized that a nation needs justice, but fallen humans are incapable of giving it. Where does the true righteousness come from? Psalm 89: 14 says, “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.” God is the true judge, and this is the good news for everyone. This is Paul’s mission that is to let everyone to have peace with God by hearing and repenting to God.

C. S. Lewis said, “If the universe is not governed by an absolute goodness, then all our efforts are in the long run hopeless. But if it is, then we are making ourselves enemies to that goodness every day and are not in the least likely to do any better tomorrow, and so our case is hopeless again. We cannot do without it, and we cannot do with it. God is the only comfort; He is also the supreme terror.”<sup>22</sup> Although Paul used Roman law to defend himself, he knew that the true judge was God. This is also God’s plan for him to take the gospel to Rome as a prisoner.

### Questions

1. What were the reasons Paul was accused by the Jews? (Acts 21:28)
2. Why did Paul use Hebrew language to defend himself before the Jews? (Acts 22:1)
3. How does Acts 22:12 describe Ananias?
4. What was the original purpose led Paul toward Damascus? (Acts 22:4-5)
5. Paul persecuted Christians, but what did the voice tell him he was persecuting? (Acts 22:8)
6. Why did Paul defend himself by telling Jews about his Jewish background, mention Ananias, and experience with God on the way of Damascus?
7. Did Paul’s religious zeal help him closer to God?
8. Why did Paul tell Jews that he received a vision from God?
9. Why did Paul tell the tribune his citizenship of Rome? Why was the tribune afraid?
10. What spiritual lessons have you learned from this lesson?

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<sup>21</sup> Treier and Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 838.

<sup>22</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 31.



## **Sermon 8**

### **Sharing the Gospel in Rome (Acts 28:19-31)**

Paul finally arrived in Rome. God changed Paul, an enemy of the gospel, to become a messenger of the gospel, and he spread the gospel from a city in the Middle East to Samaria, Syria, Asia Minor, and finally Rome. God's plan exceeds man's plan, and he uses his own way to choose people and fulfill His plan.

God's plan is always higher than ours, and He uses unexpected ways to accomplish His plan. Paul in chains attracted the attention of the entire political power of Rome. If he had entered Rome as a free man, he would have been indistinguishable from any other Jew with a Roman identity, and no one would have paid attention to him. On the contrary, when a Roman citizen of Jewish descent was chained, it could attract public attention.

Through the events of Jesus' birth, crucifixion, and resurrection, history has completely recorded the cruel reality faced by mankind: the best legal system of Rome and the most orthodox belief in the one God on earth were all corrupted by human sinfulness, greed, and evil. At the same time, God offers a hope that when people reject God's truth, God will raise up others to complete His redemption plan. No matter how corrupt a person is, God has power to change everyone. Paul who persecuted Jesus and His church became a messenger of the gospel.

Today, we are going to look at Acts 28:19-31 what happened when Paul arrived in Rome. In the Acts 1:8, Jesus told His disciples that they will receive power from the Holy Spirit and be witness of Jesus in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. But, in Acts 28, Paul arrived in Rome which is not the end of the earth. The book of Acts ends with no ending. Even Paul's ending is not recorded because the purpose of Acts is to record God's redemption plan that how the gospel was

preached from the Jews to the Gentiles. Rome is not the end but a beginning: proclaiming to the world that Jesus Christ is our true hope.

### **Jesus Christ Is Our True Hope**

After Paul arrived in Rome, he had not been convicted, but the centurion delivered him as a prisoner to the captain of the guard (Acts 18:16). Though he did not have freedom to go somewhere, Rome gave him limited right that he can invited people to his renting place. Paul invited Jewish leaders to his rented residence and told them why he came to Rome. He said to them: “Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case” (Acts 28:17-18).

Did Paul break Roman law? What did Roman officials say? Luke wrote some important information about the response and judgment of Roman officials towards Paul. In Acts 18:12, when Jews brought Paul to Gallio who was proconsul of Achaia, Gallio said to Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things.” In Act 23, Centurions protected Paul when he heard that Paul was a Roman citizen and he desired to know why Jews were accusing Paul.

Centurions wrote a letter to Felix, “I found that he was being accused about questions of their law but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment (Acts 23:29). After hearing accusations of Jewish against Paul, Festus said, “They brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive” (Acts 25). After hearing Paul’s defense in Acts 26: 31-32, Agrippa said, “This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.” And



Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.” Every Roman official who heard Paul found him not guilty.

If Roman officials did not convicted Paul, why did the Jewish religious leaders accuse him and what was their accusation? In Acts 26:6-7, Paul defended himself in front Roman officials and Jews and said, “And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king!” In Acts 28:20, Paul said to Jewish leaders in Rome he was wearing this chain because the hope of Israel.

What was the hope of Israel, and what was the God promised hope that Israel’s ancestors were waiting for? Paul said several times that he stood on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead that was Jesus (Acts 23:6). Unfortunately, most of Jews were not waiting for the resurrection of the dead, and they were waiting for Messiah to free them from the yoke of Rome. In Acts 28:21-22, Jews leaders in Rome replied that they did not receive any letters from Judea concerning Paul about anything bad about him, but they knew that everywhere it was spoken against disciples of Jesus. Now Paul was in front of them, they had a good opportunity to hear his defense and the gospel. When Paul talks about being bound by iron chains, these Jews living in Rome were deeply touched and felt the shame of subjugation under the rule of Rome. Facing the idolatry and secular culture that were hated by God, they wanted a visible revival of David’s kingdom. This expectation even made them to forgot God’s promises. The remaining faith in God in their hearts was washing away by time and aging.

Although Paul was bound by visible chain and like a prison without freedom, he could preach the gospel freely without any hindrance (Acts 28:31). These Jewish leaders, who lived freely in Rome, were bound by a weight and invisible chain. They needed to hear again the good news about the resurrection of Jesus, which was what their ancestors had hoped for, and which was what God had promised them. Brothers and

sisters, what is your hope? Is what you hope for God had promised or you have a hope that is different from God? Have you forgotten God's promises? Jesus is only hope in the world, and He is only one who rose from the dead and never dies again. Paula said, "He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again" (2 Cor 1:10). The hope of the Israelites that Paul mentioned is not only the hope of the Jews but also the hope of all people around the world.

### **The Salvation of the Gospel Is the Greatest Blessing**

The dialogue between Paul and the Jewish leaders in Rome may have been one of the few in which Paul did not encounter hostility since leaving Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders and many other Jews came to him at his lodging. Luke said, "From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets" (Acts 28: 23). Paul brought them back to the focus of Israel's hope—Jesus of Nazareth, in whom their ancestors had hoped. Jesus and his cross are a stunning statement in any era: not only the center of the Old Testament, the center of the Gospels, and the center of Jewish hope, and it is also the center of transformation for any nation, race, family and individual.

Unfortunately, the gospel faced rejection from the beginning. Even so, the gospel did not stop. This pattern persists throughout history. The book of Acts recorded a fact that the gospel rejected by the Jews became a blessing to the Gentiles. After Jewish people in Rome heard the gospel, some were convinced by the gospel, but others disbelieved. Paul used the words of the Old Testament prophets to point out the hardness and unbelief of the unbelieving Jews. He said, "Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen" (Acts 28:28). The gospel rejected by the Jews became a blessing to the Gentiles. When people reject

the gospel, the gospel will not stop because of people's rejection. God will raise up other people to serve him.

Interestingly, the book of Acts ends with no ending. Luke recorded how the gospel spread from Jerusalem to Rome through the persecution. The story of Peter, Paul and the founding of the early church is over, but the work of the gospel is not over, it is just a beginning. It has been nearly 2,000 years since the early church was established, the church does not need support and recognition from any earthly nation, king, or authority, nor does it need to be attached to any system. We are God's people, and God is our King. As recorded in the book of Acts, no matter what persecution, suppression, and rejection that the church face, the gospel will never stop, and nothing can stop people from listening to the gospel and becoming disciples of Jesus. Although Paul was imprisoned, the gospel did not stop, and he was still freely to preach the gospel. Also, the church, as Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

### Questions

1. Why did Paul take the initiative to invite Jews leaders in Rome? (See Acts 28:17, 20)
2. What were Roman officials respond to the Jewish accusations about Paul? (See Acts 23:29, 25:18, 25:25, 26:30)
3. Why did Paul appeal to Caesar? (See Acts 28:17-19)
4. What was "the hope of the Israelites" that Paul mentioned many times? (See Acts 23:6, 24:14-15, 26:6-7, 28:20)
5. How does the book of Acts end?
6. Why did Luke not write Paul's death at the end of Acts?
7. What theme is expressed in Acts 1:8 and 28:31?
8. Could Paul preach the gospel while he was imprisoned in Rome? (See Acts 28:30-31)
9. What was the core of Paul's mission? (See Acts 28:23)
10. What is your biggest gain from this lesson?

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## ABSTRACT

### DEVELOPING AN EVANGELISM MINISTRY AT ATLANTA BAPTIST CHINESE CHURCH

Tao Yang, DMin  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024  
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The purpose of this ministry research project was to help members of Atlanta Baptist Chinese Church (ABCC) understand personal evangelism, share their faith with others, and win converts to Christ. Chapter 1 introduces the project and provides the current ministry context, purpose, and goals of evangelical ministry at ABCC. Chapter 2 describes the biblical and theological support for developing an evangelical ministry: Christians must recognize God's supremacy over earthly kingdoms and their responsibility to share with the world that the gospel is the only hope for mankind. Chapter 3 explains the theoretical, practical, and historical issues affecting the modern church's ability to fulfill its mission of God. Chapter 4 provides the details and description of the project implementation at ABCC. Chapter 5 is an evaluation of the project, assessing whether it accomplished its original objectives, the project's strengths and weaknesses, and my personal reflections on the project.



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