



## **“They Glorified the Word of the Lord”**

*Series: Acts -- Worldwide Witness to the Worth of Jesus Christ*

Acts 13:13-52

May 11, 2014

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This sermon this morning is going to be different than what we’re used to on a Sunday. I do not have an elaborate outline for you to write in your journals. Instead, what we are going to do is to walk through this text a verse or three at a time and draw out some important principles from it as we go. And I am going to tell you at the very outset that this will be among the most important sermons that I ever preach to you.

Last week, we looked at the Antioch church’s mission to the Gentiles on the island of Cyprus, the faithfulness and spiritual sensitivity and submission of that church to the Lord, their humble obedience to God to set apart Paul and Barnabas for missionary work, the divine pursuit, in Cyprus, of a man named Sergius Paulus, the dramatic confrontation between the Jewish false prophet, Bar-Jesus, the son of Satan, and Paul the Apostle, Paul the man under authority, Paul a son, by faith, of the Living God. It was a powerful text and it sets the stage for this text this morning. Pick it up with me in verse 13.

“Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.” (Acts 13:13–14, ESV) Their work in Cyprus finished, Paul and his companions – notice the subtle shift from Barnabas and Saul, to Paul as the leader of the group – leave Paphos and go to Perga, a city in what is now modern day Turkey. But as they were going, John Mark decides to leave and return to Jerusalem. Now, there has been a lot of ink spilled trying to figure out why that is. Some say that it is because the leadership changed hands and the John Mark, a cousin to Barnabas, got his nose out of joint. Some speculate that he was at odds with Paul over the direction of the mission. Those things, of course, are possible. These guys were not plastic saints; they had the same passions and issues that we have. While those things are entirely possible, I think the underlying issue is obvious. John Mark was not set apart for this mission by

the Holy Spirit. God did not choose him; Barnabas chose to take him along, but he was not set apart for this mission and so the rigors and the difficulties these missionaries faced caused him to head for home.

I say that both because of what was written in the last week's text, but also because of what is not said in this text. Luke simply says that Paul and Barnabas went on from Perga to Antioch in Pisidia. It seems like a simple sentence but it is not small statement. That trip was filled with dangers and hardship. To get to Pisidian Antioch from Perga was a difficult and dangerous trip, covering a hundred miles through the sheer rock cliffs of the Taurus mountains, over the turbulent and often flooded rivers of Cestrus and Eurymedon, and involving danger from the marauding bands of robbers and brigands that infested the region. When Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:26 -- "on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers...danger in the wilderness" (2 Corinthians 11:26, ESV) – he could very well have been speaking of this trip. On top of that, as we learn from his letter to the Galatians, Paul was suffering from some kind of sickness, most commentators believing that it was malaria. This was a difficult assignment.

I want us to see something very important here. The advance of the gospel does not happen apart from personal sacrifice and hardship. There was a very real personal cost to Paul. The gospel doesn't advance through people who are chiefly concerned with making a life of personal comfort, a life that is hermetically sealed and ordered for maximum ease and stability. It does not advance by way of isolationism or self-protection, by people who are inwardly and personally focused, or through responsibility-excusing vilification of the lost. God has not saved us for such a worthless life. What drove Paul is what should drive all of us to make Christ and His gospel known – he saw himself as a debtor to God's grace and he was compelled that his life would not be a waste of that grace. He would write later in the book of Romans: "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." (Romans 1:14–16, ESV) Paul saw himself as under obligation to the Lord first and then as a result of His salvation, to all people, to proclaim the saving power of the gospel. He was determined that his life would not be worthless to the Kingdom, that God's grace would not be wasted upon Him and so he gladly embraced the cost required to make Christ known. So Paul goes to Pisidian Antioch, and, as was his practice, he goes to the synagogue first.

Luke continues in verse 15: “After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.”” (Acts 13:15, ESV) Paul, most likely, was dressed as a Rabbi, and so, as was the custom, the rulers of the synagogue offered Paul the opportunity to give a word of encouragement and he instead decided to preach.

Of course he did, and why? Because Paul understood the vital importance of preaching and he knew that preaching was the very thing for which he had been made. I’ve said this before and I will say it again, preaching is the ordained means by which God speaks to His people, the primary way in which God communicates to the men and women whom He has made. I am not saying that God cannot speak to us through the Bible as we read it – not at all – but what I am saying is this -- The ordained means by which God communicates is through an appointed mediator, through a faithful preacher. It has been true throughout all of time. God speaks through mediators. That’s how God works. We see it in Israel’s history. Moses, then Joshua, through the Judges, through the prophets, ultimately through His Son, then after Jesus through His chosen Apostles and Spirit-inspired writers like Luke for instance, all the way down to our present time – God speaks through faithful preachers today as they faithfully preach the truth that God has given to us in the Word of the Lord, but make no mistake, God is a God who speaks through His men, called by His Spirit to the task.

Paul understood that. He embraced his responsibility. He would say: “For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16, ESV) In Romans he writes: “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Romans 10:14, ESV) Then to Timothy, he wrote: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.” (2 Timothy 4:1–4, ESV) Paul knew the vital need for preaching.

The so-called experts of our age would disagree. Of all the methods of presenting information and getting people to understand it and believe it – standing before people and preaching – so

the experts say – is about the least effective. So, people argue that we should have PowerPoints and all kinds of visuals and interactive dialogue and preachers who sit on chairs and act like we are all just sitting around a coffee table at Starbucks. Can I tell you that the reason why so many people play down the worth of preaching, ignore the worth of preaching and say so many foolish things about preaching is because they have never heard true preaching or if they have, they take it for granted.

You know why we preach? Because the preacher represents Christ to the people. It is the primary method by which God saves sinners; it is the primary means of grace by which the church is edified and strengthened and made ready to be presented to God as mature in Christ. Preaching is truth on fire, expository exultation -- not a lecture or a talk, not a dialogue and through it the power of God is revealed unto the salvation of souls. Through preaching, men and women are brought face to face with the glory and majesty and holiness of God, they hear the truth of their sinful condition; they are commanded to seek God and his saving grace through Jesus Christ and to walk in obedience to Him as Lord. True preaching magnifies the authority of God over the human soul, asserts Christ's Lordship over the church, and is the means by which the Holy Spirit works conversion and the sanctification of the people of God. True preaching produces people that are consumed with the glory of God; true preaching is the source of true power in the church; it prepares souls to stand before the judgment seat of Christ; it fills souls with a fire for evangelism; it produces God-honoring worship. True preaching does all these things – but here is the thing, the inescapable thing – only...ONLY if it is received and believed and acted upon-- “not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13, ESV) And that truth will be boldly played out before our eyes in this text.

Paul embraces the opportunity to preach and his sermon is pure gold. This synagogue crowd would have had, with Paul, the common ground of the OT and so Paul compresses hundreds of years of Israel's history into a few short, pithy statements. Just listen to it and I'll point some things out. “So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: “Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen.” (Acts 13:16, ESV) it's a mixed group, Jews and Gentile God-fearers. “The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet.” (Acts 13:17–20, ESV) Notice a couple of things. One, the subject of Israel's history is not the people but God. God is the subject of almost every verb in Paul's

sermon. He is the prime mover. He is the central figure of the story, not them. Two, this sermon centers on God's grace – God's grace to chose their fathers and make them a nation out of nothing; God's grace to make Israel a great nation and to deliver them from the oppression of Egypt by His mighty power; God's grace to put up with their rebelliousness and dull hearts in the wilderness and not cast them away; God's grace to give them an inheritance they did not earn and did not deserve; God's grace to give them judges to rescue them in their serial disobedience; God's grace to give them Samuel, and through him to give to them his word. God's grace, not Israel's merit (they had none) was at the heart of the nation's history.

But as Paul infers, they were a thickheaded bunch. "Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years." (Acts 13:21, ESV) Not content to have God as king, they wanted to have a king like all the other nations, so God gave them one just like them, the perfect representative of their own hearts – proud, self-willed, self-exalting, disobedient, self-promoting, and self-justifying – but at least he looked good.

God first gave them what they wanted and then He gave them what they needed and what His redemptive plan demanded. "And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.'" (Acts 13:22, ESV) God found in David a man after His own heart, not a perfect man, not a sinless man by any measure, but a man who loved God, who desired God, who responded to the Word of the Lord, to His correction, to His truth.

Then he says: "Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised." (Acts 13:23, ESV) Do you see what Paul does right there? He turns everything that these Jews would have known on its head. He tells them that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the fulfillment and the climax of Israel's history, the reason that they existed at all. He is the climax, the great goal of Israel's history and existence, the central figure of it all. And they missed it.

"Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'" (Acts 13:24–25, ESV) They missed it despite the fact that John the Baptist, a man widely respected

and honored by the Jews, warned them of His coming, pointed to Him as the Messiah, the Saving King of God. Paul continues:

““Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.” (Acts 13:26–29, ESV) The Jews missed Jesus and had Him put to death because their hearts were hardened and sin-darkened. They had heard the prophets read to them – every week in the Synagogue – and rather than recognize who Christ was, rather than confess their need for a Savior, rather than fall on their faces in worship of Christ, rather than receiving the testimony of the Lord, they instead became the instrument through whom Jesus would be crucified and the prophecies would be fulfilled. They had Jesus killed and put Him in the grave. In their rebelliousness they crucified the King of Glory but, even then, it was all according to the eternal plan of God. The rebelliousness of men cannot overcome the gracious, saving purpose of God. They rejected Jesus:

“But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, “ ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’” (Acts 13:30–33, ESV) Paul points to Jesus’ resurrection as the undeniable proof that He is the Son of God, the anointed Savior, the true King of Israel and the fulfillment of God’s promise to redeem His people. And then notice what he does. He uses three texts to identify Jesus. He points first to this quotation from Psalm 2, a coronation Psalm, speaking of the Messiah, God the Father saying to Him: “The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”” (Psalm 2:7–9, ESV) The point is that Jesus is God’s King.

Then we read: “And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, “ ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’” (Acts 13:34, ESV) That is a quotation from Isaiah 55:3 and the point of that quotation is that the

blessings of David – what Isaiah describes as pardon for sin, compassion from God, eternal life – they are only sure, that is “guaranteed” because Christ has risen from the dead never to die again. For that reason, Jesus can be the mediator of the blessings of God. And then, we read:

“Therefore he says also in another psalm, “ ‘You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’” (Acts 13:35, ESV) The quotation from Psalm 16 points to this truth -- that unlike David before Him, Jesus could not be held by the grave because He is the Lord, the Lord of life and the Lord of all Glory. “For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, but he whom God raised up did not see corruption.” (Acts 13:36–37, ESV) That was beyond dispute. So here we have Paul presenting Jesus as the culmination of Israel’s history, presenting Him as God’s King, God’s mediator of the blessings of David, and the Lord over all and then Paul comes to his clincher in this sermon.

“Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.” (Acts 13:38–39, ESV) Paul says, “Through this man, this glorious One, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed, because it is only through him that everyone who believes is freed.” The literal translation is “justified” and I’m not sure why they didn’t translate it that way – through Jesus all who believe, are justified from everything from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. In other words, Jesus did what the Law, because of our sinfulness could never do. The law cannot justify anyone. All it can do is confirm someone as a sinner, point out the failure of any man to keep it. But Jesus did what the law could never do by doing two things: living a perfect, righteous, law-fulfilling life and then offering Himself as the sacrifice for our sins. He lived a life of perfect merit that He gives to all who trust in Him and He bears away the penalty of our transgression, our willful breaking of the Law, by His death on the tree. He does this so that we, who are by nature sinners, can be justified – declared by God to be “not guilty” and be clothed with a perfect righteousness not our own, not that we earned, but that Christ earned through His obedience to the Law. And the only way to receive this forgiveness is by faith. As Paul would later say in Romans: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For

we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.” (Romans 3:23–28, ESV) This is astonishingly good news, amazing. To the Jews who thought all their lives that way of eternal life was through obedience to the Law, this seemed too good to be true. Paul anticipates their objections and he answers them with a quote from the prophet Habakkuk, saying:

“Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about: “ ‘Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.’ ”” (Acts 13:40–41, ESV) Paul acknowledges that this message is amazing, astonishing, outlandish even, but his point in quoting from Habakkuk is this: “This message may seem outlandish, but no more than the promise that God once made through God’s Habakkuk that He would bring judgment upon Judah by using the Chaldeans as the instrument of their destruction unless they repented. They scoffed in Habakkuk’s day but God proved true. Do not make the same mistake they made and scoff at these words, because God will be proved true through Christ.” The only thing that remained was to see how these Jews and God-fearers would respond.

“As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.” (Acts 13:42–43, ESV) The initial response seems positive. The people were begging to hear the message again, begging for Paul to preach these words to them once again on the following Sabbath. Their initial response to the Word of the Lord was good. In fact, some even followed after Paul and Barnabas, confessing faith in the message, in response to which Paul and Barnabas urged them to continue in the grace of God, to continue believing in the message and being open to the instruction of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, but it did not last.

Here we come to the climax of the story. “The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.” (Acts 13:44–45, ESV) On the following Sabbath, people came out of everywhere to hear Paul preach, to hear him expound the Word of the Lord. But the Jews, who seemed to be so receptive the week before were now filled with jealousy – jealousy that Gentiles, according to this message, could be saved through faith in Christ and not through becoming a Jew and keeping the Law – and they were filled with



hostility, reviling Paul, speaking evil of him, insulting and scorning him, and opposing his message. What a difference a week makes!

“And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “ ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ”” (Acts 13:46–47, ESV) These people, the Jews, were the recipients of every advantage, every blessing possible, as Paul describes in Romans 9. “They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.” (Romans 9:4–5, ESV) But they refused to be moved by the Word of the Lord. They judged themselves unworthy of eternal life – notice that, they judged themselves; it was their fault, not God’s, their responsibility. They thrust the Word of God aside, holding it in contempt, and what did God do? God took His Word away from them. He took the light away and gave it to the Gentiles, to those whom the Jews viewed as wicked filthy pagans. These people, who would have viewed themselves and called themselves the chosen people of God, who would have thought of themselves as just fine spiritually, showed themselves, proved themselves, by their rejection of the Word of God, by their contempt for the Word of the Lord to be outside the covenant of grace.

They rejected the Word, held it in contempt and God took it away. That is what God does. He does it to peoples, to nations; He does it to churches, removing their lampstand. God takes His word away and He gives it to those who will treasure and love it.

God will not have His word thrust aside, will not have His word held in contempt and that is a serious issue to be considered. What are the signs that a people, a privileged people, these Jews, a church, a professing Christian is holding the Word of the Lord in contempt? One of the greatest symptoms is boredom, disengagement from the preaching of the Word. It shows itself in the willingness to allow the Word to tickle the conscience but not penetrate the soul and change the heart. It reveals itself in coldness in worship and mechanical prayer or the absence of it. Contempt for the Word of the Lord, thrusting it aside, shows itself when someone no longer treasures the preaching of the Word but sees it as a common thing, ho-hum and mundane and not a gift from God, reducing the preaching of the Word of the Lord to something on the level of blogs or instagram or some other social media. Surely that doesn’t happen –

yes, it does. Contempt for the Word of the Lord puts being a follower of Christ is on the same level as following someone in social media – like, like, like, little comment, but no real responsiveness to the Word, just passivity, seeing it as entertainment. It shows itself in an apathetic heart and a servantless soul, in a merely academic faith that stays in our heads and doesn't get to the heart. Contempt for the Word of the Lord, thrusting it aside, is evidenced by the proliferation of habitual sin and excuse making and self-justification. Contempt for the Word of the Lord, thrusting it aside is seen in self-centeredness, self-absorption, in the unwillingness to receive correction. It shows itself in small horizons and satisfaction in the status quo, an unwillingness to be moved. It shows itself in a loss of wonder in Christ, the loss of vibrant joy, and in a lack of urgency for the lost. And it shows itself in offense to the message and a hardened heart toward the messenger. It is a serious, serious sin, one that Israel, as a whole, was guilty of. The contrast between these privileged people and the Gentiles could not be more dramatic.

“And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.” (Acts 13:48–49, ESV) The Gentiles response to the Word of the Lord was a complete 180 from the Jews. Rather than hold the Word of the Lord in contempt, the Gentiles, those who were appointed by God to eternal life – believed and they glorified the Word of the Lord and I just love that phrase. It speaks of a love and hunger for the truth of God, an excitement and a delight in it, a sense of earnestness to hear it and obey it and make it known – and they did throughout the whole. It speaks of knowing the worth of the Word of the Lord, His gospel, His Christ. It speaks of a sense of never being able to get enough of the Word, treasuring it as the gift it is. Just loving the truth.

It was that love that was missing from the Jews. Instead, Luke says: “But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.” (Acts 13:50, ESV) That's no surprise. A thrusting aside of the Word of the Lord will always eventually result in the expulsion of the messenger, either passively by just refusing to hear and marginalizing the messenger, or aggressively by running him off, or even sanctimoniously as took place here. The so-called devout people, the leading people, the self-righteous, the holier than thou, and spiritually self-satisfied drove Paul and Barnabas out of the district.

As for them, Luke records their response – no weeping, no pining, no hurt feelings or self-pity. Instead the text says: “But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium.” (Acts 13:51, ESV) They shook the dust from their feet, an act of judgment with which the Jews were familiar – a declaration that they were no better than pagans and under the condemnation of God, and they took the Word Elsewhere as God commanded them. They did it because they were under the command and the authority of God.

As for those who believed, Luke gives this little postscript: “And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 13:52, ESV) The Word of the Lord, received by faith, had done its work.

Now, I told you at the beginning of this sermon that this would be among the most important sermons that I would preach to you and now, after hearing all that I have said, you may be wondering about that. It doesn't seem that earth shattering, but it is and I'll tell you why. It is because, when I look upon our congregation as a whole, I see a growing contempt for the Word of the Lord. I see a creeping coldness to the Word of the Lord in this body. I see a growing boredom with the gospel. And it is not just me. I spoke to the elders Wednesday night about this and to a man they whole-heartedly agreed. But they didn't just point their fingers at the congregation; they pointed them at themselves first. We are not moved by the Word of the Lord as we once were, not hungry for God like we once were.

Before you ignore this, before you self-justify, before you try to give yourself an out, before you make a case for yourself, hear me out. I see this contempt in the blank faces, in the vacant stares, the closed mouths when we sing, in the lack of tears and brokenness, the lack of desperation. We have grown too comfortable and satisfied. I see it in the distractedness, in the rustle and moving around in the congregation during some of the most sensitive times of the sermon. I see it in the inconsistent attendance at worship, the lack of urgency to come to prayer meeting, the avoidance of Sunday School. I see it in the lack of passion for the lost. I see it in the way that where once I was one among many at the altar, now, at best, I am one among a few, or I'm alone, pleading with God that he would make the words that I have just spoken on His behalf resonate with you and move your hearts and make you desperate for Him again, that you would not miss the visitation of God.

And don't fall into the trap of saying that the altar call is just an invention of men. Just walking down an aisle, repeating after the preacher and being pronounced saved is, but not kneeling at the altar, not humbling yourself without any regard for what anyone else might think, not crying out in humility, not crying out in desperation, not pleading with God to save your soul, or to change your heart, or to answer your prayer, or to kill sin in you, or to save your child, or to heal your soul. That kind a response is an evidence of real need.

I see in the way that people, in this body, who once spoke of Christ with such passion and ardor, now are silent or speak of other things – movies and bands and YouTube videos, their Christian liberties, sports and recreation, trivial things lacking any real weight – speaking of them with the passion once reserved for Christ. Through neglect, through familiarity, through a lack of cherishing this good gift from God, but instead, seeing it as an entitlement, seeing it like a box of cookies in the pantry that are always there if I want to eat some, always there for the taking if we feel the need, we have become cold to the Word of the Lord and because we have we have become cold to Christ.

Few want to admit that it is true of them, and it isn't true of all – praise God, there are still some with fresh, upturned, eager faces, but that number is dwindling and it is being replaced by a haze, by a creeping fog, by disinterest and distractedness. I am not saying this because I do not love you or I want to scold you or get a pound of flesh from you or because I am angry or because I need some affirmation. Perish the thought. I am saying this because I love you and I want you to glorify the Word of the Lord and I want you to delight, really delight, in and be hungry for Christ. I want life for you. In all honesty I can tell you beloved, that never, even when the opposition in this church to the gospel was at its worst did I ever feel like it was on me to make you feel something, like it was on me to stir up your deadness, like it was on me to make you feel something toward Christ – but that is exactly what I am feeling now and I cannot do it. I can't.

Please, don't just ignore what I am saying, or chalk it up to "Nick being really fired up today." That so minimizes the gravity of this moment. I would only ask you to answer these questions and I think if you are honest you will see the truth: How is the Word of the Lord, the gospel, stirring and stoking a greater degree of love for, devotion to, and hunger for Christ and filling your mind with the wonder of Him? How is the Word of the Lord capturing your mind and your will and your heart, fueling holy desire and passionate worship in you? How is the Word of the Lord driving you to your knees in earnest and desperate prayer? How is the Word of the Lord

deepening your faith in Christ? How is the Word of the Lord growing in you a greater degree of the fear of the Lord? How is the Word of the Lord compelling your fight against sin and your pursuit of holiness and killing your excuses? How is the Word of the Lord causing you to be amazed and astonished at the greatness of God's glory and mercy and to live in light of it? How is the Word of the Lord mastering you and commanding the way you live? How is the Word of the Lord transforming your home? How is the Word of the Lord making you to see yourself as the slave of Christ, your life is not your own? How is the Word of the Lord changing your desires, what you love, what you long for most? How is the Word of the Lord making you hungry for more of the Word of the Lord? Now does the Word of the Lord affect what you speak of and what you treasure? How is it causing you to want more and more of God and of His Christ and less of you? How is the Word of the Lord compelling you to servanthood, to be less self-conscious and to be more God-conscious?

How is the Word of the Lord changing the way that you view the church, giving you a vision for this body beyond your current social network? How is it giving you a view for the body and for the Kingdom and emboldening and strengthening you for warfare, the very real warfare, that we are in and compelling you to be invested in something greater than yourself? How is the Word the Lord commanding your life and demanding that you get outside of yourself and transforming your priorities from self-serving, to God glorifying, changing the way that you view your life and who it belongs to? How is the Word of the Lord through you impacting the community beyond your Christian social circle? How is the Word of Lord driving you to engage and pursue the lost in this world? How is it creating in you an active, obvious, daily gratitude for God's grace to you and making you a debtor to the lost? How is the Word of the Lord more than a commodity that you consume and is instead that what consumes you? This is what it means to glorify the Word of the Lord, to be moved by the Word of the Lord with effect.

Beloved, if we are honest, the truth is plain and it is painful –as a body the Word of Lord does not move us as it once did. It just doesn't. It doesn't have the hold on us that it once did. That may make some of you angry with me for saying so but I'm not going to preach in fear of your disapproval. The stakes are too high. We are not alive to the Word of the Lord as we once were. And time is not going to fix it. It is not just some cycle that we are going through. It isn't going to just fix itself.

But listen, I want you to know something – I am not discouraged; I am not hopeless; I'm not pining over what we have lost. Not at all. Instead I am boldly hopeful. You know why? Because I trust God. I trust His heart and His love for us. I trust that He really does desire to see His church fruitful and faithful and tender hearted and sensitive to His Word and Spirit, treasuring Christ and treasuring the gospel and I really trust that He will respond to us if we will only admit the reality of our current state, if we will admit the truth that we have not loved His Word as we should, and so have not loved Him like we should. I am thankful that God has been so gracious – so, so gracious, to show us from whence we have fallen and that He has provided for us the way back. “If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time.” (2 Chronicles 7:14–16, ESV) That was the promise to Israel, to the people of God, but it is also a promise to God's people of every age.

We must humble ourselves and pray, and fast even, seek God's face and turn from the complacency that has plagued us. We must repent of our pride, repent of our arrogance to be in the presence of God and treat His word like nothing, repent of flagging affections for Christ and minimal thoughts of Him. We must repent of taking God's Word for granted, repent for leaving undone what Scripture clearly commands, repent of low and familiar views of God and of His Christ. We must repent and ask God to pour out His Spirit on us and grant us a thorough and cleansing repentance, a humbling repentance, a desperately dependant repentance and ask Him to give to us a heart and a Spirit that loves Him supremely and fervently and loves His Word to us more than we ever have before. That is what it is going to take. Scripture says: “For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” (Psalm 51:16–17, ESV) We must repent of our contempt, our thrusting aside of the Word of the Lord, before He takes it away. Because He will. He did it to Israel; He did it to churches in history, taking away their lampstands, and it is only foolish presumption to think that He would not do it to us. I am calling you today to examine your heart, to examine your soul, to examine yourself in the light of these words and to pray that God would grant us repentance.

Are you alive to the Word as you once were? Is the Word of God having its full work in you? Are you truly walking with Christ? Are you saved? Are you holy? Are you serving Him faithfully? Does His Word stir your heart like it should? I know I need to repent. Every single day I need to ask His forgiveness, but I need to repent.

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