

A Look at Apostolic Preaching

Building a Christian Mind

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Before our text this evening, at least our starting text, I invite you to turn to the book of Acts 3. I want to read an extended passage to set our minds in the right direction as we continue to study this theme, how to know that Jesus is Lord. How to know that Jesus is Lord, and we can start this evening in verse 18 of Acts 3.

18 But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. 19 Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. 22 Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. 23 And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' 24 And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. 25 You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' 26 God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

As we read that passage, you see jumping out yet again what we've emphasized over our last couple of messages, the centrality of the prior ministry of the prophets in order to identify Jesus Christ as Lord. This is a theme that we are seeing again and again and again, and tonight are going to see again and again and again, again and again and again, depending on how far we go, but the writers of Scripture from the very beginning were pointing to a coming prophet, pointing to a coming Christ, and those prophets, those mouthpieces of God, his servants, the prophets, for centuries and millennia even, were laying a foundation of revelation from God upon which the Lordship of Christ would be established. We saw that in the book of Romans, where the Apostle Paul said right from the beginning that the gospel of God was something that was promised beforehand. We saw it in the contemporaries of Christ, like Zacharias and Nathanael, saying that this is the one of whom the prophets foretold, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself, he said, "I have

not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it." And there's much, much more to be seen and to be said about it; that's just the briefest of review of two prior hours of teaching. But what I trust is starting to be impressed deeply on your mind, and I know from comments, for some of you it's really starting to jump out on the pages of Scripture, that God was laying a foundation in all of that revelation over the course of a thousand years, from 1500, 1400, the time of Moses, to 400, the time of Malachi, and then 400 years of silence before John the Baptist burst on the scene, through all of that, there was an unfolding plan of redemption, an unfolding progress of revelation that God was making that were like signposts, large signposts, all pointing in the direction of Christ, so that when Christ came, people knew what to expect. And that's very, very important to realize. The teaching of the prophets had conditioned the Jewish people to be looking for a Messiah, and they had given them certain signposts by which he would be recognized, so that it was very natural and even essential and necessary that when the apostles began to preach, that they would point back to that prior revelation to show that what they were teaching about Christ was consistent with what had been expected all along.

And we're going to see that tonight as we take a look at apostolic preaching in the early church. Apostolic preaching in the early church, and what we're going to see is that the apostles had a consistent method that they used as they proclaimed Christ. They expounded the Old Testament Scripture to show that the gospel that they were preaching was in keeping with the promise that God had made all along, and what you're going to find is that the central doctrines of the New Testament, the apostles say, were anticipated and predicted by the prophets in the Old Testament, so that there was perfect continuity between the Old Testament and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, if you think about it, it could be no other way. It could never have been any other way. God is a God of truth. Truth is self-consistent with itself, and God, who knows the end from the beginning, was laying forth markers throughout the centuries so that his Christ could not be missed, so that Christ had to be consistent, had to be the fulfillment of the prior prophetic teaching.

Now, just a little sideline note here: that gives the lie to false religions like Mormonism, who come and say that God has come and given Joseph Smith and his writings to correct and to alter the trajectory because the church has gone astray. To do that is to say that there is discontinuity, that there is a change from what God had said all along would be the case and would be the fulfillment. When you realize that Christ was the fulfillment and that the apostles emphasized the fulfillment of the prior prophecies as they set forth Christ, you realize that something that says that is inconsistent with the revelation that was given all along could not possibly be true, and you can reject that out of hand without concern that you are somehow missing the will and the way and the revelation of God.

Tonight we're going to look at a few different texts. We'll see how far we get, and without making much comment on them, but going back to Acts 3, the passage that I read before, notice what we're going to see is how the prophets not only say in general that Christ was consistent with the prophets, they affirm fundamental aspects of the most basic doctrines of Christianity as they do.

So look at Acts 3:18 to 21 again, and let's take a little bit closer look at it as we go along. Peter is preaching. The Holy Spirit has come. He is preaching with power, and many people are being converted as the Spirit works through the proclamation of the word to change hearts. That's what Scripture says he does. Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. That's why it is so vital and essential for us to open a Bible when we actually come to church. I know that for some people that would be a concept different from what they expect. I know that many of you have been to churches either as regular attenders in the past or even visiting where you didn't need your Bible in order to follow along in the service. Nothing like that could be more contrary to the apostolic pattern, which is constantly pointing people back to the word. Come back to the word. See how what I am preaching to you is consistent with the word of God. So much so that the Bereans in Acts 17 were commended, they were noble-minded as they heard the teaching of Paul, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. You cannot truly preach Christ with a closed Bible. You cannot truly sustain a ministry, a church cannot be a true church if it is not consistently opening the Bible and explaining it and expounding it. Sorry if that offends somebody. That's just the case.

Look at the apostles and their apostolic method and see how they were consistently pointing back to the prophets so that in Acts 3:18 you see, "But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets," specifically, he gives an indication, he specifies exactly what he means when he says, "what God foretold by the mouth of the prophets," specifically, "that his Christ would suffer." Well, you think of, if nothing else, think of Isaiah 53 and the fullness of the explanation of the sufferings of the Messiah. Peter points back to the prophets and says, "The prophets said this was going to happen. This is the life of Jesus. He suffered on the cross as he paid the price for the sins of his people." He says, "This is exactly what the prophets would say. This is exactly what the prophets said. God said it in advance through the prophets. He did it in the Lord Jesus Christ and now I am telling you that that is the fulfillment of what was being said all along."

It's been said that there are three keys to successful public speaking: tell the audience what you are about to say; say it; and then tell them what you just said. That is the picture of what we have going on here with what Peter is saying. He said, "The prophets said this would happen. It happened in real time with the Lord Jesus Christ and now I am telling you that what you saw in the Lord Jesus Christ so recently in contemporary history," as he spoke to a first century audience, "that fulfills what the prophets were saying all along was going to happen." And so it wasn't simply that Jesus came and spoke with power and performed mighty miracles that established that he was Lord, it was that he did that and it was consistent with the prophetic blueprint that had been handed down over the prior 1,500 years.

That's remarkably powerful. This is something that was established in the plan of God from the beginning and there's something greatly sanctified and holy and reverent as we come into it and we study these things together and we realize what we're referring to. Here you and I are 2,000 years after the coming of Christ. We have the privilege of opening our Bibles and seeing these things and study them and have the Holy Spirit illuminate them to us as we open his word together and realize, especially realize as you and I, we all do this, we get so swept up in what's happening in day-to-day life or, you

know, year-to-year politics in our country and we miss the greater significance of what's right in front of us, that God in his grace in Christ has led us into that which has a 3,500-year history of prophetic revelation, supporting and laying the foundation for it as we go forward in life. God is carrying out his plan, whether we see it in real time or not, and we usually won't, but this establishes force as we look at millennia after millennia after millennia, I mean thousands and thousands of years of revelation and we see that the faith that God has granted to us is that which he has been working out for thousands and thousands of years. This is utterly transcendent. This is staggering to realize that God established a plan, predicted it in advance, carried it out in Christ, and now is continuing the work in the 2,000 years since then, and you and I are a part of it. You and I have been included in the plan.

It's staggering and what we see here is that the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement in Acts 3:18, that is Christ would suffer, is woven into what the prophet said would happen beforehand. The cross was not an afterthought. It wasn't Plan B after Israel supposedly rejected their king and then, you know, well we have to go to Plan B because they rejected Christ. No, it was Plan A from all along. There was no Plan B. We didn't have to pivot to something else as if the plan wasn't working. No, the plan was working. It was a fulfillment of the prophets and that's why it was so powerful as the apostles preached. And the message that Peter preached to that first century audience in Acts 3 is the message that we preach and proclaim and what the response is for every one of us today.

Look at verse 19, "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out." In light of this, if you have been living in rebellion against God, if you are dead in your sins now, if you are not in Christ now and this is all being laid out to you, there is only one possible right response and that would be to repent, to turn from your rejection and ignoring of the revelation of God, embrace it with the fullness of all that you are, give yourself to Christ that your sins might be forgiven and there's 3,500 years of testimony to back that up.

Now look, what you and I in this room have to do this evening, what we have to do as Christians is to realize that we are in an age and the spirit of our age is to utterly discount what has happened in the past and, you know, the whole nature of society is built on embracing what is new. There's a new iPhone out. You've got to go buy it. There are new ideas out. You've got to go out and embrace them. You know, it's no longer male and female, but there's a thousand different kinds of gender that can be expressed and this is all new and this is the trend and things have changed. And that's the spirit of the age in which we live, where something is proven to be good by how new it is, something is proven true by the fact that it is different and disconnected with the past. You and I have to understand that mindset and completely utterly reject it because truth is found in its consistency with what God has been saying all along. That's a most fundamental point, worthy of a series of messages all its own but don't give me any ideas or I'll do that and this is already going slow enough. I am encouraged. I've been reading in Martyn Lloyd-Jones and his series on Romans in recent days and one of the things that he said over and over again in his introductory messages on Romans is how important it was to go slow and to take things carefully, slowly, and to examine and see the fullness of what Paul was

saying in such a quick and summary form. Yes, of course we have to expound it because there was so much more than what's there on the surface. And so we look at these things and we contemplate the significance of what we're reading.

Look at Acts 7 as we move ahead here. Acts 7 in verse 42. You remember the martyrdom of Stephen, the first martyr in the Christian church? He was brought before the high priest and then he gave testimony to Christ and with stirring and invigorating courage preached Christ in the face of hostile opposition that would lead to his execution at the hands of those angry Jewish leaders and he says in verse 42, we don't have time to go through it all, but he's alluding to the fact in verse 41, he's looking back to the time when Israel made a golden calf and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. Verse 42, notice what he ties his message to as he preaches. He says, "God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: "Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?" He points them back to the prophetic writings that preceded his preaching.

And then in verse 51, with the greatest of courage, showing that ministry is not simply accommodating your audience and whatever they want, but sometimes standing up and confronting evil, confronting wickedness, confronting false doctrine so contrary to the spirit of our modern age. Verse 51, Stephen looks that audience in the eye and says, "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you." Then look at what he says, "Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it." A courageous proclamation of the truth is what was the mark of the true man of God at that time, not accommodation to the enemies of God, not a man telling stories, trying to win over his audience through his magnetic personality. You know, personal note here, I am really, really glad being who I am that ministry does not depend on having a magnetic personality. If it did, man, I would be, I would be sunk. I would be so, so sunk if ministry depended on having an attractive magnetic personality. What on earth would I do if that was the prerequisite?

Stephen says, "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears," and he points back to the prophetic ministry. He's tying his closing remarks, Stephen here is giving his dying words. He will be dead in moments and his dying words are, "Look back to the prophets. Look back to the revelation of God." So that in verse 54, "when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him." Beloved, take close note, take close note that an angry response is no indication that the message was not true. The angry response was simply a manifestation of the sinful hearts of those that were opposing what Stephen had to say, were opposing the message of God. It's no fault of Stephen. It was no fault in the truth. The proclamation of truth simply exposed the sinful heart that was under its power. And so Stephen in verse 55, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

This is not a good way to consider this, but as the man of God on earth was about to be stoned for bearing a faithful testimony to Christ, it's as if Christ rose at the august nature

of the occasion and made himself known to Stephen and he saw the glory of God. You know, Elijah was carried off in a whirlwind and carried off in a chariot into heaven. This is no less glorious, no less magnificent. As Stephen looks on the glory of God and then the stones begin to rain down on his head, as angry, wicked people tried to silence him, verse 57, "they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him." Stephen points to the prophets, looks up and sees the glory of God and the stones rain down and he enters into glory, every bit as glorious a departure as Elijah himself.

The point for tonight is that that early preaching in the early church was rooted in what the prophets had said. God had made his promises and he kept them and there is a consistency in the way that men responded to the truth. They rejected it angrily, they killed Stephen just like they'd killed the prophets in times gone by. The utter continuity of it is so stunning and so so stunning and so instructive for us.

Well, let's look at Acts 10 and see another snippet of the preaching of Peter. Peter's brought to the Gentiles to preach to them and even to the Gentiles he's emphasizing the fact that there is a prophetic continuity with it. Acts 10:34. He's speaking to Cornelius. "Peter opened his mouth and said: '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. As for the word that he sent to Israel,'" see the connection, he's looking back to what was preached to the chosen people long before Peter was on the stage, "preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all)." Remember, we're saying how do we know that Jesus is Lord? We look back to what the prophets said to Israel and we find that he is Lord of all. Then verse 37, again, the prophets had said what was going to happen, it happened, and now Peter tells them what had just happened. Verse 37, "you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed." He said, "This is contemporary history. You know what happened in the life of Christ, how God," verse 38, "anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead." Peter's saying "We had direct personal experience with this. We're not telling you fancy fables. We actually, we sat with him. We ate with him. We walked with him. We drank with him after his resurrection. We are direct personal eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Oh, the power of the preaching of that.

Verse 42, he looks back at Matthew 28, back to Luke 24, the events of those chapters, "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." "And to this Christ of whom I'm speaking, to this Christ whom we ate and drank after his resurrection, to this one who is known by all contemporary accounts of his life, his ministry, his power, his miracles, this one of whom I'm speaking, To him," verse 43, all the prophets bear witness." It's just phenomenal how this is everywhere in the pages of the Bible when you know to look for it. To him, all the

prophets bear witness and what do they bear witness? That everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

The prophets bore witness to Christ. They bore witness that salvation would be through faith in Christ. So we've seen the substitutionary atonement set out by the prophets, Acts 3. We see the principle of faith being set forth here in Acts 10. But we keep going through the book of Acts and we keep finding these references over and over again. Look at Acts 15 and the Jerusalem council as the church courageously confronted the efforts to add works to the gospel. It's been going on for thousands of years, beloved, people trying to add works, add human merit to that which is actually by grace alone and when that happens, the church must stand up and resist it, not accommodate it.

In Acts 15:13, "After they finished speaking," referring to Paul and Barnabas in verse 12, "they had related the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles," They had said in verse 11 that the Gentiles would be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will. Verse 13, "After they finished speaking, James replied, 'Brothers, listen to me.'" There was this great, great controversy about whether Gentiles were going to have to submit to Jewish rituals and Jewish laws in order to become Christians. The Apostle Paul said, "No, no, no, no, it's by grace alone. They can come directly to Christ without first becoming Jews." Crucial, critical matter in the whole unfolding of the biblical revelation of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. It was a momentous turning point in the church, a huge controversy taking place so that the leaders gathered together to resolve it.

And after Paul and Barnabas had spoken, James replies, "Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name." Verse 15, "And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, 'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.'" The prophets foretold that the coming of Christ would be for all the nations.

If you want to find the simplest, shortest place to find that, you can go to Psalm 117, even though it's contained throughout all of the Old Testament. The promise that God made to Abraham in Genesis 12 was that, "In you and in your seed, all the nations will be blessed." From the beginning, Scripture was saying, the prophets were saying as God spoke through them, that one day the coming Messiah would be for the blessing of all the nations. Now in real time, in the midst of a real controversy, as people were saying, no, the Gentiles must become Jews first, they have to follow these works if they want to be saved, James points to the writings of the prophets and says, "No, no, what Paul is saying, justification by faith alone, that's consistent with what the prophets have been saying all along that this Christ would be for all the nations, not simply for the Jews." You and I are the beneficiaries of that tonight in this room, aren't we? Not many Jews in this room. If God had just limited it to the chosen people, if Christ had only been for the Jews, Christ had only come to save that particular people and didn't have a gracious intent and purpose for all of mankind, you and I would be miserably lost, standing, as it were, outside the candy store of salvation, if I can put it that way, pressing our nose against the window,

looking in, longing for the goods that are inside, the sweetness of the blessings that are contained therein, and yet we would have been excluded and kept out because we didn't have the right ancestors beforehand.

Don't you see, beloved? The prophets said it would be for all the nations. The apostolic circle recognized that and applied it in the midst, and now here you and I are having the benefit of believing through the word that has been given to us, just precisely as Jesus prayed that it would be in John 17, when Jesus, on the verge of his crucifixion, prayed to his Father, prayed for his immediate disciples, and then he expanded beyond in the greatness of his loving, redemptive heart, in the fullness of the plan that God had prepared before the foundation of the world in the covenant of redemption. Jesus prays to his Father, "I do not ask for these only. I pray not only for my immediate disciples, but Father, I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word." Christ had you and me in mind as he prayed that way, because who are we as Christians except those that have believed through the word of the apostles? And Christ, in his powerful, effectual prayers to his Father before he courageously went to the cross, prayed for his own, said, "Father, I pray for those who will one day believe through my disciples." And what was it that he prayed? He said, "I pray that they'd all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given to me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one." And then in verse 24, he said, "Father," I am just overwhelmed at the goodness and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the generosity of his gracious Spirit. He says in verse 24, John 17, "Father, I desire that they also, these for whom I've been praying, I desire that they whom you have given me may be with me where I am to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world." The desire of Christ for you, for me, for all who love his appearing, those that he died for, those that he loved, those that he now keeps, his desire is that we would enter into the richness of the fullness of seeing him in his glory, not veiled in human flesh on earth, not simply knowing him as rich as it is today to know him by faith through his word. We love him now, we love him whom we have not yet seen, but he doesn't want it to stop there. He says, "Father, the purpose of my redemption is so that they could see me in the glory that I shared with you before the foundation of the world." He wants us to enter into eternal riches known only in their fullness by the Godhead. He said, "Father, I want these that I love to share in that with us."

What a wonderful Savior. You know, and it's all the more compelling when you remember that he's praying that way as he is about to enter into the depths of profound, redemptive suffering, bearing the wrath of God on our behalf but he prays, as it were, not for himself, but for us. You know, as we learn these things together, as the Spirit draws us into the riches of the fullness of this, it causes us to love him. The Spirit illuminates us so that we would have a greater appreciation and gratitude for the glory of Christ and, beloved, I trust that it builds and deepens in you a desire to know these things for yourself out of the word of God and to have a zeal for protecting the truth, which leads us into these magnificent glories of which the world knows nothing. It's all built on the prior foundation of the prophets.

Look at Acts 17 as we continue our look at apostolic preaching. Acts 17. And we're going to see the opposition again. The measure of biblical truth is not that it receives popular acclaim and affirmation, but that it generates opposition. True of the prophets, true of Christ, true of the apostles, true of the early church. Acts 17. "Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures." The Old Testament Scriptures, the New Testament had not yet been written. Verse 3, what was he doing from the Scriptures? What had the prophets laid the foundation for? Verse 3, "explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.'" He takes them to the prophetic Scriptures and explains so that they can understand, "Here's what the prophets said would be the mark of the Christ, the mark of the Messiah, the appointed one," Christ being a term for Messiah, not the last name of Jesus of Nazareth. And he lays that out before them, and he lays out the Old Testament Scriptures to them, and reasons with them and then he says, again, pointing to very recent history, says, "Look at the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Look at his death. Look at his resurrection. Look at his miracles. Look at his teaching. And understand this, Jewish friends in the synagogue here, understand that Jesus of Nazareth, so recently on the earth, is the one who fulfills what God said would be true of his Christ, of the Messiah."

So he taught them the Old Testament, the life predicted, the death predicted, and then he put the life and ministry of Jesus Christ side-by-side with the Old Testament Scriptures so that it was irrefutable, irrefutable, it couldn't be contradicted, how's that, that Jesus was the Christ. Verse 4. You can preach those things truly even as an apostle, and not everyone will be persuaded. Verse 4, "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. There were those who rose up and followed, but it wasn't without opposition. It's the biblical pattern, beloved, It's the biblical pattern that the truth be opposed.

Verse 5, "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. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, 'These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.'" And on it goes.

The apostles preached the truth. Some people were converted. Others stirred up rebellion and objection and disturbance to hinder the work. Paul, all of that, beloved, all of that flowing from growing out of the fact that Paul in his apostolic ministry was showing from the Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. It was his custom, it says. This is what he did. This was how he taught. This was his pattern. And so you and I, if we are going to mature in our faith, if we're going to truly grow as we need to grow, both individually, you and I, and corporately as a church, we have to understand the apostolic model, the apostolic pattern, the apostolic preaching, and be able to see and to know and to show how Christ is rooted in and flowed from the unfolding of the prophetic ministry

that existed for 1,500 years before he came to earth. As you do that, there's all kinds of wonderful things that happen but one of the things that you come to understand through that is that God truly is sovereign over human history. The nations are but a drop in the bucket to him. The nations are, how much more individuals? God makes promises and then he keeps them. God says in advance, even centuries, even millennia in advance, says, "This will happen," and in time, it does.

And as I said, I believe on Sunday, those of us that are trusting him for his promise to work all things together for good, to perfect the work that he's begun in us until the day of Christ Jesus, if we are truly in Christ and we are on the receiving end of those promises, then beloved, this strengthens and strengthens your spiritual confidence and your spiritual assurance that the God who keeps his promises to history is the same God who's going to keep his promises to you. The God who can raise up an a Nebuchadnezzar and cast him down is the same God who numbers the hairs on your head and knows you by name. The same God, the same God who can raise up Egypt, raise up Israel, raise up Assyria, raise up Babylon, raise up Greece, raise up Rome, all of these in the unfolding of his purpose in the nations, the God who's able to do that, beloved, is able to keep you too. And he will.

We go on. Acts 24. As you turn to Acts 24, just to emphasize so that we do not miss it from Acts 17:3, Paul reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary, 1) for the Christ to suffer, and 2) to rise from the dead. The Old Testament prophets anticipated not only the suffering of Christ, but also the resurrection of Christ. You see that in Psalm 16, among other places. So that we, again, we just see the fullness of the anticipation of the doctrines of Christianity being laid forth in seed form in the Old Testament. Substitutionary atonement, salvation by faith alone, the gospel going to all nations, the resurrection from the dead.

Then you come to Acts 24 and for the sake of time, I just need to go directly to verses 14 and 15. Paul says, "But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect," Paul dealing with false accusations and misleading representations of his ministry said, "I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down," beloved, by whom? "By the Law and written in the Prophets." I believe everything that's written in the law and in the prophets and that's what I'm proclaiming. It's simply what was previously written and now fulfilled in Christ. "Having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust." Everything written in the prophets and that includes that there will be a final judgment where both the wicked and the righteous will be resurrected to stand before God and give an account to him. It's all right there in the prophets.

Chapter 26, verses 22 and 23. Paul, again, his consciousness of being an extension and an advance of the ministry of the prophets who went before him. This was ever on his mind as he ministered. Verse 21, again, the opposition of wicked people to his godly ministry, "For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me." They wanted me dead. They wanted me silenced. Verse 22, "To this day I have had the help that comes from God." What a sweet testimony Paul makes that God has stood alongside me in the midst, in the face of all of that opposition, and as a result of God's keeping and preserving

me, verse 22, "I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass." I'm not contradicting anything that came in prior revelation. I'm simply saying, announcing the fulfillment of what they had said beforehand was going to happen. And what was that, Paul? Verse 23, "that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles."

Here in that one little condensed, concentrated version of his preaching of the gospel, Paul points to the redemptive work of Christ, "Christ must suffer. This is what the prophets said would happen." That Christ would be raised from the dead, "That's what the prophets said would happen. He would be a light both to our people and to the Gentiles. It's a message for all the world, just like the prophets said would happen." Paul said, "If you," to use modern terms, "If you try to cancel me, you can't just cancel me." If you cancel Paul, you cancel the prophets. "You can't do that. I'm just preaching what the prophets would say would happen, and which you, my contemporary audience," speaking as Paul in the first century, "you're the contemporary audience, you know that what I'm telling you is true."

In fact, he goes on, and again, an irrational man tried to contradict Paul in the midst of his ministry. Verse 24, "as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice," had to yell at him, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind." You're nuts. What's wrong with you? Listen to what you're saying. And Paul, in calm response, says in verse 25, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words." Then he turns to the king who's presiding over this affair. Verse 26, "For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner." In other words, the life of Christ is a matter of public record and public knowledge. Festus, you can't silence me on this. Everybody knows what I'm saying is true.

And in another moment of courage for the disciples of Christ, Paul in chains, looks to the king and makes the same point that we've been making for the past three messages here at Truth Community Church. "King Agrippa, do you believe," what? "Do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." King Agrippa, if you believe the prophets, there's no evading the conclusion that I've been laying out before you. And you believe the prophets, and so there's no evading the conclusion. I am proclaiming to you the Christ of God, the Son of the living God, the only Savior of mankind.

And Agrippa deflects the question. He can't give a straight yes or no. It's what wicked people do, they evade the issues. Verse 28, "Agrippa said to Paul, 'In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?'" I know what you're trying to do here. You're trying to make me a Christian like you. Paul says, "Guilty as charged, whether short or long, I would to God that not only you, but all who hear me this day might become such as I am. I would have you all be Christians. I would have you all believe and enter into this blessing. I would just spare you the chains that leads me here."

Verse 30, the king rose. They leave the room. Said, "This man isn't doing anything to deserve death or imprisonment. Could have been set free if he hadn't appealed to Caesar." They get back to the administrative aspects of dealing with a prisoner and evade the presentation of eternal truth that had just been made to them. So foolish so foolish to walk away from the truth but that's what these great men of power did. People have been doing it ever since. Easier to walk away than to deal with the truth. You see that illustrated for us there.

One final in closing here. Turn to Acts 28. Acts 28 at the end of the book. Paul's now in Rome awaiting his trial before Caesar. He's in prison, but he's able to receive guests. What's he doing at the end of the book of Acts? You know, we started early in the book of Acts, in Acts 3, we saw Peter preaching how Christ would suffer, this is what the prophet said. We saw it in Stephen. We saw it in James at the Jerusalem council. We've seen it as a custom of Paul. We've seen him courageously testifying before kings. This is a thread that is woven throughout the entire book of Acts in the apostolic preaching. Now at the end, we see the exact same thing, the relentless testimony of Scripture. We've seen it in Romans. We've seen it in the contemporaries of Christ. We've seen it in Christ himself. We see it in the early church.

Verse 23, "When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. 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." He opened up the Old Testament Scriptures. He expounded them to them, trying to persuade them that Jesus was the Messiah. And once again, just as we saw earlier in Scripture, some people believed and followed and others rejected it. That's the way it always is when the truth is preached.

Verse 24, "some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: 'The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers,'" and he appeals to the prophets again, beloved. I repeat all of this, I emphasize all of this so that you cannot possibly miss it. This is not a side theme in Scripture. This is fundamental to establishing the Lordship of Christ, establishing the most important principle in the universe, that Jesus is Lord of all, and that one day every knee will bow before him and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father. This is the foundation of that proclamation. How could we possibly spend too much time on it?

So this is what Isaiah the prophet said about you guys, Paul says, verse 26, "Go to this people, and say, 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.' For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' Therefore," verse 28, "let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen." Paul closes by appealing to Moses and the prophets and as part of it, he proclaims that part of what they said would happen, that there would be a rejection of the gospel by those who heard.

And so we see laid out for us in the prophets that the Christ would suffer, salvation by faith alone, that the gospel is for all of the nations, that there would be repentance and a resurrection and a final judgment and all of these things that we proclaim out of the New Testament about Christ, the foundation was laid long beforehand. This is what God has done for us, showing us the full foundation of our faith. The apostles took their audience to the Old Testament to show how it prophesied about the Messiah, and once they established that, it followed inevitably that the man Jesus was that very Messiah, the Lord of history. Beloved, this method points us to Christ, to God's sovereign will. It points us what to expect as we proclaim the word of God. Beloved, wolves may howl at the moon as we follow the apostles but we must preach the full counsel of God come what may.

And so my prayer for you, my prayer for us together is that the parting words of the Apostle Paul to Ephesus would mark your life and mine as well. Look at Acts 20 as we close. Acts 20. Beginning in verse 24, Paul says, and let's use this as a closing prayer. I invite you to stand with me as we close in prayer by reading this passage of Scripture.

And our prayer, Lord, is that you would do this in us even as you did in Paul.

24 But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. 25 And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. 26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, 27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

Father, make us a people like that, that do not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God. And Paul goes on and said in verse 28,

28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Father, as we contemplate that in the ministry of Paul, give us the spirit that he describes in verses 31 and 32.

31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. 32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Gracious Father, build us up, give us that promised inheritance among all those who are sanctified and help us one and all in the rounds and spheres of influence and responsibility that you have given to us, Father. I pray that you would help each one of

us not to shrink away from declaring to men and women everywhere, the whole counsel of God as represented even in Moses and the prophets. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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