

A Chronicle of Redemption

Chapter 43: Redeemed for a Reason

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CHAPTER 43: REDEEMED FOR A REASON Luke 23-24

If you have His Word, and I hope you do, I invite you to open back up with me to Luke 23 and 24, where we left off. So, here's the question. What does it mean to be redeemed, and why have we been redeemed? What does it mean to be redeemed, and why have we been redeemed?

As The Church Around The World...

We come here to the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ and the ascension of Christ at the end of Luke 24, and yet, there is still more of this book to go. Like, we've reached the apex, the mountain peak of Scripture, so why is there more? Apparently, there is a reason behind redemption. There is another chapter to come in this story, and so what I want us to do tonight is to think...as the church around the world throughout history...what does it mean for us to be in the company of the redeemed? What does that mean for who we are, and for what we do? Why have we been redeemed? I want us to think about that generally, and then, bring those questions to bear specifically on the faith family called The Church of Brook Hills. Why have we been redeemed, and why have we been joined in the company of the redeemed in this local church?

We receive the grace of Christ.

I want us to hit with broad strokes the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension of Christ and the inauguration of the church and see the answers to those questions. What does it mean to be redeemed? It means we received the grace of Christ. What happened here in Luke 23 is the grace of Christ on display. It is deeper than just a man dying a cruel, tortuous death. This is grace that brings salvation. We receive the grace of Christ. Redemption is not something you do. It's something you receive, not something you earn or merit or attain. It's received. It's given to you.

We are in the company of the redeemed and, not based on what we have done, but based on what He has done, and what I put in your notes there just as a summary is a few different theological words to remind us the gravity of what happens in Luke 23:46, when the Bible says, "*[Jesus] breathed his last.*" This is the Son of God, God incarnate, the sinless Son of God.

Pilate said it really, really well in Luke 23:22. He says, "*I have found in him no guilt deserving death.*" Preach it, Pilate. Yes, exactly. That's the thing that sets Jesus apart from anybody else. We have all sinned. The payment for sin is death. We all deserve death. He has no guilt in Him, no sin. Therefore, He does not deserve death, and yet, He dies in Luke 23:46. If He is not paying the payment for His sin, then whose sin is He paying?

First word, sacrifice: He is dying our death. The death we deserve He is taking upon Himself. It is what we have seen over and over again as we've been reading through the Bible this year. The blood of sacrifice is a necessary covering for people's sin, whether it's Exodus 12, the Passover sacrifice, or Exodus 24...sacrifice, the blood of the covenant; whether it's Leviticus 16, sacrifice, and blood is sprinkled over the atonement cover. What we have here in Luke 23 is the sinless sacrifice, Jesus Himself. He is our Passover Lamb. His is the blood that seals the covenant, and it's His blood that provides an atonement, a covering, for our sins.

Hebrews 9:26 says, "*He has done away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.*" He has died the death we deserve to die. Second, this is a great word to teach your two-year-old: Propitiation. Propitiation: He has endured our condemnation. Propitiation...propitiation or propitiatory sacrifice is one who turns aside wrath, turns away wrath. That's what propitiation is. Sin arouses the holy fury, the holy justice, the holy wrath of God. As sinners, we deserve to bear God's wrath against sin.

Jesus says, "*We stand condemned in our sin,*" in John 3:17, but then Romans 5, "God, while we were still sinners, sent His Son, Christ, to die for us," to take God's wrath. Romans 5:12 says, "upon himself so that we would be delivered from God's wrath." Romans 5:1, "So we would have peace with God." Romans 8:1, "So that there is now no condemnation for anyone who is in Christ Jesus." Condemnation gone. It's been poured out on Christ. Isaiah 53, we saw it a couple months ago. It was the Lord's will to crush Him, to pour out condemnation of sin upon Him instead of you and me. That makes propitiation a really, really, really good word.

Sacrifice, propitiation, reconciliation: He has suffered our separation. One gospel account shows Jesus on the cross, saying, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The reality is, because of our sin, we are separated from God...infinitely, eternally separated from God in our sin. It's the picture in Genesis 3 in the beginning of the Bible, cast out of the presence of God, separated from God, and Jesus endures the separation we are due, so that, instead of being cast out, we might be invited in. Think about it. Sinners to the core, welcomed into the presence of an infinitely holy God because Jesus has suffered our separation. We once were afraid of God. Now, we are friends of God. Once cast out, now invited in.

Sacrifice, propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption: He has paid our debt. This has been the primary theme as we've walked through this story since the beginning of this year, Chronicle of Redemption, the debt of our sin too deep for us to pay. "*But God,*" Galatians 4 says, "*sent his Son, born of woman, born under law, to redeem those under the law, so that through his death, we might receive adoption as sons.*" We once were slaves to sin. Now, we are sons and daughters of God. All of that is what is happening when Luke 23:46 says, "*He breathed his last.*"

The hymn writer said it best:

Man of sorrows, what a name
For the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim
Hallelujah, what a Savior.

Bearing shame and scoffing rude
In my place condemned He stood
Sealed my pardon with His blood

Hallelujah, what a Savior.

Guilty, vile, and helpless we
Spotless lamb of God was He
Full atonement, can it be?
Hallelujah, what a Savior.

Lifted up was He to die
"It is finished," was His cry
Now in heaven exalted high
Hallelujah, what a Savior.

And when He comes, our glorious king
All His ransomed home to bring
Then anew this song we'll sing
Hallelujah, what a Savior.

Can you "amen" that? That's good news. This is great news. It is the best news in all of history and all the world. Jesus has died the death you deserved to die, and He has endured the condemnation that is intended for you from a holy God. He has suffered our separation, and He has paid our debt, so that anyone in this room and anyone in all history who trusts in Him, who turns from sin and trusts in Him as Savior, will be reconciled to God, will have their sins covered, will be welcomed into eternal life with God. That's what it means to be redeemed.

We behold the glory of Christ.

So, why? Why would God give such grace to redeem us? Leads to the second picture in your notes. We are redeemed to behold the glory of Christ. So you get to Luke 24, and twelve short verses after Jesus has been buried, they cannot find His body. It's gone.

Peter doesn't believe it. He goes and runs and has a look for himself, and then you get over to Luke 24:36. Just imagine this scene. Put yourself in these disciples' shoes.

As they were talking about these things, [verse 36] Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"

Like, they're shocked. A man has come back from the dead, and all He wants is a simple meal. So, *"They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it before them."* You can just picture their jaws are still on the ground, their eyes still wide open, like, "Is this a hallucination?" Well, hallucinations don't eat. "Is this a spirit?" Well, spirits don't chow down. He's real.

Then he said to them, "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 the third day rise from the dead, and the repentance

and 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."

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.

That's where Luke 24 ends.

Now, hold your place here and turn over to Acts 1, because Luke writes a sequel, part two, and part two is called The Acts of the Apostles, the book of Acts, also written by Luke. What I want to show you is that Luke picks up by recounting the same scene and elaborating on it. Listen to Acts 1:1. We're going to kind of go back and forth a little bit between Acts 1 and Luke 24.

Acts 1 says:

In the first book, O Theophilus, [book of Luke] I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 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." And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who has taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

This is where it starts, right here. The whole next chapter, the story of redemption, starts with this picture. Don't miss this. People who have received the grace of Christ, beholding the glory of Christ. He is the risen Savior. He was dead, and by dead we mean dead, tortured, killed on a cross, blood flowing, not breathing, wrapped in a tomb, stone put in front. Dead. Then, He was alive. Not a lot of people have done that.

He is the risen Savior. He conquered death. He is the exalted Lord. As if that were not enough, He ascends into heaven. Four times in Acts 1...verse 2, verse 9, verse 11, actually twice in verse 11, and then in verse 22 later on...He talks about how He was taken up. The Lord was taken up. Jesus was taken up to the right hand of the Father.

Risen Savior, exalted Lord, and, third, He is the coming King. Put yourself in these guys' shoes...these disciples...the range of thoughts and emotions. One day you see Jesus crucified cruelly on a cross. A couple of days later, He is alive, hanging out with you, chatting and having a meal, and so they're asking, "Are you going to restore the kingdom of Israel to Israel?" All right, this is a movement here. We've got things on a roll. We've got dead, alive, and then, not long after, He rises into heaven.

I love Acts 1:11, when this angel comes and says, "*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?*" "Well, why do you think we're standing looking into heaven? We were having a conversation with a man, and all of the sudden, He's skyrocketed into the air, and so, angel, that's why we're looking up, because Jesus just disappeared." So, this must be a rhetorical question of some sorts, an introduction.

"*Why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus...*" Here's the promise. "...*who was taken from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.*" That promise drives the rest of this book. That promise that Jesus is coming back drives ten of these eleven men to be martyred, to die martyrs' deaths proclaiming His greatness, looking forward to His coming. The only one who was not martyred is exiled to an island, where he writes the last chapter in the Bible, and in that chapter, the words on the page, he says, "*Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly.*" They're longing for the coming King.

What I want you to see is that it's this vision of the glory of Christ, risen Savior, exalted Lord, coming King that drives the church from this point on, from age to age, generation to generation. It's this vision that drives. Passion for the kingdom is fueled by passion for the King.

Company of the redeemed. What does it mean to be a part of the company of the redeemed? We love the King, and we honor the King, and we glorify the King, and we give our lives for the King and for the advancement of His kingdom. Brothers and sisters, we are not just playing games here. We don't just come and sit in a chair once a week and give token adherence or songs to Christ...token time to Christ. No, He's worthy of our plans and dreams and ambitions and hopes, our possessions and homes, everything we have, everything we are.

We want this King to be exalted. We want His Kingdom to be advanced. This consumes us. This drives us more than making the next dollar or getting the next promotion or having a nice job or comfortable life. Leave it all if necessary. We will do whatever it takes to honor our King. That's what it means to be a part of the company of the redeemed. The prayer...the constant prayer on our lips is, "Let your kingdom come. In my life, in my death, let your kingdom come."

We proclaim the gospel of Christ.

So, that begs the question, "How will His kingdom come?" I am glad you asked. Third reason for redemption here: We receive the grace of Christ, we behold the glory of Christ, and we proclaim the gospel of Christ. We are redeemed to proclaim the gospel of Christ. Let me show this to you. End of Luke 24, so we're going to come back to Acts 1 in just a second. End of Luke 24, I want you to look with me at verse 46. We read it just a second ago when Jesus said to them, Luke 24:46, "*Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead.*" Now, pay attention close. Verse 47, "*and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be,*" what? This is the audience participation part of our program. "*Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed [or preached] in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*" So, circle "proclaim" there. Underline. Put a box around, star around "proclaimed."

Then, verse 48, "*You are witnesses of these things.*" Proclaimers of these things. You testify to these things. Circle "witnesses" or underline or box it or pink highlight it or something. Then, you get over to Acts 1:8, and it's the same picture. Jesus says, "[*But*] you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my," what? "*Witnesses.*" Circle it. Underline it. Mark it there. You'll be witnesses.

This is the reason for redemption. Receive the grace of Christ. Behold the glory of Christ. The Spirit of God will come upon you. Jesus says, "And you will proclaim. You will testify. You will witness to these things." This is the reason for redemption. We are washed of sins, so that we might witness to the reality of Jesus, His death and resurrection. We are delivered to declare. We are saved to speak. That's why we've been redeemed, so that we might speak.

Now, we miss this if we're not careful, this word "witness." We say things today like, "I witness with my life." Well, it sounds good, and certainly we need to live lives that are good and good deeds, Matthew 5:16, that glorify God in heaven. One saint of old said, "Preach the gospel at all times, and, if necessary, use words." It sounds sweet and cozy until we realize in order to preach the gospel, one must preach. In order to witness, one must speak.

Jesus did not say, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and you will live nice lives, be good, decent people." It's not what He said. Now, hopefully that's implied. If Christ is living in you, that's reality, but you will be a witness. A witness goes to a stand, not to sit mute, but to say something. You will proclaim the gospel. These men who heard these words on that day did not lose their lives. John was not exiled to Patmos because they went around smiling and doing kind things. You don't get killed for doing kind things. You get killed in the first century for preaching, for telling people about Christ, and the same thing is true in the 21st century.

I got an email this week from one of our contacts in Central Asia, and he told me about a brother named Sayed Mossa in Afghanistan who a few months ago was arrested by the Afghan secret police. The only crime that Sayed has been charged with is conversion to Christianity. The reason I want to share this especially today is because he, by now, has gone to trial today. We worship in this room, and the odds are, the contact said, that he will be sentenced to death. Sayed is 45. He has a wife and six children, the oldest of whom is disabled. Sayed himself is an amputee with a prosthetic leg, and over these last months, he has been repeatedly tortured and abused in the prison for following Christ.

Sayed is not in prison because he is a nice person, though I'm sure that is the case in our brother's life. He is in prison because he has verbally confessed to following Christ. He has done what men and women, brothers and sisters have done throughout history in the face of death. They have proclaimed the gospel, so let us not be so foolish as to claim in a free country that we witness with our lives when our brothers and sisters around the world are dying to witness with their mouths.

Witness necessarily involves proclamation, and this is why the Spirit comes to us, so that we would be proclaimers. Another phrase we often use, we say, "Well, I witness when the Holy Spirit leads me." Again, there's a grain of truth to that. Well, yes, of course, we all want to be led by the Holy Spirit, but here is the reality. The Spirit will come upon us for one purpose: So that we'll be witnesses.

So, I want to free us up tonight. For every follower of Christ in this room with the Spirit of Christ in you, you can now consider yourselves led. Like, this frees us up. We don't have to wait for some, like, tingly feeling to go down our spine and some weird circumstance to

come about and think, "I guess this means the Spirit is leading me to share the..." No, like if you are breathing, you are led by the Spirit of God to proclaim the gospel of Christ. That's what He's in us for, and that's what happens.

You get over to Acts 2. So, follow this, Acts 2:1. *"When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as a fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them."* Verse 4, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to smile." No, "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak Spirit-speak." That's why the Spirit comes, so that they'll speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. They start preaching.

Verse 14, Peter stands up, and he doesn't just smile. He speaks. This is what the Spirit will come to do, to enable us to proclaim the gospel of Christ in the power of Jesus' presence. This is exactly what Jesus had promised in Luke 24 when He told these guys...I love this in Luke 24 when He said, "Whatever you do, don't leave Jerusalem. Stay in the city until you've been clothed with power from on high."

Translated, the last thing Jesus wants is these disciples let loose in the world on their own. Like, they will botch this thing up. They need to wait. We don't need Peter going and just going out on his own. We need him with the Holy Spirit and all these other guys, and that's what happens. They wait, and the Spirit comes down. They start speaking in all these other languages, and everybody around them thinks they're drunk, and Peter stands up.

He's like, "It's only 9:00 in the morning. We're not drunk," and then it's Peter...think about it. It's Peter who's preaching. This is the guy who days before was afraid to say he even knew Christ. He denied knowledge of Christ, friendship with Christ, so this is the guy that either says the wrong thing or says nothing, and now he's standing up preaching the first Christian sermon.

What's the difference between timid Peter and bold Peter? Spirit of God. It's the only difference. It's the only thing that's changed from that point to this point. The Spirit of God is on Peter, and this is what Jesus had promised. He is with us. He said, "Make disciples of all nations. I am with you always, to the very end of the age. You do not go out on your own proclaiming the gospel. This is not a solo deal. I am with you."

Not only is He with us, He dwells in us. John 14, Jesus is talking about how the Spirit's going to come upon His disciples, and He says, "You're going to do even greater things than I've done." What an astounding statement. How is that possible that we are going to do greater things than Jesus? Jesus did a lot of great things, miracles. People who were blind seeing, who were dead coming to life. He says, "You'll do even greater things than these." How is that possible? Well, what Jesus is saying in John 14 is that, "It's not just going to be the fullness of the Spirit on one man but on all of my people," and this is the beauty of what happens here in Acts 2.

You get down to verse 16 in Peter's sermon, and the Bible says Peter says, "This is what was uttered through the prophet Joel," and then he begins to quote from the book of Joel, verses 17 to 21. You probably have a little note at the very beginning of verse 17 or at the end of verse 21 in your Bible, that says where he's quoting from, so kind of look for that note and see. Okay, Peter is quoting from Joel Chapter what? Chapter 2, verses 28 through 32.

So, let's do a little sermon evaluation of Peter, and let's see how he did on his Old Testament quotation. So, hold your place here in Acts 2. We've got to compare here. Hold your place in Acts 2 and, turning over to Joel 2, let's compare Joel 2:28-32 and Acts 2:17-21, and let's see how Peter did in his first attempt at preaching the gospel.

Joel 2. We'll start with Joel and just kind of go phrase by phrase and compare with what Peter said. Joel 2:28. This is the prophecy of Joel. We looked at this a couple months ago. Joel 2:28 says, "[And] it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh..." Okay, let's pause. What does Peter say? Verse 17, "[And] in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh..." Pretty close, maybe a little nervous, missed a couple of words at the beginning, but pretty much the same.

Okay, come back to Joel 2:28. "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions." Peter: "Your sons and daughters shall prophesy..." It's the same. "Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." So, he swaps those around, but basically, the same thing. He's doing all right until you get to Joel 2:29. "Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit." Peter, verse 18, "Even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy."

Wait a minute. Those four words...do you see them back in Joel 2? No. Joel starts going on to the next verse, "I will show wonders..." just as we see next in Acts 2:19. Peter adds four words. What should we conclude, then? Did Peter just blow it? First Christian sermon, he misquotes the Old Testament, and it is recorded for us for centuries to see his blunder. I don't think so. I think this is very important here. It says, "They shall prophesy," not in the Old Testament account in Joel, but in the New Testament account in Acts 2.

What's the difference between Joel 2 and Acts 2? Think about it with me. In Joel 2, were a lot of people prophets or only a few people prophets? Old Testament, a lot of people or few people? Just a few people, right? Joel, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, select people that God called out to speak on His behalf, to bring His Word to people. You get to Acts 2, and Peter says, "God declares, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and..." Then, you get down to verse 18, and it says...he adds, "...and they shall prophesy."

Acts 2, a lot of people or just a few people prophesying here? A lot of people. In fact, all of them who have trusted in Christ, the Spirit of Christ on them, and they're all speaking, and so here is a huge difference between Old Testament and New Testament. Old Testament: Select people, select individuals with the Spirit of God coming upon them to speak words for God. New Testament: Every single follower of Christ having the Spirit of God poured out on them to speak for God.

Do you realize what this means to every follower of Christ in this room? You are a prophet. Now, what does that mean? I put on some sackcloth and ashes, get a big orange neon cross and go out in the streets and just let them have it? No. What did a prophet do? One thing: A prophet had the privilege and responsibility to speak for God, and the beauty is what was reserved for only a couple of people...a few people in the Old Testament...and it's granted to every single follower of Christ in this room, that you can go out into the place that you work this week, the place where you live this week...the neighborhood, the people you meet, and you have the Spirit of God in you and the authority to speak for God; to go and tell people that He has sent His Son to die on the cross for their sins. He has risen from the grave and ascended into heaven, and He deserves their worship, and He desires their salvation. You can speak that to anybody this week, and you have the authority of God to

do so and the Spirit of God on you to do so, the power of Jesus' presence in you to do that. Oh, God help us not to miss this.

We have this way of thinking, even in the church, where we think only a few people do the preaching and speaking, so we need to bring people to hear them, set up a communicator, a charismatic speaker, whatever it is. We need to show him on video or hologram. Just make sure it's a good communicator in front of people, so they can do the work. No, the beauty is every single follower of Christ in this room, you have the Spirit of God in you, and He has enabled every single one of us to go out into the city this week and to the ends of the earth, speaking on His behalf. So, let's not relegate this to one person or think we're going to be dependent on a few people over here to do that. No, we all are playing in this game; nobody on the sidelines here. He is with us. He dwells in us.

We're not going to get through this. All right. Keep moving. He enables our obedience. We don't have time to turn there, Ezekiel 36. In Ezekiel 37, "*It has been prophesied: I'll put my Spirit in you.*" He will move you to obey Him and give your life, and He empowers our proclamation. As we announce, God awakens. You announce good news, and God awakens hearts.

You get to the end of Peter's sermon here in Acts 2, and they don't respond and say, "What wonderful rhetorical skill! What an orator in Peter!" No, it says they were cut to the heart. Something happened on the inside of them when the gospel was proclaimed, and it's what happens when we preach, when we proclaim the gospel.

When I was in Southeast Asia a couple of weeks ago, we had gathered together with a small group...this is the largest unevangelized island on the earth one night...and there were some people that had been brought there that did not know Christ, had not trusted in Christ. We began to share, and, to be honest, it just wasn't going well. Like, I didn't think...it just definitely wasn't the "A-game", and it felt like I wasn't connecting, and I wasn't sure if anything was being driven home.

I shared the gospel, and in that gathering, there were three people who turned and trusted in Christ as their Savior, and I was reminded: This thing is not dependent on my expertise, my ability to connect, your ability to connect and to say the right things in the right way. You speak this gospel, and there is supernatural power at work in people's hearts, and they are awakened, and it's designed in a way so that it's our weakness on display and His glory that's made known.

This is really good news. Most all of us, I think, if we're honest, would say when it comes to proclaiming the gospel of Christ, we are timid and hesitant and stutter thinking through how, but the reality is it's not dependent on our skill or rhetoric or oratory or convincing. It is dependent on this gospel, and it is good. For 2,000 years, it has been proclaimed, and people have had their hearts awakened. You and I have had our hearts awakened, not because of rhetorical skill, but because God's sovereign grace and the operation of His Spirit, and it happens when we speak. So, let's speak, and He'll empower our proclamation.

This is the purpose of the Holy Spirit, to make us worshippers. We're not going to have time to spend here. Our lives are being conformed in the worship of God. 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, "*As we behold the glory of Christ, the Spirit transforms us into the image of Christ.*" Our lives are flowing in worship to God, and as we are worshippers, we are witnesses, and worship leads to witness. Worship fuels witness.

We see His glory, and we tell people of His glory. When you behold greatness, you declare greatness. We proclaim the gospel in light of Jesus' purpose and in obedience to Jesus' plan from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. This is what we've seen from the very beginning of Scripture. God's blessing was promised for all nations.

Do you remember Genesis 11, Tower of Babel, all these languages, all these peoples scattering, and God takes Abraham, an idolater from Ur of the Chaldeans, and He says, "I'm going to bless you. I'm going to pour out my grace upon you, and the result is going to be you're going to be a blessing to all peoples, and you're going to show my grace to all these peoples." He promised it. God's blessing promised for all nations in Genesis 12:1-3.

Now, New Testament: God's gospel preached to all nations. These nations gathered together here in Acts 2, all hearing the gospel in their own language, and Jesus saying, "This gospel we preached is a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come." Now, Acts 1:8 sometimes is used almost as kind of an evangelistic strategy, so to speak, for church. Like, "Okay, Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria to the ends of the earth, that means we need to reach Birmingham and Alabama and North America, and then the ends of the earth." However, that's actually not what the text is saying, because the text is talking about a specific time and place.

The gospel starts in Jerusalem, and it goes from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria...Acts 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11...and then, from Samaria to the ends of the earth, Acts 28. Paul is in Rome preaching the gospel from the center of the ends of the earth. So, this is the picture of the gospel spreading, and you know where Birmingham is? Ends of the earth.

Praise God! By His grace, people have not stopped proclaiming the gospel all the way to Birmingham, Alabama, and every single one of us has heard it, because people have not stopped proclaiming it to more and more people, and the reality is, the ends of the earth are still on the horizon, and there's...we talked about it last week...6,000-plus people groups who still haven't heard. That's where we've got to get the gospel to. From Birmingham, yes, but we are still going after the ends of the earth in obedience to Jesus' plan. That's why we've been redeemed.

Why are you still here? Why am I still here on this earth? To fill a seat on Sunday? No. To coast through life as normal, business as usual? No. We are here, redeemed for a reason: To proclaim the gospel of Christ to the ends of the earth. That is what our lives are intended to count for. Paul said in Acts 20:24, "*My life is of no value except for one thing...*" One thing that my life has value for. He said, "*It is to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.*" That's what our lives count for, and yet, we are all tempted to neglect that one thing, to do all kinds of other things, even good things, and miss the one thing: Testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

As The Church At Brook Hills...

The Radical Experiment

So, how can we make sure not to miss the one thing as The Church of Brook Hills, surrounded by people in Birmingham in need of the gospel, people in all nations in need of the gospel? We have the grace of Christ, and we behold the glory of Christ, so how will we proclaim the gospel of Christ? Well, in 2010, we talked about The Radical Experiment, and we've been walking through the Radical Experiment. Basically, us saying, "As a church, we don't want to waste our lives, and we don't want to waste our church just coasting. We

want to risk it all to make this gospel known and see the advancement of the gospel and the accomplishment of the Great Commission, no matter what it takes.”

So, we’ve been praying. Five components of the Radical Experiment: Praying for the entire world and being on our faces, on our knees on behalf of needs around the world, and reading through the entire Word and walking through...we want to know God in Scripture, and this is where His power is found. Sacrificing our money for a specific purpose individually and in our families, saying, “How can we stop the constant quest for more and more and more and more, bigger and better in our lives and in this culture?” and say, “No, I don’t need more and more stuff. I need to get rid of stuff and give away for the glory of Christ,” a world of urgent spiritual and physical need, and spending our time, fourth, in another context. Over a thousand folks from our faith family this year going into other contexts outside of Birmingham, proclaiming the gospel and doing it all. Spending our time, fifth, in the context of multiplying community as a church, not Lone Rangers. We’re doing this together. So, we called this The Radical Experiment this last year.

The New Normal

So, the question is, “All right. We’re coming to the end of 2010, so what next? What is 2011?” This is where I want to put before you this phrase: In 2011, may we call this The New Normal, i.e., we can’t turn back, go back to business as usual. We see in the Scripture that Jesus demands and deserves total abandonment and radical obedience, and the reality is radical is normal for anyone who follows the Savior. It only makes sense to give everything in our lives and in our pocketbooks and our plans and our dreams toward advancing His kingdom.

Elizabeth Elliott, at the beginning of Jim Elliott’s biography...her husband who died proclaiming the gospel to Indians in South America...she wrote these words.

Jim’s aim was to know God, and his course was obedience. His end was what some would call an extraordinary death. He and the other men with whom he died were hailed as heroes. I do not approve, nor would they have approved. Is the distinction between living for Christ and dying for Him, after all, so great? Is not the second the logical conclusion of the first? To live for God is to die daily as the Apostle Paul put it. It is to lose everything that we may gain Christ.

Elizabeth Elliott says, “He’s looked at as extraordinary, but he would not think so, nor do I think so. This is what is ordinary for anyone who follows this Christ.” So, in 2011 and 2012 and 2013, my prayer is that, increasingly, normal would involve radical praying. This is where it all starts. This is where it all starts, on our faces before God. Apart from Him, we can do nothing. We would be fools to think that with our ingenuity and our resources and all our stuff that we have that we can really make a dent in the picture of urgent spiritual and physical need in the world for the glory of Christ.

The reality is, apart from Christ, we can do nothing, but with Christ, we can do more in the next 100 days under the power of the Holy Spirit of God than we can in the next 100 years in our own power, and when we believe that, we’ll be on our faces, praying...praying daily. There’s a whole new edition of *Operation World* out now, and I want to continue to put that before us as a faith family as a resource. I want to even serve and help provide some tools to use *Operation World*. It can be a daunting book, and there’s so much. Even online, there are so many needs in the world.

Just in case you're kind of playing catch-up here, *Operation World* is basically a book, and it's all free online, as well, that walks through, over the course of the year, every country in the world with prayer needs, and no book outside the Bible has had more of an effect on my prayer life than that book, just exposing me and my heart and us in our heart to what God is doing in the world. So, we're going to continue to pray, and then, weekly prayer emphases that we are going to start in January to really focus on specific ways we can be praying for small groups and trips that people are taking, and other things that are going on within our faith family week after week after week. So, we're calling out to God on each other's behalf, and then, quarterly prayer and fasting celebrations.

I had somebody ask me after this last one last week. They said, "Are we going to do this every month?" and I said, "We're not doing it every month. Four times a year. Four days a year we're not eating. We can do this." Remember the first time we did this? We had some brothers and sisters who were here from Africa, from Kenya, and I was having lunch the next day with them breaking the fast, and they were asking questions about our fasting, and I said, "Well, do you guys fast?" Things got really quiet around the table, and finally one of them spoke up and said, "Well, in our church we start every year with a month-long fast." So, we're, like, so not radical on this one. We're going to press in and pray. We're going to be serious about seeking God's face.

Radical praying, radical studying. Walking through the Word individually. Now, we've been reading through the Bible chronologically this year; pretty tough to top that picture. What we're going to do this next year, though...and, obviously, feel free to read through the Bible in this faith family, by all means...but what we're going to do is we're going to have individual Bible reading that we serve one another with, that gives, maybe, some more time for some meditation and reflection and deeper study and memorization, even in the context of walking through the Word individually.

Then, as families and small groups. We're going to continue, every week, serving one another with a family worship guide that helps every head of household in this room lead your family in worship. So, this is not just something that happens when we all gather together, but it happens in the context of our homes and in small groups, walking through a small group discussion guide, then together when we come together, having all that tie in to what we're studying.

So, we're going to do radical studying, radical giving, radical giving. We cannot rest from the war with the materialism in our hearts. As soon as we begin to sit back and coast, we will lose that war. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. We need to constantly evaluate where our treasure is, and where our hearts are and in our individual budgets, and our families say, "How can we cap it off and stop getting more and spending more on this, and how can we save and spend as much as we can for the glory of Christ, make sacrifices for the spread of the gospel?"

Then, in our church budget the same thing. In a few weeks, we'll put the church budget before our faith family, and we're crystallizing, finalizing that right now. So, we've been praying for that process but trying to say, "Okay, how can we continue to free up in our budget, sacrifice less stuff for ourselves...more stuff for the glory of Christ in the world?" Then, there are some other creative things that the elders have been praying through about how we can put radical giving into practice, but that will have to wait for another day.

Radical going...going. Here, yes, here. Start with going here. All of us going here, so we're not neglecting Birmingham...in no way neglecting Birmingham. Like, 98 percent of our time spending here. It's what we talk about every year at this time, and then challenging one

another. Is there a week, two, maybe three, but even just a week or a few days when you can go into some context outside of Birmingham proclaiming the gospel. Maybe near Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana coast. Who knows where? Or maybe far...maybe India or Southeast Asia and Africa?

There are, outside in the lobby, already scores of possibilities listed there for you to pray through and think through...plan for. Instead of Christmas gifts this year, to say to people, "Will you help me go to Africa instead of getting yet another tie?" Anyway, there's nothing bad with ties. So, go on short-term looking for opportunities, and then mid-term. Now, this is where opportunities are growing: Spending two months to two years spreading the gospel outside of Birmingham. So, there are so many possibilities here...summer, three months, six months, year, two years.

I want to challenge every single high school student in this faith family to look toward the possibility, at the end of your senior year, spending three months, six months, a year, two years. This is the total official Mormonization of The Church at Brook Hills. We're going, but we're going with, like, the real gospel. We're going to go. We're going to give our lives, and then in college take a semester. Take a summer. Take a year. Take two years in college. When you graduate college, take a semester, summer, year, two years.

So, all kinds of opportunities, but not just mid-term opportunities for the young. What about semi-retired or retired brothers and sisters in this faith family? Do you have a month, two, or three or six or a year or two that you could go? Why not? Why not? Are we willing to put comforts and excuses behind? I'm not saying that there aren't some valid reasons why some cannot go. Don't hear me saying that, but, oh, what it would be like for this retirement thing that a lot of the world knows nothing of, for us to use this blessing that God has given to us in this context for the spread of His gospel, instead of just staying where the gospel is already prevalent.

Then, long-term: Some people deciding, in the days to come, they'll spend 2 percent here and 98 percent somewhere else and spending over two years spreading the gospel outside of Birmingham. We're, in the coming months, going to send the church planting team to North Africa to the Arundo people group, to East Asia to the Hui people. We're going to send the church planting team to North America, the Midwest and Northwest, others to come.

So, many different possibilities are out there. You know, we partner together with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, and basically, an incredible partner for us...with us in going to unreached people groups. The reality is current financial levels at the International Mission Board allow for about 5,000 missionaries...because all of them are fully supported...5,000 missionaries overseas that are supported through the International Mission Board.

What I want us to dream about, though, is what happens when somebody doesn't have to, necessarily, raise full support in order to go. What happens when a businessman can get a job in the Middle East just like he could get a job here, or a teacher can teach in Asia just like they could teach here, and we start to look at creative ways where we can go into other contexts and live in other contexts and live as disciple-makers who are making the gospel known on the front lines in places where many traditional missionaries cannot even go.

When we begin to think like this, we can blow the lid off that 5,000. We're talking many more thousands can go. It's one couple in our faith family, a businessman and a teacher...married...and they say, "We can do business and teach in Asia just like we can

here. They don't know the gospel in this part of Asia, so let's move and teach and do business there."

So, are we willing to open up our lives and say, "We want to spend them for your name's sake," and look at creative ways to go? Let's blow the lid off this thing. Radical going and radical disciple-making. This is the key. This is the key where it all comes to a head, and we're going to talk some about this next year, specifically, in the book of Acts, but this is the goal: Every small group in the church making disciples. Not just having Bible study, not just having get-togethers, making disciples, experiencing the care of biblical community; sharing life with one another and loving one another and serving one another and walking together, and then, expanding the church through biblical mission, leading people to Christ.

That's the purpose of our community. It's the purpose of the Spirit in us. We need to ask the question all across this room. First of all, are you in a small group? If not, then refuse anonymity any longer. Commit your life to some other people to grow with them. They need you. You need them. You say, "Well, I've tried, and the small group, it's not good. It doesn't work well." The reason it doesn't work well is because you're in it, and you're a sinner, and everybody else in there are sinners, and when we share life together, it's a mess, but it's worth it. Jesus died for the kind of community that is brought about in this picture. So, I'm the cause of bad small groups, too. I'm not just saying you, but all of us together, sinners in community with one another, and God has designed our community to be for the spread of the gospel. Is your small group leading people to Christ? If not, we have missed the point.

You say, "Well, we just want to care for one another." When we care for one another in the good, biblical, authentic way, it'll speak volumes to those who don't know Christ, and we show what the gospel looks like in action as we proclaim the gospel, and people will be coming to Christ. Every small group in the church doing that, and then, ultimately, this is the picture: Every member of the church...this is my prayer for every member of The Church at Brook Hills...every member of the church multiplying the gospel to the ends of the earth.

This is the design of the Holy Spirit for your life. No Christian in this room is intended to coast or to sit on the sidelines in this mission; no Christian intended to be on the sidelines. Every follower of Christ, your life is created to multiply the gospel, and it looks different in all of our lives, the different contexts where we live and the settings where we are, but what happens when we're all multiplying the gospel? The gates of hell cannot stop the advancement of this kingdom to the ends of the earth.

So, I want to invite you to stand with me, and I want to lead us in a confession of these realities that we are witnesses of Christ, and so much like last week, we had time where we corporately prayed together. This is going to be a little more responsive, a little more back-and-forth, and so you will see on the screen in a second a line that I'll read, and then it'll say, "Church," and then, Church, you read. Then, there will be a line occasionally that says, "Everyone," and together we're going to confess this. Then, we're going to sing, and then we'll close our time together tonight. So, let me invite you to confess what we believe and who we are as the company of the redeemed together.

Leader: Lord God, you have chosen us from out of the world.

Response: Lord God, you have called us into the fellowship of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Leader: You have commanded us to love one another as you have loved us and
Response: You have commissioned us to go and make disciples of all people in all nations.

Everyone: And to be your witnesses to the end of the earth,
Leader: So, we are witnesses of your eternal existence from before the beginning to after the coming of the new heaven and the new earth.

Response: We are witnesses of your creation, which you found to be very good.
Leader: We are witnesses of the fallen state of humankind, resulting from the sin of Adam and the sin in our own lives.

Response: We are witnesses of your plan to call and redeem a people for your name's sake.
Leader: We are witnesses of your law, given to expose our sin and to exalt your righteousness.

Response: We are witnesses of your prophets calling your people to repentance and telling of your salvation to come.
Everyone: We are witnesses of our Savior, Jesus Christ, your son.

Leader: We are witnesses of His virgin birth and perfect life.
Response: We are witnesses of His parables and miracles.
Leader: We are witnesses of His love, grace, and mercy.

Response: We are witnesses of His compassion, justice, and righteous indignation.
Leader: We are witnesses of His betrayal, arrest, and trial.

Response: We are witnesses of His death on a cross.
Leader: We are witnesses of His burial in a rich man's tomb.
Response: We are witnesses of His resurrection on the third day.
Leader: We are witnesses of His ascension to take His place at your right hand.

Response: We are witnesses of His promise to come and again to judge both the living and the dead.
Leader: We are witnesses of the redemption and reconciliation now made available to us through His sacrifice.
Response: We are witnesses of our salvation by grace through faith.

Leader: We are witnesses of the justification you have reckoned to us.

Response: We are witnesses of the sanctification you are enacting in us.

Everyone: We are witnesses by the power of your Holy Spirit indwelling us.

Leader: We are witnesses of what your Spirit speaks on your behalf.

Response: We are witnesses where your Spirit according to your will.

Leader: We are witnesses here, and we are witnesses there.

Response: We are witnesses among our people and among all peoples.

Leader: We are witnesses to every language.

Response: We are witnesses to every nation.

Everyone: We are witnesses to your glory and honor and praise, Lord God, forever and ever. Amen.

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