

Paul's Evangelistic Strategy: Reasoning from Scripture

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Up from the minor leagues. What I'm trying to say is that don't judge our church based on what you are about to hear. The good preacher will return.

Acts 17 is our text. It's no small amount of irony that not too far away from this Bible-preaching church there's a megachurch in whose shadow we stand, whose famous pastor infamously said that we do well to unhitch the Old Testament, unhitch the Old Testament despite the fact that that's the old Marcion heresy, many Evangelicals just yawned. The rest of us should be absolutely shocked that a preacher would suggest that we unhitch the Old Testament from the Christian faith when the New Testament repeatedly, constantly, persistently reflects back, points back to the Old Testament. Consider the claims of Jesus Christ, a man who multiple times proclaimed that he is God. What credibility would he have without the Old Testament? He would be the C. S. Lewis lunatic, a man standing up and telling us that he's divine, where does he get off? And the answer is the Old Testament. Without the Old Testament making the case, preparing the way for the Messiah to come, Jesus Christ would have been a strange man indeed, but he referred back to the Old Testament for his credibility and so too did the Apostle Paul and so too must we. We're not going to unhitch the Old Testament. We are going to run to it regularly to make the case that the Messiah had to suffer, die, and rise again.

So let's turn our attention to Acts 17 as we see Paul doing just that. This would be Paul's evangelistic strategy. If you've ever wondered how did Paul share his faith, how did Paul preach the gospel? I think we have the answer in our text. And how instructive is that, that we see the apostle in action with his evangelism laid out quite clearly for us, and if you think, "Well, that was 2,000 years ago, we need more current strategies," I think our passage today would beg to differ. Acts 17:1-4. Paul is on his second missionary journey. He just left Philippi where he'd been flogged, imprisoned. There was an earthquake, typical week in the life of Paul, and now we see him traveling through northern Greece. Verse 1,

1 Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica [which still stands today], where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2 And according to Paul's custom, he visited them for three Sabbaths reasoning with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining

and giving evidence of the Christ [the Messiah, the chosen One] that he had to suffer and rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ." 4 And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a significant number of the leading women.

Let's take a look at Paul's evangelistic strategy in three parts this morning: the location of his evangelism, the contents of his evangelism, and then the results of his evangelism.

What was Paul's evangelistic strategy? You recall in Romans 5 where Paul tells us that at just the right time Christ died for us, at just the right time God sent forth his Son born of a virgin to live under the law, to redeem those of us under the curse of the law. At just the right time. What made, let's call it 33 AD, just the right time? And if you've studied biblical history you would say, "Ah, it's the Roman roads." And I would say, "Ah, you're correct," because it was the roads that allowed for missionaries from Jerusalem to spread out throughout the Mediterranean. You might say it was the Greek language and I would say I agree with that also. But I would make the case that synagogues were just the right time. Paul leaving Israel was able to have an evangelistic strategy where he could go and conveniently find people who were versed in the Old Testament. Those were the synagogues. There were hundreds, perhaps thousands of them spread throughout the Mediterranean and Paul would make a beeline right to those synagogues to reason with people from the Scriptures and we see this all throughout the book of Acts. Acts 18:4, he's in Corinth, Paul was "reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks." They were, of course, proselytes, they were converts to the Jewish faith. Acts 18:19, "They came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews." We're seeing some repetition which should get our attention. Paul's strategy was to go to the Jewish people in the synagogues.

A number of years ago, I had the privilege of being in Kyiv, Ukraine, and we were in a church slightly bigger perhaps than that back area. There were 40, maybe 60 mostly babushkas, these elderly Ukrainian women mostly and a few men, and wow, did they sing loudly. They sang so loud. They almost yelled, they were so happy to be in God's house. And then they turned to me and said...and I said. It was assumed that the guest preacher would bring a word and so I did and it lasted about 12 minutes and they were actually quite disappointed that the preacher didn't go longer because that was the assumption and same with the Mediterranean world. If you were a teacher, you were trained by Gamaliel and you're in our presence, it was expected this man would bring a word of God.

And so he did and that's why he made a beeline to the synagogues, however, Paul didn't just reason with them from the Scriptures in the synagogues. Take a look at a detail. In Acts 17, you're already there, Acts 17:16. This is, of course, the great Athenian speech. "Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols. So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present." These are total strangers. In other words, Paul didn't unhitch his

Old Testament when he was in the market place for fear that people would think, "That God is too bellicose. He is not up to our philosophical sophisticated standards." He was unashamed to reason with people even in the market place from the Scriptures.

What do we learn from this? I think the conclusion is Paul had a strategy. He thought this through. He didn't wander into a town and go, "Oh, well, where do we start today?" No, he made a beeline for the synagogue. He would head out to the market place. Please note Paul was doing 1:1 evangelism and open-air preaching which is not outdated today. Paul had a strategy. My question for all of us this morning is: what's our strategy? Do we even have one personally, corporately, familiarly? Do we have a strategy to reach the lost? If we don't, I fear we're not being like Paul and you might be saying, "But wait a second, he was an evangelist." That is true and we still have the gift of evangelism but that doesn't let anybody off the evangelistic hook, and we should all have a strategy.

How might we concoct one? I would suggest, you might enjoy this today because I know I do, thinking about my favorite subject which is me. Where am I? With what has God gifted me? Who do I bump into on a regular basis? That's where I need to spend some time coming up with a strategy and it's going to look different. It's certainly going to look different than Paul's. If you wandered into a synagogue today, they would think you're quite strange if you started preaching, but you do have an open door and you say, "No, I don't have an open door." I say, "Yes, you do. All you need to do is open your door, walk out of it, find a sinner and you can share the gospel with somebody."

Paul talks about this in Colossians 2. We tend to use this word "open door" I think a little bit loosely as if we've got to wait for God to give us the opportunity to share the gospel. That's not what Paul prayed for. He asked them, the Colossians, to pray that God would open up a door of ministry and we see that in the book of Acts, that God opened up a door for us to go into a region. An open door is when God determines, "I'm going to make this opportunity available to you." What would that look like today? You're trying to get onto the university campus. You can't. You can't. Then out of the blue you get the email saying you can. God opened up a door because then Paul goes on to say that "make the most of every opportunity. Pray for me that God would open up a door of ministry. As for you, make the most of every opportunity." Opportunities abound for us and you and I should have a strategy similar to Paul's strategy, not with perhaps the location but definitely with the contents.

May I ask you: what is your strategy? Perhaps you could spend some time this afternoon assessing where God providentially has you to reason with people from the Scriptures, which leads us to point number 2: what were the contents of Paul's evangelism? What did he preach to people? We see it in our text, "according to Paul's custom, he visited them and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures." Perhaps if you are a Christian philosopher or an apologist you hear the word "he reasoned with them, aha, that's what we need to do, we need to logic them into the kingdom." I don't think that's what our text suggests at all. The word *dialogomai* isn't just let's kind of share some ideas. You hear the word *legomai*, you hear the word "word" inside of that *logos*, *legomai*? But *dia* is a preposition that is intended to show movement. You are introduced to somebody,

they're here, you want them there, what do you do? You dialegomai them. You push them from point A to point B.

This was not a mere conversation that Paul was having with people. He forcefully reasoned with them from the Scriptures. He didn't share stories. He didn't give his testimony. He dialegomai'd with people. This is a far more intense word than just having a chat or sharing one's heart. This was Paul not assuming a defensive posture but he went on the offense. He wasn't offensive but he was on the offense and all too often these days, I know the feeling, we're living in a culture increasingly that says, "You Christians are stupid. We hate your Christ One and your book is antiquated and it needs to be on the ash heap of history," and we can have a tendency to become apologists for God's word. I would tell you we do not apologize for God's word and while apologetics is important and it plays a role in an evangelistic encounter or when you're witnessing to your children, or teaching the kids about Jesus in Sunday school, we need to be doing more than just laying out a case for them; we need to go on the offense and stop waiting for them to regale us with the latest problem that they read about when they did a quick Google search. We should not be obnoxious in our evangelism, we should speak lovingly but we need to reason with them with intentionality. It can be polite. It can be pleasant. We must be loving. But if we're just going to try to defend the goal of Christianity by using our textual criticism, our archaeological evidence, those issues, they need to be addressed but that is not what saves anybody. Apologetics doesn't save one single soul and we see that in our text.

Paul reasoned with them. This is intentional, commanding, persuasive speech and preaching, and he didn't just do it in Thessalonica. Acts 17:3 we see him proclaiming, kataggello, this was, "Hey, listen up!" Isn't that the way that Paul would start his addresses? Remember in the book of Acts he'd wave his hand and he would get their attention to proclaim it, not apologize for it. In verse 19 Paul proclaimed to them. In Acts 18:5 Paul solemnly testified that Jesus is the Christ. In Acts 19:8 Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. Not as an apologizer but as being a testifier of the truth that Jesus Christ is the Messiah.

Notice what Paul didn't do, Paul didn't use philosophy. He didn't use logic as we know it. He didn't use reason. He didn't use man-made inventions. He didn't use movie clips or allusions. He didn't have props and gizmos, fog machines, sound systems and dim lights. He didn't rely on any of those devices, instead exclusively what did he do? He preached nothing but Christ and him crucified. That's it. Nothing but Christ and him crucified was his proclamation. He didn't use reason and there's a reason for that.

Turn in your Bible, please, to 1 Corinthians 1 and we're going to stay there for just a couple of minutes. 1 Corinthians 1:21. This is why Paul reasoned with people from the Bible, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." Hold on, he's just getting warmed up. Verse 27, "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak

things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the insignificant things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no human may boast before God. But it is due to Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'" We are not on an academic mission when we share the gospel. We're engaging in spiritual warfare and we need spiritual tools and that is exactly why Paul ran to use the sword of the word which cuts deep. You say, "Well, people, they need to understand that the Christian religion is coherent." They can't, that's the point of this text. They can't get it. Their machines up here are broken. Their logic machines are unplugged and mis-wired and they can't understand it.

Now watch what Paul does with us in 1 Corinthians, he tells us, if you would be so kind, 1 Corinthians 2, "And when I came to you," this is verse 1, "And when I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come as someone superior in speaking ability or wisdom," human intelligence, "as I proclaimed to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." And then Paul makes it clear that in order for people to think rightly, they need to be saved correctly. People don't get smart and then become a Christian. You become a Christian, then you get smart. That's the order that Paul lays out in 1 Corinthians, spiritual things are spiritually discerned. You have to have the Spirit of God to understand the word of God.

So how does one get to that place? Paul preached nothing but Christ and him crucified. Why? Because the power of God's word accompanied by the one who actually wrote God's word, the Holy Spirit, convinces the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. We reason with people from the Bible, we preach the Bible, we use as many Bible verses as we possibly can when we're teaching our kids about Jesus because that is what converts people. Not logic. Not reason. Paul reasoned from the Scriptures. And by the way, Peter agreed with Paul. 1 Peter 1, "for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable, but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God." Because, "'All flesh is like grass, its glory is like the flower of grass. The grass withers, the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever.'" And this is the word that was preached to you." The word is where the power resides. We don't unhitch it. You don't offend a lion, you open the cage and let it out and it will do the work that God intends for it to do when we reason with people from the Scriptures. How did Timothy get saved? We are told in 2 Timothy 3, "from childhood you have known the sacred writings." What are the sacred writings? That would be the Old Testament, "which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." This is why Paul preached the word in season and out of season, and he commanded Timothy to do likewise.

We have a trend going on in Christianity today, if we can call it Christianity, where people go out onto the streets to do supernatural healings. Well, they don't. We have never seen a total, organic, instantaneous healing the way that Jesus and the apostles did. They go out and lengthen legs, you know, that old shenanigan where you take the shoe off a little bit and push it back and, "Oo, my leg just got longer." Those have very little

power. Now to be sure, God gave that power to people to undergird the testimony of the word but it was just that, to support the word. They use it as the buttress to get people to believe in Jesus Christ. "We've got to do signs and wonders and miracles." And what does Paul tell us? "No, we have a more sure word," Peter tells us, "we have a more sure word. Yes, we saw the transfiguration. Way cool but we've got a more sure word." And he relied on the Bible, not apologetics, not presuppositionalism, as effective as those tools can be in playing a role, he reasoned with them from the Scriptures.

Let's take a look at exactly what he reasoned about. It's in our text, verse 3. Paul reasoned with them from the Scriptures but further the Messiah, "explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead." That's Paul's message, the Messiah had to suffer. Now if you don't have an Old Testament, you don't know anything about a Messiah and so Paul would reason with them from the Scriptures that this Messiah, look at this book over here on the left side, this book says this Messiah is going to suffer. Then what did he do? Pointed them to the suffering servant Jesus Christ, and he used the Old Testament to demonstrate that he was proclaiming to them that Jesus is the Christ.

So how exactly did Paul do that? Acts 28. Paul is under arrest, house arrest in Rome. Acts 28:23, "When they had set a day for Paul, people came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was dialoguing to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening." Well, now we've got a hint, don't we? Paul used the writings of Moses, the first five books of the Bible. Where would he have gone? Let's explore what Paul might have said to people to reason with them that the Messiah had to suffer, die and rise again.

I suspect he couldn't avoid the fall, Genesis 3. We see a command given. We see a command violated. We see the consequences of sin. And then we see God do something strange for the human beings who had just sinned and tried to cover their shame with vegetables and fig leaves, God killed an animal for the covering of the shame of the sinful people, and he could explain to them that there is going to come a Messiah who ultimately deals with this problem. It's Genesis 3:15, "This is one who is going to crush the head of the serpent but his heel is going to be bruised. Let me tell you who that Messiah is. Let me tell you who that seed is." And he could point them to the Lord Jesus Christ, take them to the cross where they see the heel-bruising of Jesus Christ.

It is almost certain he spent time in the book of Genesis. He could have used typology. He could have talked about Noah and the boat, which is not a cute... It's funny, isn't it, maybe I shouldn't say it, in our nursery do we have, like, Noah's ark and the giraffes looking like they're kind of having a party on the boat? Not exactly what was going down with that. Instead, God was pouring out his wrath on the world, save those who were saved by going through one door into an ark of salvation, and Peter tells us that was Christ. The ark is a picture of Jesus Christ. He could proclaim to people, "See God pouring down His wrath, a few people were saved by a boat. Jesus is the ark. Get into the ark of your salvation. Flee from the wrath that is to come."

He could have used the story of Isaac almost being sacrificed by a father who loved him. But he didn't. But the next time we see a Father and Son, we see the Son again carrying the wood but this time the Father did not spare his Son and he crushed Jesus Christ on our behalf.

He could have used Passover where death would pass over if you would have a lamb live with you for a short amount of time, unblemished, slit its throat, take the blood and post it over the doors and then death would pass over you. Why? Because there's no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood, and so a lamb's blood was shed to save people from death.

He could have pointed to Yom Kippur and all of the Mosaic ceremonial laws, hundreds of them, about the sacrificing of animals, that blood had to be shed for not the forgiveness, that's not what Yom Kippur means, Yom Kippur the Day of Atonement, it's the day of covering but it doesn't remove sins. Millions of lambs lost their lives for the covering of sins. Why? Because they weren't forgiving sins, a lamb or the blood of bulls and goats cannot accomplish that. "Behold the Lamb of God. He took away the sins of the world."

Paul could have used typology just the way Jesus did, by the way, in Luke 24 when he's walking on the road to Emmaus. He tells them about himself from every book in the Bible, that's Genesis to Malachi.

And so we see Christ in fuzzy pictures, especially if we know they're affirmed in the New Testament, we see pictures of Christ in every single book. He could have used the bronze serpent. He could have used the splitting of the rock and water pouring out. It's such a phenomenal story, the Hebrew language is so instructive. The Jews, Exodus 15, they're in the wilderness, they're complaining, "We don't have any water." God provides water. Two chapters later they're in the wilderness. They don't have any water so they start complaining. This time Moses gets it. "Aha, you're not complaining against me, you're complaining against God." And so God instructs Moses to stand in front of the people with his staff of authority and the elders, as if they were going to be the judge of the court case that was going to be presented. The Jewish people were to gather and between the people, the ones who are accusing God of sinning, the guilty ones themselves accusing, what? God whose presence fell on a rock between the judge, the staff of authority and the guilty people claiming that God is the guilty party. And what does he instruct Moses to do? Strike the rock. God was being struck on behalf of the guilty people. And what happened? The rock split open and the water gushed out and that water is Christ, and the rock, said Paul, is Jesus Christ. He was using the writings of Moses to give credibility to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

No doubt he would have used the laws of Moses. He would have opened up, don't we see him doing that in Romans 2, "You who say thou shalt not, I say you're doing it too. Don't you do the same thing?" What is he doing? He's opening up the law. Why? Because he tells us what role the law plays in the conversion of a sinner. The law is a schoolmaster to grab somebody by the ear and pull them to Jesus Christ. The laws of Sinai should

frighten and terrify the guilty sinner but we don't leave them trembling at Sinai, then we chase them to Calvary where we share with them Jesus Christ, he had to suffer, he had to die, and he rose from the dead, and your sins can be forgiven.

He used the law to bring about the knowledge of sin. He used the law to silence the mouth and bring the whole world guilty before God. Paul used the laws. He might have used Deuteronomy 28, the blessings and curses chapter. If you behave, blessings. If you don't, curses. Misbehavior brings about a punishment from a holy, just, righteous God. We see it portrayed in the Jewish people and the principles that apply to them apply to you. If you have broken God's commandments, you are a lawbreaker, you are a guilty criminal and God will have his day in court with you. But God sent forth his Son because he's rich in mercy, to send his Son not as a victim but as a volunteer to joyfully march to a cross. And we see how brutal that cross was and perhaps this is how Paul reasoned with them from the prophets, "You know Isaiah 53." Isaiah 53 and starting in chapter 52 describes a man who is so beaten that you couldn't tell he was a human being, and Isaiah 53 in vivid detail, "He was pierced for our offenses. He was crushed for our wrongdoings. The punishment for our well-being was laid upon Him." And Paul, just like Philip with the Ethiopian eunuch, can say, "That's Christ. 700 years ago this was written and it was fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ who was beaten beyond recognition because sin demands a payment, there must be suffering, there must be bloodshed. Jesus paid the fine." And what happened on that cross? They knew, they knew what happened to a guilty criminal who was brought before a Roman tribunal.

We wonder how was he so disfigured you couldn't tell he was a person? We have a tendency to think that getting hit, especially in the face, is like the movies, psh, psh, and then they get up and the good guys, you know, get hit 84 times but they're still able to recover but hit the bad guys one time and down they go. But it has a sound effect to it, doesn't it. Psh, psh. That is not what a fist meeting a face sounds like. You know this sound if you've ever been on the playground, you've been in a gymnasium. All the adults are kind of gathered around the side and they're chatting, kids are all playing and everything is well, but suddenly you hear a dull thud and everybody recognizes this is the sound of a head meeting the floor and everybody is sickened to their stomachs because of that sound. That is what Jesus received. He was beaten beyond recognition. The suffering of Christ would have staggered the first century audience so we would do well to understand what happened to Jesus the way that they understood it.

I want to take you to Dr. Truman Davis, a medical doctor who describes the beating that Jesus took. This is not rated R but this is what our God did for us. This is what our Savior did. This is how he suffered so that our sins could be forgiven. "Preparations for the scourging were carried out when the Prisoner was stripped of His clothing," how's about that? The Creator stripped naked before the creation. "Stripped of His clothing and His hands tied to a post above His head. The Roman legionnaire steps forward with the flagrum (or flagellum) in his hand. This is a short whip consisting of several heavy, leather thongs with two small balls of lead attached near the ends of each. The heavy whip is brought down with full force again and again across Jesus' shoulders, back, and legs. At first the thongs cut through the skin only. Then, as the blows continue, they cut

deeper into the tissues, producing first an oozing of blood from the capillaries and veins of the skin, and finally spurting arterial bleeding from vessels in the underlying muscles.

"The small balls of lead first produce large, deep bruises which are broken open by subsequent blows. Finally the skin of the back is hanging in long ribbons and the entire area is an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue. When it is determined by the centurion in charge that the prisoner is near death, the beating is finally stopped." Regularly they missed the mark on that and people would die from the beating because that flagellum, it would be leather straps, they would put pottery or glass or nails in it with lead balls at the end of it, would not just rip open the skin, it would shred the muscles and people's organs would merely fall out of their backs and they would die long before they got to the crucifixion. That's what Jesus endured for us that you and I might be forgiven. No doubt Paul used Isaiah 53 to say, "This is how the servant suffered."

He might have run to Psalm 22, "I am a worm and not a person," by the way, this is the Psalm if you've ever wondered what was Jesus saying, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" There's different explanations but I think the best is that he was doing a bit of a Hebrew tradition. If you wanted to cite the sentiment of a verse, you would just quote the first line. So he's saying, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" That Psalm goes on to say, "I am a worm and not a person, A disgrace of mankind and despised by the people, poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a piece of pottery, And my tongue clings to my jaws; And You lay me in the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones." Crucifixion didn't exist when those words were penned by David but at just the right time, God sent forth his Son to receive a death, a death on a cross on our behalf, and incidentally even though our text doesn't say that he suffered, died, and rose again, the fact that it does say he suffered and rose again certainly indicates he died. He had to. Paul was emphatically making the case the Messiah had to endure these things if he is indeed going to be our Savior.

And we, if we are willing to, would do well to, once again, go back to the first century and ask what was that death like that our Savior suffered for us? This is another medical doctor's account. "When the cross was erected upright, there was tremendous strain put on the wrists, arms and shoulders, resulting in a dislocation of the shoulder and elbow joints. The arms, being held up and outward, held the rib cage in a fixed position which made it extremely difficult to exhale, and impossible to take a full breath. The victim would only be able to take very shallow breaths. As time passed, the muscles, from the loss of blood, and oxygen and the fixed position of the body, would undergo severe cramps and spasmodic contractions." Jesus Christ had nails put through most likely his wrists, through his Achilles, not through the top of the feet but through the Achilles to straddle him to a tree where he struggled to breathe. That is how you die from crucifixion typically. It could be from blood loss but it could be the fact that you can't breathe. You know, when you've got everything pulled down, you know, when you're reaching and it gets hard to breathe, your entire body weight is pulling you down.

"It appears likely that the mechanism of death in crucifixion is suffocation. The chain of events which ultimately led to suffocation are as follows: With the weight of the body being supported by the sedulum [little seat], the arms were pulled upward. This caused the intercostal and pectoral muscles to be stretched. With the muscles of respiration thus stretched, the respiratory bellows became relatively fixed. As dyspnea developed and pain in the wrists and arms increased, the victim was forced to raise the body off the sedulum," and don't forget what his back looked like and it wasn't a smooth piece of timber they put him on. So in order to gasp for just a mouthful of air, he had to pull himself up, remember how he's affixed to the cross, his wrists are pinned there, he'd have to pull himself up scraping his back to get up, gulping air which is most likely why he made such short statements on the cross, and then slump back down with his back scraping the rough timber.

"Respirations became easier, but with the weight of the body being exerted on the feet, pain in the feet and legs mounted. When the pain became unbearable, the victim again slumped down on the sedulum with the weight of the body pulling on the wrists and again stretching the intercostal muscles. Thus, the victim alternated between lifting his body off the seat in order to breathe and slumping down on the sedulum to relieve pain in the feet. Eventually, he became exhausted or lapsed into unconsciousness so that he could no longer lift his body off the sedulum. In this position, with the respiratory muscles essentially paralyzed, the victim suffocated and died."

But he didn't stay dead. Paul reasoned with them from the Scriptures he had to suffer and it was brutal. He had to die but he also had to rise again. He had to rise again. And think of the crucifixion as the payment for your sins. Think about the resurrection of Jesus as the receipt for your sins. God said the payment is accepted. This had to happen and Paul, no doubt, took it from the Old Testament, Psalm 16:10, "For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; You will not allow Your Holy One to undergo decay." Paul, no doubt, used this text or he could have run again to Isaiah 53, "the LORD desired To crush Him, causing Him grief; If He renders Himself as a guilt offering," this is 700 years before Jesus endured death for us. But it says something odd, "He will see His offspring." This one who is a sacrifice on behalf of people who are the actual guilty parties, "He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days. He will prosper. He will see it and be satisfied. I will allot Him a portion with the great, And division of the plunder." No doubt Paul brought people, both Jew and Gentile, to these texts to say, "Look, God promised this One wasn't going to die and stay in the grave. He rose from the dead. It said so 700 years ago and it just happened the other day in Jerusalem."

Perhaps he went to Daniel 12. This is a Bible verse we should all memorize because there are people who would say, "The Old Testament doesn't really talk about death, burial and resurrection." Oh, yes it does. This is going to sound strangely familiar. Daniel 12, "many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. And those who have insight will shine like the glow of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." There's a resurrection and Jesus Christ was the firstfruits of that resurrection which, by the way, the celebration of firstfruits is also an allusion to Jesus

Christ. It's a type. It's a picture for us that Jesus Christ rose first and there will be a great army that follow behind him. Daniel recognized that. Paul used that verse.

And incidentally, please note this, Daniel says, "and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." Maybe this will be a bit of a surprise to you, we will all be thrilled when we're in heaven. We're just, we can't even imagine the delights that await us being in the presence of God, when faith will become sight and we get to be and dwell with God and reign with him and receive everything as sons and daughters of the firstfruits of the resurrection. It's going to be staggering there but it's going to be more staggering for some than others. Did you know that? How you live, how you die will determine how much joy you have in heaven. Please note everybody will have their full capacity of joy, it's just that some of us are going to have a fuller capacity than others. A demonstration. If two guys are driving through Memphis and one of them says, "Hey, let's go to Graceland." And the other one goes, "Yeah, okay, fine." So the second fellow, he knows about Elvis, something about a hound dog and jailhouse rock, and I think it's like all '70s and stuff. "Yeah, so let's go." So he's going to go visit Graceland and he's going to be pleased that he went. This was good and he's going to enjoy Graceland as much as he's prepared to. But the other fellow who suggested it, oh, he loves Elvis. He can't wait for June 24th for the movie to come out about Elvis Presley with Tom Hanks. See it in a theater near you. He, oh, Elvis, you ask him to do an impression of Elvis and he'll say, "What movie? I've memorized the scripts." He goes to Graceland, he's going to be thrilled beyond our imagination. Why? Because of his great love for Elvis. Similarly as our love for Jesus grows, as our gratitude to God is increased, as we study him more, live more for him and share the gospel, that's what the text says, those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever. In other words, evangelism has big dividends. You will be a brighter star in heaven as you go about the business of I would suggest following Paul's evangelistic strategy to reason people from the Scriptures the Messiah had to suffer, die and rise again.

And interestingly in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul goes on to say and he had to rise again in three days. Okay, wait a second. Where does that come from in the Bible? Well, it no doubt came from Jonah. "Just as Jonah had to be in the body of the whale, so too did the Son of man." Three days. Furthermore, you'll recall that Matthew equated Jesus with Israel, Israel in captivity in Egypt, Jesus went down to Egypt and was brought out. So Matthew says Hosea was alluding in chapter 11, he agrees, he is equating the Messiah with Israel. So here's Hosea 6, "For He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has struck us down and He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us. On the third day, He will raise us up that we may live before Him." This was a picture of Jesus Christ who had to suffer, had to die, and had to rise again in three days. Where did Paul get his evangelistic contents? I would suggest to you he was rightly plagiarizing Jesus. Matthew 16 seems like a small injection of a detail, verse 21, "From that time Jesus began to point out to His disciples that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem and to suffer many things and to be killed, and to be raised up on the third day."

Do you see the elegance of the Bible? Do you see the coherent nature of our Scriptures? The axiomatic nature of the Bible? We don't need to try to persuade people through

archaeological evidence, textual criticism, any sort of cosmological apologetic. We need to reason with people from the Scriptures that the Messiah had to suffer, die and rise again. That's the way Paul did it and that is the way that Jesus did it, and we should do it too. Paul left Christ ringing in their ears. He preached nothing but Christ and him crucified. And what were the results of this evangelistic strategy? Well, guess what, our verse tells us that, Acts 17:4, the results, the effectiveness of Paul's preaching, "some of them," verse 4, "were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of," Gentiles, "the God-fearing Greeks," the proselytes, "and," look at this detail, "a significant number of the leading women." That's a fascinating detail because unfortunately in the first century women were not first class citizens in a Jewish world, and Paul points out God saved a lot of them. But did you also see the other demographics that were being saved? Jew and Gentile being saved and a large number of women. Would we like to see the ethnic divide breached? We need to reason with people from the Scriptures that the Messiah had to suffer, die and rise again which, by the way, our day calls out for this, that is why we have ethnic groups in the first place even represented here, different levels of melanin but that's the only distinguishing characteristic between one human race.

So why do we see different skin colors? Why do we have borders? Why do we have different languages? Well, you can scoot back and find that answer in Genesis 9, but we see throughout history the warring of ethnic groups, do we not? Cite a place where people of different skin colors or just different histories were able to live together in perfect harmony. You're not going to find it and the worst demonstration of ethnic animus was Jew and Gentile. If you think black and white is ugly today, Jew and Gentile, oh, wow. The Jews thought those Greeks were, they thought they were pigs. They were pagan pigs. They despised them and the foods that they ate and all of the gods that they worshiped, and in the meantime the Greeks looked at those uppity Jewish people and couldn't stand how certain they were of themselves, and it was a clash of ethnic groups. And what does Paul tell us in Galatians 3 as well as our text? What brought them together? The gospel of Jesus Christ.

You want a solution to the racism problem? Fox News doesn't have it, CNN certainly doesn't have it. No politician can cure the ills of ethnic division and animosity but Jesus can and that's what we see in Revelation 7, isn't it? Revelation 7, there's the Lamb. He's on the throne and around him, the description is every tribe, every tongue, every language. You had every gender which is two. You had every different socioeconomic group represented before the Lamb, all getting along, praising the one who brought them out of their earthly identity into an identity with the Son of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Why do we have different ethnic groups? Because Jesus is going to show, "You couldn't do it but I can. I did and I will." You want to see ethnic divide end? Bring people into Christ where we're no longer a black Christian or a white Christian or a yellow Christian. No, we are Christ's ones who happen to have different levels of melanin. And we can do that if we will reason with them from the Bible.

CRT is not going to save this nation. Brace yourself, anti-CRT isn't going to save anybody either, not going to fix the problem. I'll happily rail against it all day. Nobody is

going to get saved because I understand its Marxist roots. Instead I need to do what Paul did, reason with them from the Scriptures. Do you want to see the radical, third wave, feminist movement put to an end? How did these women change their mind about feminism? They heard that the Messiah had to suffer, die and rise again. If you'd like to see the world fixed, we need to reason with people from the Scriptures that the Messiah had to suffer, die and rise again and leave the converting work to God. Our job is to merely be faithful stewards. We can't convert anyone. Our wits, our looks, our personality, our sense of humor, none of them are effective in regenerating a dead man or woman. Instead we must reason with them from the Scriptures.

So in closing, I would like to challenge two groups of people here today. We have, by the way, only two groups of people here even though there's different levels of income represented here, bigger home, smaller home. That's not what makes you a member of one of these groups. Here's the two groups that exist in the world and that exist anywhere you go: darkness and light, unsaved, saved. That's it. And by the way, that is what this battle is about in our culture. It's not just about an agenda. It is an anti-God fist-shake to tell God, "No, You're in our chair. We belong there and we are going to crush anything that reminds us that the Messiah had to suffer, die and rise again."

There's two groups that are not Republican/Democrat, it's not rich/poor, it is darkness and light. If you're a member of the light because you've repented and put your trust in Jesus Christ, I hope today you have renewed confidence in your Bible, the book on which we stand, the book by which we live and die. You can trust it. It is worthy of your faith. The God that is represented there is mighty to save and he proved it when he sent his Messiah to suffer, die and rise again from the grave. But you might be here and you're in the other camp and it might be that you're the child of one of the members of this church and you have not yet repented and put your trust in Jesus Christ. I have really bad news for you. If you were paying attention today, everything that I've said to you will merely increase the guilt that you will be exposed to on judgment day and your damnation will be hotter and more miserable than if you had not heard this sermon today because you just heard a definitive case that this Bible is supernatural. There is no way that human beings could have put this book together, not written over the course of 1,400 years by dozens of different men who weren't even alive at the same time, with the coherent theme that the Messiah had to suffer, die and rise again from the dead. And so if you have not yielded your will to the Lord Jesus Christ, look at him on the cross, look at him being beaten and bruised, hear the thud of fists, see the lead balls bruising the body of the God who loved sinners so much he came to suffer, die and rise again from the grave. Today is the day of salvation for you. If you've never repented and put your trust in the Messiah, today is the day to call out to him and say, "My God, don't forsake me. Save me." His invitation is wide open, "Come, you sinners, poor and needy." That's what we should have learned from this, we are the lawbreakers, we are the guilty criminals, we're the accusing human beings of God. "Come, you sinner, poor and needy, weak and wounded, sick and sore. Jesus ready stands to save you full of pity, love and power." And he proved it by suffering, dying and rising on the third day.

Let's pray to that God because of Jesus.

Our Father, we are in awe of Your word. It proves itself again and again and again and again that Your word was inspired by Your Holy Spirit. Convict those who are here today by the power of Your word that they have a Messiah who suffered, died and rose again from the grave. And encourage those of us who have repented and put our trust in Your beloved Son, that we stand on a rock, we have a firm foundation, and it's not the Bible, it's the God who is spoken of and represented and taught in the Bible. You are our foundation. Thank You for giving us a more sure word that we might have confidence to merely be faithful stewards who proclaim to the world that Your Son willingly suffered, died and rose again. In His name we pray. Amen.