



HILL COUNTRY
BIBLE CHURCH | AUSTIN

THE **BIG** PICTURE

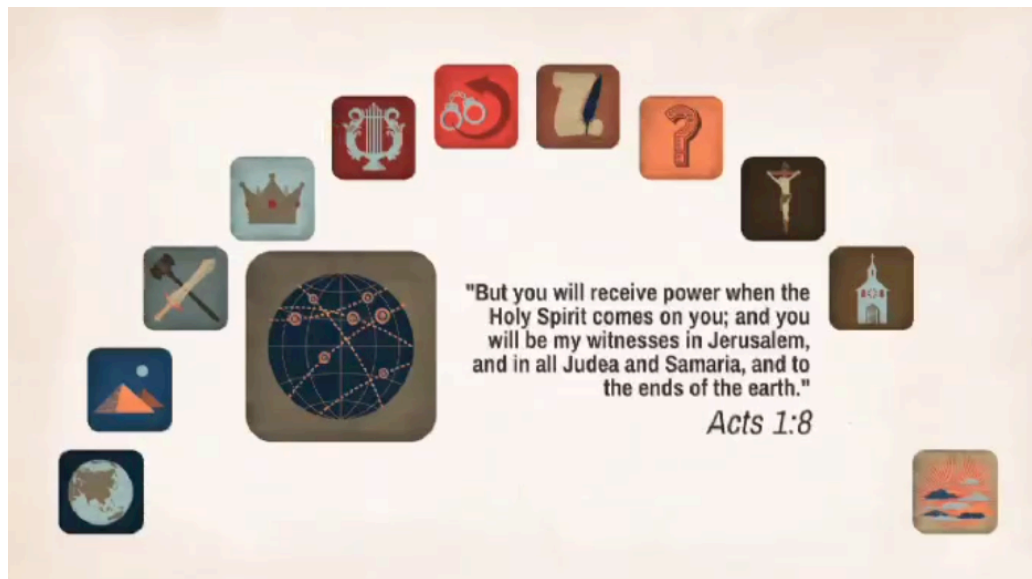


CURRENT SERIES

Mission

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Vincent van Gogh painted *Starry Night*. It's probably his most well known work. He was 37 years old, he was in an insane asylum in Saint-Remy, France. Most of the time we think of Vincent van Gogh as the guy who cut his ear off and painted a self-portrait of it. A guy who was crazy, but what's interesting about



van Gogh is the fact that he actually was raised as a pastor's kid, Dutch Reform church. He took after his dad, went to school, got theologically trained and then went off to a small town in Belgium, a coal-mining town where he was a

missionary. He had great zeal, matter of fact sold everything he had. He lived like the people that he was ministering to, very humble means. He lived in a little hut, slept on a straw floor. The problem was, it wasn't his zeal, it wasn't the fact that he had issues with Jesus or scripture. Matter of fact, he was teaching that we ought to embrace the literal teachings of Jesus Christ. He was going at it and he was seeing some success. The problem with van Gogh was the fact that the church that sent him thought that the way he was living and his zeal was actually a demise for the priesthood. They thought, "This is making us look bad." So if you can be, they fired him from being a missionary. He actually got really disenfranchised with the church. He never became disillusioned with God or Christ, and some of his letters to family and friends he makes it clear that he was passionate about Jesus and God and even the people of God. The problem was the institutional church for him had just - he was just disillusioned. Probably not unlike many of us that come in with hurts and scars and times where we've been feeling like the expectation wasn't met or maybe we were hurt by something said. At the end of his life as he was in this insane asylum, he drew this picture and I'll just read what one biographer had to say about it. I think you'll find this interesting. It says:

"The scene of a quiet hamlet beneath the churning sky of stars was composed from his imagination. For this reason Starry Night depicts the vistas of van Gogh's soul more than the countryside surrounding Saint-Remy, France. The deep indigo of the sky was used by Vincent to represent the infinite presence of God and the heavily bodies are yellow -- van Gogh's color for sacred love. The divine light of the stars is repeated in the village below, every home illuminated with the same yellow warmth. For Vincent, God's loving presence in the heavens was no less real on the earth."

It sounds really good, doesn't it? Watch this.

"But there was one building in van Gogh's imaginary village with no light, no divine presence - the church."

You can go home and take a look at this painting you'll notice that the village is illuminated except for the church, right in the middle. It's all dark. As we think about what we talked about last week, the fact that this church is the Body of Christ, the people of God, the community of the saints, and here we are with this, this unity like no other because we have put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ. And our ability to be a part of this community is based solely on the work of Christ. And we have been given the commission, we've been given a purpose and we've seen these commission statements through The Gospels. We even saw it last week in the very first chapter of Acts where he makes it

clear, “you are to be my witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world.” And we have a call and we have a purpose and it is to be salt and light. It is to be ambassadors of reconciliation. We are to proclaim the excellences of Jesus and help people come out of darkness into the marvelous light of Jesus Christ. Would you agree with me on that? That is our purpose. That is our call. And when it comes to the church we want to make sure that we understand this mission, which brings us to our part in the story today, doesn’t it?

We’ve been talking a lot about this. We’ve been seeing what God has been doing through redemptive history in The Big Picture, in the story, and now it comes – now just our part where we enter in, where we put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ, we are the church, but now the church has something to do and it’s a mission of salt and light. Stephen Spencer says this: “The primary ministries of the community of the Spirit or the church are glorifying the triune God, worshipping him, obeying the great commission to make disciples of all the nations, and thus,” as a result of that, as a result of our worship, as a result of our obedience to The Great Commission, “making disciples we will edify the church and the world would be evangelized.” Isn’t that good? If we will worship in a God-honoring way, if we will be obedient to The Great Commission, if we will do those things, the church will be edified and the nations will get to hear about Jesus Christ. That’s our part.

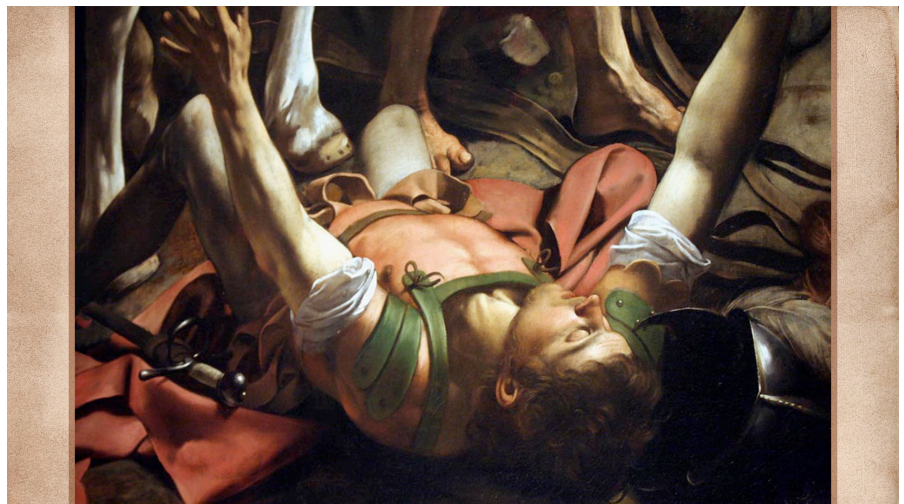
So if you’ve got your Bibles, turn with me to Acts chapter 9. Let’s see if we can run through the New Testament this morning. We’re actually going to cover most of it as we look at Acts and the Epistles, and we see how God is modeling for us this mission, and how he is encouraging and instructing and in challenging us to go forward with this mission. Some 2,000 years later after Jesus Christ, this is our part and our place. As you turn to Acts chapter 9, we left off last week with the church growing. Matter of fact, in Act chapters 6 we see that they needed to bring some people on, these servants. There were six guys chosen and one of them was Stephen. Remember he was stoned. He preached this incredible message, but they drug him out of the city and stoned him. These Godly men wept over him and buried him. And as they were stoning him they laid their coats at the feet of a guy named Saul. Saul in the first part of chapter 8 is going home-to-home dragging people out and putting them into prison. We find out that he is a Roman citizen, he is well trained in Jewish law. He is zealous to keep Judaism pure. He does not want any influence of Jesus Christ in it whatsoever. Matter of fact, he is so zealous about this that he goes to the higher ups and he says, “I’m going from Jerusalem to Damascus, and when I get to Damascus if I find anybody there who professes Jesus Christ, when I get to Damascus if I find anybody on the way who follows Jesus, I’m putting them in prison. Is that okay? I need a letter verifying that

I'm here to – that I mean business. I'm not here just to play around. I'm here to clean up. And if there's anybody in the synagogue we're taking them out." He gets the letter, he heads to Damascus, that's his plan. God has a different plan. Let's start reading in Acts 9:3:

"As he neared" Saul, "neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'"



So Saul was walking along with his entourage, a light from heaven shines out. He's laying on the ground, he's been blinded, he hears Jesus say, "Why are you persecuting me?" The text goes on to tell us that the rest of the crew, they didn't see the light, but they heard something and so Paul's laying there, he's blind, and Jesus tells him, "You need to go to Damascus. I'll tell you what to do from there." Can you imagine that? Can you imagine what that would have been like? Here you are, the very guy and the very teachings of a man you're trying to eliminate from your religion, shows up, blinds you, you're laying



there and he's saying, "Why are you doing this to me?" That was probably a pretty good conversation, don't you think? I mean - and then he doesn't give him any clue. He just says, "Go to Damascus, go to the city. Just stay there. I'll tell you what to do." He stays in the city for three days. He doesn't eat, he doesn't drink, we find out he's actually praying a little bit. I'd be praying too don't you think? I mean I'm sitting back and I'm thinking, "Lord save me." When he gets there there's a guy named Ananias who loves Jesus and God speaks to him and says, "I need you to go find Saul. He'll be locked up praying somewhere. Ananias says, "Whoa, Saul. You mean like killing Christians Saul? You mean like putting people in prison Saul? Thanks but no thanks. I don't think I'm going to do it." The Lord says, "No you are going to do it and this is what I need you to do." Acts 9:15:

"But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.'"

He tells him, "You've got to go and you've got to let him know that this is bigger than just him and the Jews. This is about everybody. This is about everyone who is not ethnic Jew. Everyone. He's going to be the guy to do this. He's going to lead the charge. We need him. So Ananias shows up, lays his hands on him. The Holy Spirit fills Saul, scales fall from his eyes, he's able to see. They baptize him on the spot. Saul goes to preaching to The Gospel. People come to know Jesus. He decides to go back to Jerusalem. He tries to buddy up with the disciples and they're like "Whoa", they have the same response Ananias had. "You're going to kill us, we don't trust you. You're just playing a game." Barnabas luckily comes in and says, "No, this guy's legit, I've heard him teach. He's for real. He's put his faith and trust in Jesus." And from this point forward the rest of Acts is going to follow this man Saul, who we know as Paul because his name is going to change, and he is going to do some incredible work for the sake of The Gospel. If you're looking for the storyline for The Mission Era here it is: **Paul is going to expand the church into the Roman Empire during the next two decades.** Paul is going to expand the church, he's going to present The Gospel. He's going to start churches, these gatherings in all of these cities. He is going to expand it by people putting their faith and trust in Jesus, even in to the Roman Empire. And he's going to give his life to it literally for the next two decades - 20 years. That's what he's going to do. He's going to call these people to put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

Let's see if we can follow along with this on these missionary journeys. Missionary journey #1, Paul is going to spend some time in Galatia. He's going to spend some time in Galatia. He's going to be there roughly around two years.



Acts 13 and 14 tell us the story of this missionary journey. He's going to go with Barnabas. You can tell he doesn't cover a whole lot of territory, but this is his first journey. On his way through he lands in Paphos, and I'll tell you just a little bit about this. He gets there and he starts presenting The Gospel, and the Roman Proconsul says, "I want you to come to me. I want you to teach me about Jesus." As he gets there there's this guy named Elymas who's a sorcerer. He does all kinds of magic and stuff, and as Paul is trying to tell him about Jesus, Elymas shows up and he's trying to persuade the Roman Proconsul not to



believe in Jesus. Paul has it up to here, strikes Elymas blind. He's walking around, he can't see. The proconsul, what do you think he does? He's like, "Um, I'm going with Jesus on this one," right? (congregation laughs) He puts

his faith and trust in Jesus, just one of the many cool stories that happen on

this first missionary journey. Again, two years, Acts 13 and 14, spends his time in Galatia.

Second missionary journey is going to cover Acts 15 to 17. This one's going to last three years. It's going to be primarily in Athens. Paul is going to trek out a



little farther, as you can see. As we think about Acts 15 to 17, probably the most memorable part of this second missionary journey is when he gets to Athens. This is where he's going to spend most of his time. Some educated folks there, the stoics and philosophers are listening to him talk about Jesus Christ. As he talks about him they say, "We need you to come to the Areopagus. We need you to come to these guys and tell them. And sure enough they say, "Teach us about this Jesus, this God." So Paul immediately goes in, one of the most famous passages in Acts as he looks at them and he says, "Hey guys. You've got monuments to every god around. You even have a monument to an unknown god. You guys are hedging your bets just in case you missed one, right? So this is what's going to happen. I'm going to tell you who that god is. He's the God of heaven and earth. He's the creator. He is the one who has put us here, he has ordained our time and our place, and even where we live." And he even has that great quote where he says, "Even your philosophers say it is in Him we live, we move, we have our being." They're amazed by his teaching. Some of them say, "I still have some questions." Others of them reject it, but then there are some in there that put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Pretty impressive, isn't it. Just another one of these times where he goes and begins to proclaim the gospel.

Along the way we have some of these cities named in Acts. We're not real sure what he does there. They're just named. We know he stops in. Others, he'll get there, he finds himself going to the synagogue nearly immediately and preaching to the Jews. Others he finds believers who are already in the city and encourages them and begins to meet with them. Each journey a little different, each city a little different, just to give you a flavor.

The third missionary journey is found in Acts 18 to 21. This is really his time in Asia. He's going to go a little further this time, and as he goes he's going to



spend four years. Three of those years are going to be in one city, Ephesus. He's going to spend three years in Ephesus. The cool part about Ephesus is he shows up, he starts preaching in the synagogue. As he starts preaching in the synagogue some of them embrace him, some of them don't, but they can't help but listen and the crowds get larger and larger. Ephesus is no small city. It's a port city. That means there are people coming and going. It has a large population. There are plenty of people coming in and around. There's actually a college there with a coliseum, the Hall of Tyrannus, which would seat roughly around 25,000 people. They say they had to move from the synagogue to this hall because so many people wanted to hear him preach. He preaches and the text says that it is so compelling and he does such an incredible job, that everyone in the area - listen to me, I'm not exaggerating. Everyone in the area was exposed to The Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's pretty cool, isn't it? I mean that gives good stuff to every man, woman, and child. Paul's preaching,

they're hearing it, people are coming to know Christ. The problem in Ephesus was this. There was a god there that they worshipped named Artemis, female deity, fertility god. There was also a temple there that people would come to, and in the worship of Artemis they would seek out an oracle in the temple. They would want their future told or they would want some meaning of life given to them so they would seek out these oracles. As you can imagine there was a lot of money made on this. There were silversmiths and others in the town, and they would make little trinkets to help with the worship or in honor of the deity of Artemis. And so as Paul was preaching, he's doing this for three years, people are coming to know Jesus and people are talking about Jesus. Guess what they're not talking about is Artemis, and they're not buying the artifacts, they're not buying the little trinkets and the things for worship, and so the silversmiths come together and they say, "You know what? This isn't good, this isn't right. We're losing our livelihood on this guy. We're not going to get paid on this. We can't continue to operate because everybody wants to listen to him and Jesus, and not buy our stuff to our god. And so in order to protect her and us, primarily us, we're going to run this guy out of town." And it's a huge riot that's stirred up. After three years of ministry they drive him out of town. Paul on his way out says, "Whoa guys. Let me speak to the people one more time," and his disciples say "No, if you do you'll die. They will kill you." He has to leave a place he did ministry in for three years and didn't get to say goodbye.

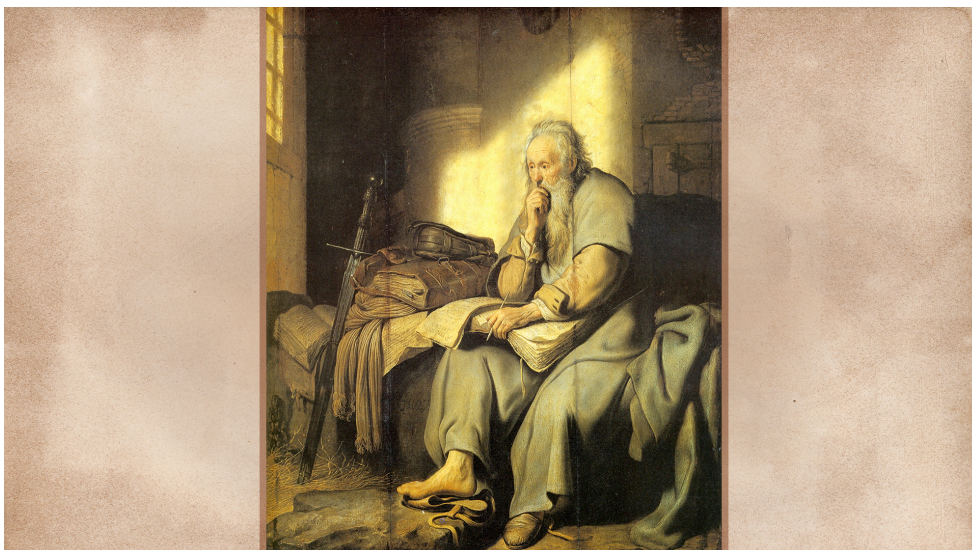
He ends up traveling around on his way back down. He ends up in Troaz, and as he gets there he preaches, it says, all night. He goes on and on and on the text says. That's what you feel about me sometimes, isn't it? Eutychus is sitting there in the window, a third story window and like a good preacher, he puts him to sleep. Eutychus falls backwards three stories and dies on the spot. Paul, I'm assuming feeling bad, right? Runs down, lays his body on top of him and Eutychus comes back to life. Pretty cool, huh? I can't promise you any of that if you fall asleep during sermon. No Paul here. (congregation laughs) There's nothing I can do for you. Just one of the great stories. Can you imagine what it would have been like. Can you imagine traveling with this guy. Can you imagine showing up to a city and having thousands of people show up to hear him preach. Can you imagine the miracles, even when guys are falling asleep during sermons they are brought back to life. I mean can you imagine all that you would have seen. All that was taking place. Man this was just amazing.

As he leaves Ephesus he knows what's going to happen. He heads back to Jerusalem. If he goes back to Jerusalem the plots are clear. He's going to be arrested. They don't like him, they don't like what he is saying. The Jews don't, they don't want anything to do with him. So when he gets to Jerusalem he

knows what's going to take place, and sure enough he's arrested there. And he's going to be taken to Rome. The Roman imprisonment is going to be the rest of the book of Acts from about Acts 22 to Acts 28. As you can see here are all the missionary journeys together. As you look at it, he's covered a lot of ground, lots of places visited, lots of relationships, lots of people put their faith



and trust in Jesus. He's arrested in Jerusalem and he's going to come by way of ship right here to Crete (points to the island of Crete) and a little place off of it called Malta. It's going to be a shipwreck there, but everybody on the crew is going to be safe. He is actually bitten by a viper in Malta. The people think he's a god. The Romans are like, "We've got to get this guy out of here" right? He ends up getting to Rome and he's going to be imprisoned. He's going to be



imprisoned for two years. He's going to be under house arrest, and it's at this point a bulk of the New Testament is written. It's while he's imprisoned in Rome that these letters are going to be written, what we call The

Epistles. These letters to the people that he's ministered to, that he's invested in, who he's seen their lives changed. Leaders who he knows need to step up – at the end of the day basically Paul and the writers of The Epistles are looking at everybody they've poured into and they are saying this -- are you ready? "Tag, you're it. It's now your turn." Paul's saying, "I'm here in, I'm in prison." I mean the great phrase from Philippians, right, the great verse that says, "To live is Christ, to die is gain. I don't know what's going to happen, but you guys had better preach Jesus." I mean that's what he's doing. He's saying, "Tag, you're it." That's what these letters are, which lead us to the next storyline.

The next storyline is not only in mission, but this storyline of The Epistles. **The Epistles are letters to churches and to individuals to encourage them and to instruct them in the Christian faith.** They are letters written to churches and individuals to encourage them and to instruct them in their faith. I mean isn't that what you would do if you were Paul? He's getting word about how people are doing. He's hearing about how some of these folks are staying faithful. He's also getting word about how some of these guys are struggling with issues of sin. Some of it's silly, some of it not. And so he writes these letters along with some other fellas to encourage and instruct them, having them stay the course.

Let me show you The Epistles break down in the New Testament. You have the Pauline Epistles to the churches. These are written to these gatherings, these congregations where he had been. You have Romans, 1st and 2nd Corinthians to the folks in Corinth, Galatians, Ephesians to the folks in Ephesus, Philippians, Colossians and 1st and 2nd Thessalonians. Those are the ones that Paul wrote to

EPISTLES		
PAULINE EPISTLES TO CHURCHES: LETTERS TO LOCAL CHURCHES	PAULINE EPISTLES TO INDIVIDUALS: LETTERS TO INDIVIDUALS AND PASTORS	GENERAL EPISTLES: LETTERS TO THE CHRISTIAN PUBLIC
Romans 1 & 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 & 2 Thessalonians	1 & 2 Timothy Titus Philemon	Hebrews James 1 & 2 Peter 1, 2, & 3 John Jude Revelation

those churches. And then you also have the ones he wrote to individuals. 1st and 2nd Timothy. I mean 1st and 2nd Timothy -- Timothy was on some of these trips with him, and Timothy now is this young guy who's got to carry the torch and lead, and that's where Paul looks at him and says, "Preach The Word." Right? Can you imagine that? That's what he says to him, "Preach The Word." And then Titus, Philemon, and then some general Epistles where Paul's not the author, but you have books like Hebrews and James and Peter writes a couple. John writes three. He also writes the book of Revelation, which Tim's going to talk about next week as we look toward eternity and what's this thing going to look like when it's all wrapped up.

He writes these Epistles, looking at them, encouraging them, instructing them in their Christian faith saying "You're it. Move on. Continue the good work." You look at that and I know you sit back and say, "That's great Russell. You've got some animated maps up there. You've got us a list of The Epistles - boy we're stirred up now," right? Let me see if I can make The Epistles and the life of Paul and his journeys come together for us. Because at the end of the day we're called to be on mission, and when we think about being on mission we need to be instructed and encouraged. We need to understand that we have a part to play in this, and that's what Paul models for us and that's what the writers of these epistles challenge us to do. And they do it in two different ways. The first part of The Epistles are typically doctrine. You typically get doctrine up front. This is who Jesus is, what he accomplished, who God is, some of the characteristics and the attributes of God. Typically The Epistles cover that up front. Then on the tail end you get the big "Therefore, in light of who Jesus is, in light of what he's done in your life, in light of God and his grace and his mercy, this is how you should practically live. This is your duty in light of that." So you have doctrine and practice. You have principles and practice. Unfortunately for most of us, we gravitate to one or the other, don't we? I mean you've got some over here in doctrine and we just want to know about the five points of that and the seven dispensations of this, and doctrine, doctrine, doctrine. And then you've got others over here saying, "Don't bother me with all the heady stuff. Just tell me how I'm supposed to communicate to my wife," right? I'm just practical. Just practical. How do I maintain a budget. And what we learn in The Epistles is this: our practice is derived from who Jesus is and what he has done. What we believe about him, what we believe about God. It's the why for how we live. You gotta have both.

Let me see if I can show it to you in Acts chapter 20. If you've got your Bibles turn over with me, Acts chapter 20. I'm going to go back to that third missionary journey. Paul has just been run out of Ephesus. He can't speak his last words to the guys. He can't speak to the people. He can't do it. He's got to get out really, really quick. So he gets out, he comes back down through and

he's going to stop at Miletus. He wants to go back to Ephesus, but he can't go back to Ephesus because they'll kill him. So he stops at Miletus on his way back to Jerusalem because he knows he's going to be arrested. And as he gets to Miletus he says, "Will you call the elders of Ephesus down to me. I want to talk to them. I want to talk to them, I want to share with them what I didn't get to share with them earlier." Acts 20 starting in verse 17:

"From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, he said to them: 'You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.'"

He looks at them and he says, "You know how I've lived among you guys. I didn't shy away because the plots were coming and I knew they wanted to run me out. And I knew - I know I'm going to get arrested. I know my life has been on the line, but I never hesitated, I didn't stop. This was all Jew or Gentile, it didn't matter. This was all about The Gospel. You guys know I did that, don't you? You know I did it." Then in verse 22 he says:

"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there."

He goes on in verse 25:

"Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again."

He just gets real right there. "Listen guys, this is - I gave you my heart and soul for three years. I gave you everything I had, and I'm not going to get to see you again." So he says in verse 26:

"Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them."

So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears."

He looks at them and he says, "Don't let this thing blow up. Keep it going. Protect the people. They're going to come in, they're going to try to rip you apart. Don't let it happen. Shepherd the people well. And even when folks from within create dissension, stay the course. You know we did this for three years with blood, sweat, and tears." He calls them out to that. In verse 36 when he had said this:

"He knelt down with them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship."

That was it. Can you imagine what that was like? Man the guy who brought The Good News of Jesus Christ to your city and your life has changed. You're never going to see him again. Knowing he's headed for pain, prison, death. So you know how it goes. He goes to Jerusalem, he's arrested, he's taken to Rome. If you're Paul and you're sitting in a home under house arrest don't you think you'd be thinking, "I wonder how those folks at Ephesus are doing?" Do you think he'd think that? Or when somebody comes along and says, "Paul, you're not going to believe it. The folks in Ephesus are knocking it out of the park. They are loving each other, they're staying faithful, they're proclaiming the gospel. Paul, it's good news." Don't you think you'd want to write a letter then too? You don't have to turn there. Just listen to the words of The Epistle Ephesians that Paul writes to them while he's under house arrest. It says:

"For this reason ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers."

He gets word, he hears that they're doing incredible and he says, "Ever since then I have not quit saying thank you God, thank you God, thank you that they're persevering and they're doing exactly what they need to be doing. Thank you for that." And then he goes on and he says:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better."

He says, "It's not over guys. You haven't arrived yet. You're doing great, but I'm asking God that you would know him even better. That you would have

more of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, that you would press into him more and more and more.” And then he says this – ah these famous words:

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.”

Do you hear what he’s saying? He says, “I know what you were like before I showed up. I know who you were. You were walking in the ways of the wicked.”

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.”

You feel the personal touch of that? “I know you. And you were saved by the grace of God and your life has been changed.” And then he goes on to say:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Continue on. Do you see the doctrine and the practice? He says, “Based on what has happened in your life, Jesus Christ rescued you from sin, and it is by grace you have been saved.” That’s doctrine, amen? Then he says what:

“You are created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”

And the rest of Ephesians is therefore, be imitators of God because of what Jesus has done in your life. Isn’t that good? This thing comes to life when we see it as more than just a bunch of rules and regulations, but we see it’s a man who’s passionate about people he’s hung out with for three years. And he says, “This is what Jesus has done in your life and you need to live your life accordingly. And guess what – you’re it. You’re it.” And for the next 2,000 years every letter as we read it is a resounding, “You’re it” to us. You’re it. We’re it. If the gospel of Jesus Christ is going to go forth we’re it. The commission was made to us, the model was set by Paul. The Epistles have been written to encourage and to instruct and to challenge us, and so now here it is. WE’RE IT.

So here's the question, you ready? How are you doing? How are we doing? How are we doing with the mission that we've been given? How are we doing now that we've been tagged as we've embraced the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ, what are we doing - those good works that have been prepared for us. How are you doing?

I laugh when Ryan gets up here and does the announcements and gets us all excited about Backyard Bible Clubs, and the reason we get excited because it's an opportunity to be on mission. And I love the fact that here in a few weeks we're going to start seeing Explore God billboards and radio ads everywhere, and it's because this is another opportunity for join on the mission - citywide. And when we passed out those silly magnets last week that said, "Do you know your neighbor" and write their name in, it's our opportunity to be intentional with the people around us. And there are more and more opportunities than I could ever imagine if I would just be open and ready to jump in and embrace the fact that I'm it until Jesus returns. And you're it until he returns. So I'll ask you one more time - how are you doing? It's our part of the story. Let's live it and do it well.

Father, we love you. I thank you for your word, I thank you for Paul, I thank you for his passion, I thank you for his zeal. I thank you that he would travel all over and gave his life for the sake of The Gospel, the model for us, what it looks like to love you and glorify you with our lives. So Father I also thank you for The Epistles as they challenge us and they encourage us and they remind us of how gracious you are, how big you are, and they instruct us on how to live this life for you, and most importantly so that others will see the life-changing reality of your Son, Jesus Christ. So God I pray that each and every one of us in our hearts right now would answer honestly how we're doing at it, and we would listen to you as you instruct us, as you guide us on how we can better participate in your mission to see every man, woman, and child respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Father that's what we ask. It's in your Son's name we pray, Amen.