

Pointing People to Christ 4
Declaring the Blessings of Obedience
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Well, I read a ridiculous article this week that had been published in the Telegraph of London. It's not unusual to read of ridiculous things in the secular news, particularly when they write about Christianity, which of course, this article was about. They were giving us a swift kick in the shins, all under the guise of trying to help us as Christians. And the secular news source was trying to help us by telling us to stop sharing our faith. The title of the article was simply "Talking About Christianity Could Put People Off." Right there I knew I was dealing with a genius. That was just an amazing revelation. The article went on to say that Christian speaking openly about their faith could do more harm than good when it comes to spreading Christianity.

So I thought OK, so I have to read this article. Right? If I want to spread Christianity, I can't talk about Christianity because when I talk about Christianity it could do more harm than good. So I read it. What is this about? Well, it was an article all about a statistical study that had been done that when they showed the results to church leaders in the UK, they were aghast. They were like, "I can't believe this," or so they claimed. What were these evangelism-stopping numbers all about? Well, here they were. When the gospel was shared by Christians to non-Christians, they reported in this article that 30% of the people who heard the message of the gospel, they had a more negative view of Jesus than before. OK?. 60%, well 59% to be exact, of the people after hearing the gospel presented to them by their Christian friends, they said they don't want any more information. That was it. I've had enough.

Well, that's interesting. I thought, well, let's read the rest of the article, because if you're going to quote all these stats, I'd like to hear what the other numbers were about. And, of course, you've got people in the middle but tell me the positive results. And sure enough, they had to, although it was tucked down later in the article, tell us about the positive responses. So here's what they said: in this statistical study, they said 19% of the people, 19% who heard a Christian share the gospel to them, when they were done said, "I want to know more about Christianity and Christ and the gospel." 19%. 23% ended up leaving that conversation with a more positive view of Christianity.

Now, I thought that's pretty impressive. As a matter of fact, the article trying to get me to be quiet about the gospel did just the opposite when I just took a minute to think about what they were saying. Now just consider anyone trying to present anything to anyone anytime about any product or any concept or any philosophy. You have someone, here are the cold stats of a person who is coming to convince someone, to persuade something of someone, like a salesman trying to sell something. Here are the statistical averages when you're talking about anyone trying to say, "Here, buy this. Get this. Subscribe to this. Be a part of this." Of cold contact sales calls just to have someone be interested enough to get a followup appointment, the stats are 0.5%.

Now think about that, 0.5% when trying to sell a widget or a vacuum cleaner or a yo-yo or whatever it might be, say, "Here, buy this," 0.5% will say, "Well, let's do a followup because I want to learn more about that." And good professional salespeople who are out there trying to peddle whatever it is that they're trying to peddle, if they have professional salespeople following up with leads, I'm talking about leads of people who here they are in the profile, the demographic, that should buy this product. Their conversion rate is only 3%. OK, so here I just read an article

that led with all this 30% ended up with a more negative view, 60%, 59% said, "No, I don't want to hear anymore," and I ended up fixating on the stat that 19% of the people that if you were to open up your mouth and start pointing them to Christ, 19% said, "I'd like a follow up. I'd like to know more." There's not a salesperson in the world who wouldn't want those stats. I mean, that's an amazing response.

As a matter of fact, that was the most motivating thing I could read this week about evangelism. Then I hit this quote, OK, that motivated me to get this sermon that I was preparing to preach to you. Here was a stat. Of course, these are UK stats. But if there's any faint reflection in the O.C., well, then here's something that is even more motivating as to why I should be up this morning preaching this sermon to you. In the article, it said one-third of the people who were polled in this big study, one-third of them, claimed to not know a single practicing Christian who would be aware enough to share the message of the gospel with him. One-third.

Now listen, if there's any reflection of that in our little corner of the world, that means there are tens of thousands of people right here who live around us, that if they were to hear you talk to them this week about Christ, tens of thousands of people, would say, "I want to know more about that." You see that response in the book of Acts. You see a lot of negative responses, you see a lot of people closing the door, 30% percent I'm sure, saying, "I don't even like this Christianity thing." And 60%, there's nothing odd about that, saying, "I don't want to hear any more." But there are some people and that stat is high for the dark culture of the UK saying 19%, one out of five, are going to say, I want to know more. It's an amazing, amazing stat. And I recognize there are a lot of people who haven't even had a single Christian in their sphere of influence speak up and say, I want to tell you about Christianity.

You know, it's funny there are no articles written that read "trying to sell vacuum cleaners could put people off, so stop trying." Which is the whole logic of the article. Right? Trying to sell insurance to people could turn them off. So, hey, all you insurance salesman, stop trying. Right? Trying to sell something, trying to present something, trying to get someone to subscribe to something, it really puts people off. Some people are put off when girls try selling those Girl Scout cookies, so just everyone should stop trying. Man, I'm telling you, we ought to redouble our efforts, particularly when we read stats like that, that you've got people in your sphere of influence that if you just opened up your mouth about the gospel, they would say, "I want to know more."

We've been trying to study how to do that better in the book of Acts. We've come to Chapter 3 when Peter has been preaching a sermon. I've wanted us to get into the sandals of Peter there as he stood in the shade of the colonnade of Solomon, preaching the gospel to thousands of people there. I want to get in his sandals and say I want to learn from how he presented the gospel to his generation. I want to learn what I can to be better at presenting the gospel to them.

Now, you're going to hear this sermon and you're going to say, well, this seems like a complete contradiction to everything you've been telling us for the last, I don't know, 10 weeks. You keep talking about Christianity being all about the then and there. And yet the things that we find here in verses 22 through 26 are all about things that we can apply and see as benefits right here and now. Now, I understand that the pendulum in our day, with all the false teachers, have been trying to get us to think that the whole of Christianity, all of its benefits, all of the advantages are here and now. And I'm trying to swing the pendulum back and say, listen, most of the New

Testament is getting us to focus on the then and there. "Keep your mindset on the things above." "Store up for yourself treasure in heaven." "Our citizenship is in heaven, not here." "The world's crucified to me." I get all of those things and I try to preach those things faithfully from this platform.

But there are things about Christianity. I had one critic last week, just mad that she was hearing all this and like, "Well, you seem to think there's no advantage in the Christian life now." Well, there is. Matter of fact, that's what this message is about. Not because you complained about it, but because it's right here. I want to tell you this is something that you and I can say. We can declare this to our friends and our neighbors and our co-workers and say, you know, if you do become a Christian, you become a follower of Christ, there are some things that you and I are going to be blessed with, we're going to be advantaged by. There are going to be benefits in your life because you follow Christ between here and the kingdom. You get to the kingdom, amazing. You see the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. That is what this is all about in the end. We see the establishment of the kingdom. It ought to be your prayer every day. But right now, in this walk, this path between here and the kingdom, what is there for us? Well, there's plenty.

Here are three things that we see from this passage. I want you to open to it if you're not there already. Acts Chapter 3 beginning in verse 22 as Peter is coming in for a landing. This is the third installment of our look at his sermon after the healing of this paraplegic there on the Temple Mount. He's got an audience and he starts preaching the gospel to them and he ends with these statements by quoting Deuteronomy Chapter 18. Start with me in verse 22 when he quotes Moses and he says, "Moses said," are you with me? Acts 3:22, "The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers." Of course, Moses was a prophet, he went over the mountains, God was going to speak to the people, he speaks to Moses, Moses relays the message to the people.

A mouthpiece. The Hebrew word "Navi" in the Old Testament, it translates "prophet." It means a conduit of information, a mouthpiece, someone who speaks here for God. There's going to be one like that. "You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people." All the inner-testamental expectations of the Messiah, the second temple period expectations, the expectations in Qumran there where they found the Dead Sea Scrolls, they all looked at this passage and say, there is THE prophet who is coming who is going to speak for God. The definitive mouthpiece of God is coming in the likes, at least in the model, in the template of Moses. He's coming, we expect him.

Of course, Peter is applying that to Christ. He says in verse 24, it's not just Moses the prophet, "All of the prophets," verse 24, "who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days." What days are we talking about? We going to have to look closely at that. "And you," he's speaking there to this first-century Jewish group of people on the Temple Mount, "you are sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'In your offspring,'" which we don't see as easily in English, but in Greek here in the New Testament, clearly a singular, also in Hebrew in the Old Testament, in Genesis Chapter 12 and 15 and 18 and 26, wherever we see this repeated, the Abrahamic covenant, "your offspring," singular, as Paul makes a big case of in the book of Galatians. "In your offspring," there's one coming, "shall all the families of the earth be blessed. God, having raised up his servant."

That's starting to show a little of the double entendre of verse 22. Raise them up. Raise them up in time. Raise them up in history. Raise them up in time and space. But he was also raised from the dead. These are the terms we used to speak of his resurrection. Well, he raised them up in time and space, and he raised him up from the dead as the verification of who he was and what he came to accomplish. Well, he "sent him to you first." Who is he speaking to? The men of Israel. That's how the sermon started. And thankfully, though, we're in the queue. Right? Romans Chapter 1 verse 16. "Not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe, to the Jew first," we get that, "and then also to the Greek," to the non-Jew. And so we can apply this to ourselves. What is he blessing them with, who respond rightly to this prophet and blessing us with? "To bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

There are some good things here, even though the gravity of verse 23 may be staring you in the face like, "Wow, I'm going to be destroyed if I don't listen to the prophet." I want to look at verse 22 and recognize, even in contrast to verse 23, to realize that God sends a prophet that is so definitive, so objective, so authoritative, that if you don't listen to him, you're cut off from the people. Such a clear voice from God that we have some asset in that, some benefit in that, that you should be so acquainted with, so thoroughly acquainted with, and appreciate so much that when you share the gospel with people, you can't help to speak about this aspect of the Christian life. And what is that? We have THE Prophet. That's an important thing to recognize. An important thing to realize.

If you're taking notes, and I wish that you would, jot this down. John Chapter 7. John Chapter 7, particularly verse 40. You can look at the surrounding verses, verses 37-43. Jesus is there on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, this little camping pilgrimage feast they had in Jerusalem. We're told in history that the high priest would take a golden jar, go get water out of the pool of Siloam, bring it up on the final day of the feast, and he would pour this out as they recited Isaiah Chapter 12 verse 3, about the wells of salvation, the water that comes from the wells of salvation. "With joy you shall draw water from the wells of salvation." The high priest would dump this out. When that was going on on the last day of the feast, Jesus stands up and he says, "If you're thirsty, come to me and drink." Interesting. He says that "if you believe in me, your heart's going to overflow with a river of living water."

Well, with all that kind of talk you're talking about all these symbols and ceremonies and even these Levitical kinds of practices that the priests and high priests would do on these great feast days, you're looking and saying all that stuff, "It's me. Look at me." In response to that verse 40 it says this. "Some of the people said, 'This really is THE Prophet,'" the Prophet. Now, a lot of times you read the gospels and you'll see this: Jesus, he's a prophet. Who do you make him out to be? He's a prophet. He's a prophet. Like one of the prophets. Like, I don't know, he might even be like Elijah. Right? But there are passages like this, and our translators try to help us really underscore that definite article "the" with a capital "P." People said and our English translations say, this is really the Prophet, capital "P."

What are they talking about? Their talking about what everyone in Qumran was expecting, everyone in the second temple period was expecting, everyone who thought about the messianic promises. We know we're going to have a great king who sits on the throne of David and the extent of his government will know no end. But he's also not just going to be a king. He's going to be THE Prophet. He's going to come in this template of Moses who could go up to a mountain and get information from God and bring it to us. There's going to be a definitive prophet. Were there

prophets? A lot. Yeah. Was Isaiah a prophet? Of course he was. Malachi? Of course. They were prophets. They were mouthpieces of God. But there's THE Prophet.

Even in the gospel of John, we recognize people were waiting for and expecting THE final word from God. Which, by the way, is one of the reasons in the prolog of the book, that you memorized as a kid, was so important. "In the beginning, was the Word of God." Revelation Chapter 19, he comes back, it says, at the Battle of Armageddon, and he has a robe that is dipped in blood and his name is called the Word of God. What is that? Here's the authoritative Word of God. Hebrews Chapter 1. Right? "God has spoken through the prophets, many times, many ways, but in these last days, he has spoken to us in his Son." He is the definitive declaration of God's information to mankind. He's THE Prophet.

He's so much the authoritative prophet that if you disregard his information, you disregard at your own peril. You will, as it says in this passage, you'll be "destroyed from your people." Now, again, it seems like, well, that's a heavy-handed tactic in evangelism, if you're trying to teach us that. I'm just trying to glean from this passage what we have is what the world does not have. What we have, the minute you step into the community of believers, the minute you repent and put your trust in Christ, you now have what we call in the parlance of modern evangelicals, we call it the Lordship of Christ. The Lord, the king, the boss, the chief, the principal, the commander, the one in charge. And do you know what the commanders do? They command. They have information. They give information.

You can wake up in the morning and read through the authoritative voice of the apostles that he appointed to codify his message. You can read on your phone and scroll through your iPad information that comes about the final word, the faith, this salvation "that is once for all delivered to the saints." He has spoken through the final word of his Son, THE Prophet. It would not be a bad thing to spend time in Colossians Chapter 1. He is the "head of all things." "In him, the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form." When Jesus speaks, he speaks authoritatively. He speaks the truth.

Jesus in his evangelism in Matthew Chapter 9, he's about to teach the people. It says he's moved in his heart, in his gut, really, his "splanchnon," in his bowels. He's moved in his bowels by compassion because he looked at the people and he saw them as "harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd." Do you know what your neighbors and co-workers are that are non-Christians? That's the picture. They're like sheep. They don't have a clear, authoritative voice. Jesus comes on the scene in John Chapter 10 and he says, "I am the good shepherd. My sheep hear my voice and they follow me." Do you know what you're doing here this morning? If you are a genuine, converted, redeemed, regenerate Christian, you are here... the reason you come to a Bible-teaching church is you want to know what the definitive propositionally, objective, truthful Word of God says for your life so that you can go out this week and you can be conformed to the image of Christ, so you can learn what God has to say, what heaven says.

I am not here as the source of your information. I am here as a conduit of the information to try to take the text of Scripture and give it understanding and meaning so that you can understand what God says to you. It's all bound up in his Son who's spoken, and he speaks for God. That is something your non-Christian friends and neighbors don't have. Do you know what they have? The Bible says they're like sheep without a shepherd and they're baaaa-baaaa to each other. About, well, "I think this: baaa-baaa, I think that: baaa-baaa." That's the world, the den of

confusion. "My opinion, your opinion, my opinion, your opinion, whatever. I guess your truth, my truth, I want to state my truth." It's nonsense.

In the ivory towers of the universities, they're sitting around, they're meditating on their navel, writing books, and they're sitting in philosophy classes trying to figure out what the world is all about, which is often an existential nihilism and meaningless. Why? Because they don't have the truth. As Francis Schaffer said, "He is there," God is there and he's revealed himself, he's spoken. God has given us divine truth. And it comes to a head in biblical revelatory history through the mouthpiece of Christ. Christ is God in bodily form and he speaks, the head of the Church. Not your pastor, not the leaders, not the smart guys in the church. Christ is the head of the Church. He directs the church by giving you the information. You open up your phone, you open up your Bible and you read it. You have propositional objective truth in a den and sea of confusion of our day filled with relativism when everyone's sitting around going "your opinion, my opinion, their opinion, the strong man's opinion."

We're living in a world where you become helpless and harassed like sheep without a shepherd until you hear his voice. And I'm not talking about some subjective experience, although there is a subjective element to coming to Christ. I'm talking about the fact you can get up in the morning and read propositional, objective statements and say, here is what God says. If you haven't read Psalm 119 lately you ought to read it. Even from an Old Testament perspective when they didn't have half of the truth that we have revealed to us in Christ, as they look forward to it they fell deeply in love with the Word of God because God had spoken and Moses said, "You ain't heard nothing yet. If you read Genesis through Deuteronomy, that's great. I'm the prophet. But there's a Prophet coming. The Lord is going to raise up for you a prophet like me among your brothers and you shall listen to him in whatever he says."

Number one on your outline, that brings you great confidence. It settles your life. It is the foundation for our brains. It brings us peace and consolation to know truth. You ought to "Declare the Confidence of Lordship." Let's just put it that way. Number one. You are under the Lordship of Christ, which means he's in charge. He's the owner. He's the chief. He's the boss. He's the commander. And when he speaks, we listen to whatever he says. If he defines marriage this way, then that's the way we define it. Then you got people who say, "Well, I don't think that's right. I took this poll and I saw this thing and I heard this professor and I heard this philosophy and I heard this lecture at the Airport Hilton, and I just think this is the truth now." It doesn't matter what people say.

What matters is for the sheep that were created by his hand that he has made us and not ourselves, is that we hear the voice of the shepherd and he's codified that, he's put it in black and white, he's provided it to us. If you don't have a good doctrine of bibliology, you don't understand the veracity of the truth of Scripture, if you don't have a high view of the Bible, then it's time for us to focus on that. We got a whole class at the Compass Bible Institute going on right now, just about that one topic. We'd better become well versed in understanding that God has spoken. "He's spoken to us in these last days by his Son, who he has appointed heir of all things," to keep quoting Hebrews Chapter 1. He's the exact representation of the nature of God, and he speaks.

There's great confidence in listening to the chief shepherd. You get to do that. I get to do it. And Jesus said, when you don't have it, you are like sheep without a shepherd. I love the way Peter, who, of course, is the one preaching this sermon, says later in his life in First Peter Chapter 2

verse 25, "You were straying like sheep," you were helpless and harassed like sheep, "but now you've returned to the shepherd," I love this next word, "and the overseer of your souls," the "Episkopos" of your souls, the one who manages it. That's a word from the Senate, in the Latin Senate, you know, in Rome that the leaders, they are in charge. And in this case, he is in charge. He's the shepherd of your life and he speaks.

I don't know. Maybe you don't appreciate that for the way that you ought to, because... I don't know why. But think about how good it is to have a definitive word from God. To know that we can evaluate anything, whether it's someone who's pitching Hinduism to us or someone who's pitching existentialism to us or someone who's pitching, you know, Karl Marx to us or someone who's pitching People magazine to us. I can take everything and weigh it against the truth of God's word.

Declare the confidence of the Lordship, the Lord will raise up a "prophet like me from among your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he says. And it shall be every soul that does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people." I want to align myself under the lordship, the clear teaching and authoritative information that comes from him, not relativism, not opinions, not guessing. Let that be a motivation for your evangelism, because it was for Christ. He saw the crowds. He had compassion. They were "harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd." And then he says to his disciples, you know, "the harvest is plentiful." Why? Because there are a lot of people who don't have this. "Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest," that he might thrust forth, "he might send out laborers into his field."

And I'm just telling you this. You go out and you start talking about this Christ. Yeah, you're going to get 59% of the people if those stats in the UK hold up here. They're going to go, "Nah, I don't want any more information." But you'll have others who go, "I need to know more about that," at a rate of 19%. Those guys were so dumb they didn't know what they were doing with that article, motivating us to share the gospel. Thank you for the article. Thank you for the stats. Thanks for the polling. Your writer had no idea what he was doing. But man, that is motivating to me. I want to talk about the Prophet Christ, the mouthpiece. Our great high priest, our great king, but also our great Prophet.

Back to our texts. Act Chapter 3 verse 24. There were other prophets, small "p." Even though there's not a capital "P" in verse 3. That's the idea. THE Prophet. That Prophet. Well, then there are the other prophets, "All the prophets," Moses included, "who spoke from Samuel to those who came after him, they also proclaimed these days." Now I emphasize that when to read the text initially "these days." What days are we talking about? Well, it says here in verse 25, "You are sons of the prophets." What in the world does that mean? "And of the covenant," so you're sons of the covenant, "that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham," quoting now, Genesis 12, "and in your offspring," singular, "shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

So the prophets are talking about "these days." Now, what days has he been talking about in this sermon? He's been talking about the fact that heaven's got to receive Christ, sitting at the right hand of the Father, until we finish this task, which was tasked in Chapter 1 of "being witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth," as it's put in Romans, the Time of the Gentiles can be fulfilled. Then we're going to deal with that kingdom that God promised. But all of that picture there of the work being done, we're waiting for him to be dispatched so he can restore all things, the times of refreshing can come. And yeah, we get a little taste of that now, which is what

this sermon is about. But the idea is we know that's future. The glories of Christ, as he said in his earthly ministry, I'm going to "come on the clouds in glory" with the mighty angels. That's coming. And that's certainly a part of what we are excited about. But in this passage, it starts in verse 22, the immediate context is hey, he's raised up that prophet. He's brought into time and space of the Christ. And people were concerned about the coming of Christ.

Matter of fact, the prophecies were about even the timing of the coming of Christ. And they said, I can't wait to see the Christ. What have we seen about the Christ? We've seen him suffer. We've seen him be that fulfillment of Isaiah 53, "a man of sorrows acquainted with grief." We've seen him be crushed as a guilt offering so that he can make intercession for us. But what we're waiting for is the coming kingdom. But you know what is really good to know now, even how he suffered and died as the lamb of God to take away my sins so that I can sit here this morning knowing I'm not going to hell to suffer for the sins that I deserve to suffer for, because he took those upon himself. I can sit here on this side of the first coming of Christ, like the Galatians were, Paul said, you know, "Before your eyes, Christ was crucified." Well, they lived in Asia Minor, in modern-day Turkey. Guess what? None of them saw that with their own eyes. But what was he talking about? The preaching, it was clear. Here was the preaching. He talked about the historical events of Christ dying before these two criminals on a cross outside the gates of Jerusalem. Guess what? That's vivid detail that you and I get to see. And you know what? "We become sons of the prophet." In what sense? We get to see the advantage and the benefit of what the prophets have said. I know that's the interpretation because of the next line, "and sons of the covenant."

Another word for covenant, by the way, is testament. Right? A promise. Matter of fact, we have in our Bibles, the Old Testament and the New Testament. You might go to a lawyer, a probate lawyer and talk about a last will and testament. One thing that would be really good, I guess, I suppose if you had a really rich man with a last will and testament, a promise, a covenant about what he's going to do with his estate and his assets, it would be good if you were the son. If you were the son, you would inherit the covenant. You'd inherit all of the things that come in that promise. The last will and testament would be giving all of the resources to you. You are sons of the covenant.

The covenant was made and what was the covenant? It starts in Genesis 12 about blessing, God giving his favor, his love, his forgiveness to people. And you know what? He says, you're sons of the covenant. You get to inherit the benefits of the promise. And you're sons of the prophets. What does that mean? We get to go out and prophesy? That's not the picture here. The picture here is you get to have the fulfillment of those prophecies playing out before your eyes. All of them? Half of them.

Keep your finger here and turn with me to First Peter Chapter 1. First Peter Chapter 1. I want to tell you, this is the picture of the prophetic promises heading toward the people in the first-century. Though they are first in line, those Jews who sat there on the Temple Mount hearing this message or stood there, we are second in line. Christ, of course, had an intention not just to be the Messiah of Israel, but to be the Lord of all the Gentiles as well. He's saving people from every tongue, tribe and nation whose favor is resting on them because they repented, put their trust in him, and he's calling them to that repentance and that trust.

The prophets couldn't wait to see that happen. It came in two installments. I understand that. We're sitting between this valley here of reaching Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the

earth, between the first coming and the second coming, between the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, and the reigning king who comes in Isaiah Chapters 54 to 66. That picture of God's reigning kingdom, the glories that are coming. It says in verse 10, drop down to verse 10 in First Peter Chapter 1, "Concerning the salvation," what God is doing in his grace, "the prophets prophesied about the grace that was to be yours." Who is the recipient of grace? I am. I'm not even a descendant of Abraham, but I get to experience the favor and the love and the blessing and the forgiveness of my transgressions in the Jewish Messiah who died as the lamb of God. All of that's given to me.

The prophets of the Old Testament who prophesied about it, they "searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person..." Is it this guy? Is it this guy? Is that this guy? Is it John the Baptist? And time... "What person or time the Spirit of Christ in them," which is so great. The Spirit of Christ. This Spirit of Christ, the coming Messiah in these prophets, moving them to speak and to write these things. "Was indicating when he predicted," want to know the person and the time, "when he predicted," the Spirit of Christ did, "the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories."

Oh, I know that we see a little taste of that on the Mount of Transfiguration. We see a little bit of that in the Ascension. But the glories of Christ are the ones that Jesus kept talking about. "I'm going to come in the clouds in glory," just like Daniel Chapter 7 says. All the people now will be subjected to the king, all the nations of the earth will bring their blessings into Jerusalem. That picture of his coming reign, the glories of Christ and the sufferings of Christ. We didn't know it would be separated by 2,000 years. The prophets saw the peaks of those prophetic mountains together in Scripture so often, sometimes separated by verses and sometimes by chapters in the Old Testament.

But those prophets kept saying, "Where's the Christ? Where's the Christ? When's he going to come and suffer for our sins? When is he going to come and reign and rule?" "It was revealed to them," verse 12, "that they were serving not themselves..." They came to realize "It is not in our day. It's not in our time." God put a big 400-year gap between the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament fulfillment, "but serving you." You, first century Christians in this case, "in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preach the good news," the gracious news, the salvation of verse 10, the grace of verse 10, "to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven." You have now become recipients. Do we see the glories of Christ reigning and ruling? No, we don't see that yet. But we saw the sufferings of Christ. So we become sons of the prophets, at least the first half of those prophecies. We get to see those and experience those and know that we're qualified for the inheritance that is to come. "Things into which," what a mind-boggling phrase here, "angels long to look."

It's one thing, a bunch of sinners, hoping for, praying for, repenting to see the grace and glory of God rest upon us, the salvation of lost sinners. Angels don't have that. They know their demonic brothers who have fallen, and there's no redemption for them. Christ didn't shed his blood for the demons. I mean, you can imagine that must be part of their head-scratching inquiry into Christ dying. The eternal Christ of the Son of God is now dying on a cross in Jerusalem. That's a mind-boggling thing for them. Not to mention that I think some of the prophecies in Scripture are even mind-boggling, not just for us, but for the angelic class. I mean, I believe that. The idea of them even searching and inquiring and thinking this through, they're finite creatures, you know. All of that the Bible says, has come to fruition in your day. All of it? No. Part of it. Half of it. You're now

sons of the prophetic message. You inherit the prophetic realities and the fruition of those promises. The most important promise, of course, was the one that was introduced in Genesis 12, that you would be blessed, that God would favor you and not be your enemy. That your hostilities would be removed because of Christ's cross.

Paul talked about being grafted into this olive tree, a wild branch. Like the arborist kind of carefully pinning that branch on that tree and making sure that it had the sap and the internal provision of all that it needed to bear fruit. That picture of grafting in. Here is God taking a promise to his nation where he sets his love on those people and then he says I'm going to take Gentiles and I'm going to graft them into this thing. The inverse of that is when Paul looks back at your life and my life and he says, you know, we were at one time, just to quote Ephesians Chapter 2 verse 12, "separated from the Messiah, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world," Ephesians 2:12.

That's the description of your non-Christian neighbors and friends and co-workers. If you're a Christian here, you have that and can turn it into this. You become sons of the prophetic word. You become sons of the covenant. You get to have God's covenant favor rest on you and you can invert all that. You get to not be separated from Christ. You get to not be alienated from the promises to Israel. You get to not be a stranger of the covenants of promise. You get to have hope and you get to have God, even while you're in this world. That's an amazing promise. That's a sense of belonging. That's a sense of amazing security. Let's put it that way, number two, you need to "Declare the Security of Belonging." If you want to make that statement longer, the "belonging to God's covenant promises," to belonging to God's people, to God's work within this world, of him setting his favor, his love and his forgiveness on people.

Our world doesn't have that. I say security because there's nothing better in Scripture than to look at how God talks about that. Do you remember that passage I quoted in John Chapter 10, when Jesus says, "I'm the good shepherd, my sheep hear my voice and they follow me"? Do you know the next line? "I give them eternal life and no one will snatch them out of my hand." The great thing about joining this team, becoming rightly associated with the good shepherd, is it not only do you have this great connection to the shepherd, you hear his voice and you follow it, the Lordship of Christ. That's good to have clarity now. I know what truth is. I can follow that truth. But yet belonging to this to this flock, this fold, and he says, "No one's going to come and steal you away."

It said in Chapter 6 earlier in John 6, he said, I think it was verse 37, he said, "All that the Father gives me I will never cast out." You want to talk about security, here is a picture of security of being part of that flock. As though you were going to doubt that, because you're not of the lineage of Abraham, I love the fact that that great good shepherd dialog in John 10 adds this: "I have sheep of another fold." Right? I got to go get them too. I'm going to call them, too. They're going to hear my voice and follow as well. What's he talking about there? They're not just of Israel. All the families of the earth will be blessed. Not all without exception, but all without distinction. Not every last one, every last individual, but certainly all those from every tongue, tribe and nation. And we sit here, most of us, without any DNA from Abraham in our blood. You and I sit here, most of us, as Gentiles, having all of the favor and forgiveness and covenant promises resting on us as recipients of that. You belong to God. I love the fact that both in John 6 and John 10, we hear

this. "I'm not going to cast you out and no one can take you away from this fold. You're part of my flock now."

Do you know what non-Christians have? Fear, worry, anxiety, uncertainty. Do you know what we're offering to our non-Christian world? Follow Christ. After we deal with the cataclysmic issues of heaven and hell and where you're headed when you meet your creator, let's talk about the here and now. Let's talk about the fact that you have definitive objective truth. You're no longer a relativist and resting on the opinion of Oprah and Tony Robbins or whatever. You now can have the truth. Now you can be a part of God's covenant people. You get to be a part of God's promise and you're never going to be cast out. Even flocks, this flock, these sheep of another fold that aren't descendants of Abraham.

Are you in this thing? I hope so. I hope you've seen evidence of God's Spirit invading your life. Jot this reference down, Ephesians Chapter 1 verse 13. You want that security and the thing that we want to offer to our non-Christian neighbors and friends, trust in Christ, follow Christ, repent of your sins. You will have God's Spirit. And here's what it says about God's Spirit in Ephesians Chapter 1 verse 13, it says, "When you heard the truth of the gospel, the gospel of your salvation, and," you trusted him, "you believed in him, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it." I mean, I'm sorry. Those are the kinds of things every human heart at the depths of where we are, we long for that security.

Your non-Christian friends are uncertain. They may cover it up with a lot of activity. They may whistle through the graveyard and say they're not worried about anything, including death. But the Bible says they're enslaved to the terrors of death. They don't have a connection with God. To read it again from Ephesians Chapter 2, "They're separated from Christ Messiah, they're alienated from the commonwealth," the good things that God does for his people, "strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." That's the reality. You can change all of that, from a human perspective, we're changing all that by offering them something that even if you start to talk about it, even the stats in UK, 19% will say, "I want to hear more about that," and you have a chance to drive home the message of being grafted into God's covenant work in this world. Declare the securities of belonging. What a good thing this is.

Jesus said my Father, he's the farmer, I'm the vine, you're the branches. You abide in me, connect to me, connect with me, man, there you go, you're going to bear fruit. But apart from me, you can do nothing. Your non-Christian neighbors are running around doing whatever they're doing and really the Bible would say that is nothing. And if you don't know what that means, read the book of Ecclesiastes. They're moving around on the hamster wheel of this world. The Bible says it's vanity, vanity, all is vanity, they're chasing after the wind. But in that all their activity there is something meaningful, even in this last verse here, that "God has raised up his servant and sent him to you first," back to our passage, Acts Chapter 3 verse 26, "to bless you" right now, he's going to bless you, "by turning every one of you from your wickedness." There's a great echo of the word repentance -- turning. "He turns you from your wickedness."

Now, here's something about becoming a Christian. You repent. We've looked at that message in this sermon. I'm turning from my idolatry and from clinging to my life of independence and all these things. I'm turning now away from those things to cling to the Lord, the king, the boss. I put my trust in him to save me. I now get the blessing that God can lay on me because my sin has been expiated, it's been removed by the cross. Now I have repented and guess what happens? I

find out within, you know, two hours of becoming a Christian I still got a sin problem. I still struggle with the desires of my flesh that wage war against my soul. And you know what I then have to realize? I got to repent again. Not this whole life repentance but now I'm convicted of this one thing that just happened at 2:30 in the afternoon. I have to repent of this. I see wickedness cropping up in my life and now I'm turning from that.

I just love the connection between blessing you and turning from your wickedness. I just need to see that connection. There is a blessing from turning from wickedness, of the wholesale turning of repentance and becoming a Christian. But practically lived out, next month, next year and ten years from now, if Christ doesn't come back and you're still alive, you will have a life of repenting over and over and over again of a variety of issues. Hopefully every time you repent of something, you're turning progressively away from wickedness. Hopefully you're seeing progress in your sanctification, being set apart to be increasingly righteous and more like Christ in your practice. You're never going to be absolutely perfect, I understand that. But you're becoming more and more conform to the image of Christ, I trust, and as you are, guess what you're doing? You're being blessed in that. How are you being blessed?

Wickedness, the Bible says, when there's wickedness in your life, you're always going to reap what you sow. Paul wrote to the Galatians, he said God is not mocked in that you always reap what you sow. If you sow to the flesh, you reap from the flesh. Do you know that word? What comes next? Corruption. Nine times in the Greek New Testament that word shows up "corruption." And it's as bad as it sounds. Right? Bad things like rust on metal. It's like mildew on leather. It's just bad. It starts to corrupt and just mess things up. The Bible also speaks in terms of death. It's a life of death. What we're doing is trying to fight that battle, and you fight it moment by moment, issue by issue with repentance.

The word repentance as an imperative verb shows up more in the New Testament toward Christians than it does toward non-Christians. Now we all start the Christian life by repenting of our sins, but our Christian life then continues on and I say, I've got to repent of that, I need to repent of that. And tomorrow I've got to repent of that. I thought I repented of that yesterday. I got repent of that. So I'm turning from those things and as I turn and see any progress in the Christian life, I have the blessing of the removing of myself from the sowing and reaping that we see of sowing to the flesh, reaping corruption.

Before we write this point down, turn with me, if you would, to again Peter's writings in First Peter Chapter 3. Peter preached this message and, of course, he wrote these two letters in First and Second Peter. He says something here about the Christian life, about the life of sanctification. If you want to know how we are blessed by turning from wickedness, he gets very practical in this passage. First Peter Chapter 3, are you with me on this one? Verse 9. Are you following along here? 3:9.

He says, listen, "Don't repay evil for evil." You can have a lot of bad things happen. A lot of people do bad things to you, "or reviling for reviling." You get a lot of people reviling you. Just don't respond in kind. "But on the contrary," this is what Jesus taught us. Right? Can you bless those who curse you? Can you pray for those who hate you, your enemies? "Bless them." And then he gets into this discussion, "For to this you were called," I mean, you bless others who don't deserve it. You know, "you are called to obtain a blessing." Oh, I know, I know. We're going to die and be in the blessed kingdom and all good then. No, no, no. Here and now. Look at how he

unfolds and unpacks this, verse 10, "For," he quotes the Old Testament, "whoever desires to love life and see good days," get to really love life, which is not what happens in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Life on the treadmill, doing a thing, chasing after the wind. Its meaningless, hopeless. It doesn't end in anything. But getting really connected to the Lordship of Christ, being part of the body of Christ, being forgiven and being blessed in this community that we have, now we start growing in our sanctification and we get blessed.

How? Well, by "keeping your tongue from evil." You say, "Well, I just did that yesterday." Well, repent of that. Repent. Then maybe tomorrow when you're tempted, maybe you'll see some advantage. You'll see you getting better as God is improving your Christian life as you're walking in these good works "and your lips from speaking evil." You want to love life and see good days? Do you want to lay in bed at night and go, "This is good, God is good, these days are good"? Well, then, keep your lips from speaking deceit. You say, "Well, yeah, but I did that last week." Well repent, repent.

"And let him turn away," there again is the reflection of repentance, "from evil and do good." Are you following what he's doing here? If you want to love life and see good days, I'd say that's a blessed life. Right? I'm not talking about prosperity gospel, yacht in the harbor, I'll get everything I want, I'll always be healed of every sickness. I'm talking about you even if you're in a Philippian jail having been whipped, you can sing a song with your buddy Silas at midnight, a hymn to God, and you can have the kind of blessed life where you know you've got a clear conscience, there's no guilt, you're doing the will of God. And I just got to say, don't you see that that is increased the more you do things like this next phase, "you seek peace and pursue it."

Look at the things we've said. Keep your tongue from evil. Keep your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil. Do good. Seek peace and pursue it. "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous." And here we're talking about a relative sanctification. I mean, there's a kind of blessing that comes with that, God's favor, that comes with that. Not in a positional sense of being his child, but being a child who's well-pleasing to him. "And his ears are open to their prayers. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." He's not even happy with his kids when they do evil. Hebrews 12 says he'll discipline them. That's never fun.

But here's the good news. Your life of repentance brings you this protection, this safeguard. Picture the trajectory of your life as a non-Christian. Now picture your life as a Christian with all this struggle against sin and you can look and say, you know what? I got more good days and I love my life more because I see this increasing sanctification and I can reap the benefits. If you look at love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, all the fruit of the spirit coming out in my life, man, that's a much better life than a non-Christian life.

And you know, your non-Christian neighbors may look like they have a great life, but I want you to think about your life when you get to go to bed with a clear conscience, the life of repentance as you see God cleansing you from the unrighteous of your sinful decisions yesterday. And you sit there without the guilt and the shame and carrying the burden of your sin. Not only that, you see progressive conquering of sin in your life. Just trace those two trajectories. What would your life look like if you were not a Christian? If you continue to reap the corruption of your sinful, fleshly decisions? I'm just saying, yeah, we're not perfect, but you see the trajectory of you becoming more and more like Christ, that's a life that I'd rather have than that life. That protects me from

all kinds of things. Does it make me healthy, wealthy and wise? Not necessarily. But man, it's a much better life, it's better days, it's good days, it's loving life.

Number three and your outline, let's declare that to our non-Christian friends and neighbors. "Declare the Protection of Repentance." There's a great protection. There's a great safeguard. There's a great blessing, number three, of repentance. And I don't mean the repentance that started the Christian life. I'm talking about the repentance that characterizes every day of the Christian life. In my prayer list, I hope you have something like this on your prayer list. It just needs to pop up on my phone. Repent. Right? Confess your sins. It says there in First John Chapter 1, "If we say we have no sins were deceiving ourselves." But the verse in front of that says if we walk in the light as he is in light, we have fellowship with one another and he cleanses us," present tense, he cleanses us, ongoing tense, "of all sin."

Think about that. That's the picture of my life being a life of repentance. Because the next verse: "If we say we're without sin, we're kidding ourselves. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful, he is righteous to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we're without sin? Lying." Even as Christians, I understand we struggle with sin. But the grace of God in your life allows you, I trust, to see that, the conviction of that, and you repent of that. And what is that repentance saving you from? It is a safeguard and a protection from all kinds of things. We ought to say that to our non-Christian neighbors. Yeah, I'm not saying your life's going to be better in the sense that you'll have every whim and wish that you ever wanted. But I can tell you this, it'll a better life than the life you would have if you continue to reap to the flesh, because all you get from the flesh is corruption.

God raised up a prophet, THE Prophet, and you can have confidence looking to that objective truth. We get to have in our lives the benefits of being sons of those prophetic promises and the covenant promises of God. We get the blessing of turning from our wickedness, not just in the whole of our lives, but every day in our lives. God wanted that kind of life to be so settled into your heart that you have no doubts about it. Look at those words: confidence, security and protection. God talked about the promise that he made to Abraham in Hebrews Chapter 6. He says, I wanted the heirs of the promise to be so sure, to be so certain that that's why I made such a big deal about it with Abraham and I confirmed it on an oath. I made the promise and then I put an oath on it so that by two unchangeable things, a promise and an oath, insofar as it's impossible for God to lie, there's a third foundational unspoken reality. We don't even have to say it. Of course, God can't lie.

He wanted all those who have fled to take refuge in Christ to have that strong encouragement. If you've experienced that, and you need to focus on that sometimes so that you can take great benefit, that blessing and say, you know what non-Christians, we have something good to offer. I don't want you to feel like a vacuum salesman, but I do want you to recognize there are some great things about giving our lives to Christ and they happen here and now.

Do they pale by comparison? Yeah, they do. You're right. They pale by comparison. The thing that is far better is that if you got nothing in this life, here's what you get. The day you die, you stand before the great king who made you. And he does not say "depart from me. I never knew you." He says, "enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Here is God giving you the blessing you don't deserve and that's what our Christian life is all about. I want you to declare Lordship, belonging and repentance. I want you to declare the benefit of

confidence and security and protection. But the thing that goes without saying in this sermon is the foundation is that you're declaring that Christ has died for us. The covenant promise is ours because his blood has been spilt and he held up a cup when he was celebrating the Passover, and he said, this is the cup, this blood of my covenant. That's the picture here. It was the fruit of the vine. And he knew that. And he said that. But here is the cup and it represents this picture of the covenant promise I have made with you.

So it's appropriate for us when we think about the benefits of our Christianity to end our time together with a celebration of the Lord's Supper. So I'm going to ask the ushers to come forward and I want you, if you are a Christian, to take that cup and to take that bread. I want you to think about what Christians have been doing for 2,000 years. Here's how Paul started this by saying to the Corinthians, you were declaring the Lord's death until he comes. That's the ultimate thing I want to tell my non-Christian neighbors and friends. But first, I want to spend time making sure that that is a reality for you. Has there been genuine faith transferred from yourself to Christ? Have you genuinely repented of your life of independence and sin?

Let's celebrate the fact that that was purchased for us, not by our good works, but by the finished work of Christ, and then let us think about all the good things we have now. The Lordship of Christ, the clarity of his prophetic truth, belonging in the family of God, the covenant people, the repentance that brings protection in our lives every day. I want you to cogitate on that while, of course, you do what I've ended this sermon with, repentance. I want you to think of your life. Maybe it's not on your prayer list and it should be, but now it's time for me to remind you to repent. Something in your life that you're dealing with, repent. Tell God that you are ready to put it under his hand to say, "I submit. I confess, I recognize it, and I ask you to fix this." That kind of contrition that leads to repentance is the best thing you can do this morning.

So as you spend time with the Lord, spend time talking privately, quietly to yourself as you pray to the Lord. These are words that only you and the Lord can hear but you tell him what you need to tell him about your life and then celebrate the forgiveness that we're celebrating by declaring his death through the participation in the cup and the bread. We're going to play a little bit here so that you can spend some time talking to God. I'm going to give you a few minutes. So I'll come back up when we've all been served, after you've prayed for a while and we will take these elements together.

In the Old Testament, they spoke metaphorically of a book that God kept records in, several of them. But one of them Moses referred to as the Book of Life. It was understood as a book that if you were living, you were in the book and if you died, you were taken out of the book. At one point, Moses, in his frustration said, if I can't have this, then just blot me out of the Book of Life. Blot me out of your book.

Much like a lot of things that were referred to in the Old Testament, whether it was the Promised Land or manna or the life that they were looking for, the promise always looked to something greater, something more perfect, something eternal. So in the New Testament, you start to see, particularly in the book of Revelation, a discussion about the Lamb's Book of Life. Stop being so much concerned about death. It became the concern about the second death. The focus of Revelation stopped to be the focus just on life, but eternal life. Life after you die. God and his progressive revelation gave us more and more a sense of what really matters is what's going to

happen to you when you stand before your king, the creator, and he's going to look to see whether your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

The promise of God five times in the book of Revelation, the picture is that you need to make sure your name is there. There comes a day when people have to answer for their sins through some kind of response from a just God and the Bible says the only people who are in that line are the people whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life. The good news about what God says even early on to the churches, in the first three chapters of the book is that those who are Christians have their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life and it will never be blotted out, unlike the Old Testament where your name is blotted out and it's like Moses' life comes to an end, the second life, the eternal life, that God offers, it never ends. And your name is never blotted out of it. Luke 15 when the Bible says what really matters ultimately is whether or not you're repentant. If you repent, the angels in heaven rejoice, there's rejoicing in the presence of God when one sinner repents.

That, of course, speaks to these eternal realities that we base our faith on that were purchased through the blood and body of Christ. We have that to offer to people, but I don't want to forget the kinds of things that we've seen illustrated through Peter's preaching this morning of how good it is right now to be a Christian. We've got more enemies than the non-Christians do. I get that. We got more problems. We have trouble fitting in here. Our citizenship is in another place, we're sojourners, we're wayfarers, we're aliens and strangers here to use biblical terms. But, man, it's good to have definitive truth from God. It's great to be a part of the covenant people where God's favor rests on us. It is so good to be the people who have in our lives an increasing pathway of life where we're not reaping from the flesh corruption.

Share that, understand it. Experience that in your own thinking so that you can communicate it clearly to the non-Christians around you. It would be a dreadful mistake to have people think it's about the here and now only, because what really matters is their name written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Their name there makes all the difference in the world. Christ purchased that through his blood. He's also purchased every other benefit we have by taking all of our sins out of the way on the cross. If your trust is there, you understand these issues that we've talked about here regarding your salvation, then we invite you with thanksgiving to eat this bread and drink this cup.

God, to be associated with you is so essential. There could be nothing more important than us to have peace with our maker, and we know that you sent your Son, because of your goodness and your kindness and your favorable disposition toward us to forgive us of our sins. So, God, we rejoice this morning that we have good news to offer to our world. This salvation, this grace that was brought to us that the prophets inquired about, and they searched it out so carefully and they realized that they were serving us. We get to see it. We got to experience it, and we get to have the benefits of it here and now.

So God, we celebrate that hope in a world that doesn't have any. We celebrate the security in a world that so uneasy and so unsettled. We celebrate the definitive clear truth that we proclaim to our neighbors without apology in a world filled with opinions. God, we're grateful for every step of progress we make in our sanctification. We have so far to go, obviously. Our sin grieves us, but we're grateful for forgiveness. We're grateful even for the fresh start of walking out of this

building, being in step with your Spirit. So refresh us this morning with the benefits of Christianity and open our mouths this week to talk about it.

In Jesus name. Amen.