

43a ACTS

This is Friday the 13th of August, 2004. We continue our study in the Book of Acts, one that we just can hardly tear ourselves away from. We're going to begin Chapter 23 tonight and get well into it.

If things go well, we may even finish it. But as we begin, we want to take a moment at the outset to ensure that this time is beneficial to us. Only God can enable us to redeem the time.

Only the Holy Spirit can take the Word of God and minister it to our souls. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can impart to us His mind through the study of His Word. And it is the only way that we grow in grace and in knowledge of the Savior is the type of time that we are endeavoring to spend together tonight.

So let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, we are grateful, as always, for another opportunity to spend time looking at the truth of Your Word and also to be encouraged and built up by that unique ministry of Your Spirit that occurs when believers of like mind are gathered together. We know that where two or three are gathered that the Lord Jesus is in our midst.

We know that God the Holy Spirit can bless each one of us through the fellowship and the gifting that You have imparted. And we ask that our fellowship will be beneficial, that we will be built up and motivated and encouraged to love and to good works. We pray that we will gain fresh insight into our lives and our situations.

Each one of us is different, and yet the same Word can equip each one of us and prepare each one of us for service. We pray that all those who are present tonight and all those who study with us on tape will find a blessing in what we look at from Your Word this evening. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. As I said, we are right here on the cusp of chapter 23. We want to kind of ramp up by reviewing the last part of chapter 22 here.

You remember that Paul has, against all warnings, gone to Jerusalem. He has endeavored to address the Jews, which did nothing but aggravate them. He gave them an account.

They are charging him with encouraging a departure from the law and the traditions in his preaching abroad. His answer is to recount to them the Damascus Road experience and to say, listen, I have encountered the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one that commissioned me.

This is from God. Well, they tolerate this all the way to the point that Paul quotes what the Lord Jesus told him. Because, in fact, we need to back up just a little bit.

Paul said, I am a Jew from Tarsus, a Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city. I implore you, permit me to speak to the people. This is the end of chapter 21.

So then he gives his apologia in chapter 22. And we saw the first part of this. He reviews where he's from, taught at the feet of Gamaliel.

High priests and others will bear witness. I have persecuted these who follow the way. The Lord Jesus appears on the road to Damascus.

Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting. It's interesting to compare this with the account in chapter 9 because it's not word for word the same. Now, let me ask you.

The Lord Jesus Christ appeared to you and said something along the lines you can fill in your name. Sam, Sam, what are you doing there in Dallas? You would tend to remember pretty much the exact words, right? These are not the exact words of Acts chapter 9. Keep your finger here in Acts chapter 22 and turn back to chapter 9. What is it that the Lord Jesus says to him in verse 4? He fell down to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And he said, who are you, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.

Now, that's Luke's account in chapter 9. Here, as Paul tells the Jewish crowd, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? That's good. So, I answered, who are you, Lord? And he said to me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting. And he adds, of Nazareth, it wasn't back in chapter 9. Is this a significant change? If it isn't what Jesus said, why does Paul include it here? Or, if it was included in the Lord's words, why is it left out in chapter 9? Well, I don't know.

There is no explanation given. We can surmise. One of the things is, it has been 20 odd years since Jesus was in Jerusalem, and the uproar has passed.

You think roughly 10 years ago was the O.J. Simpson thing. What was happening in the world news 20 years ago? It's much more difficult for us to remember. We have to think back.

What was it, Iran-Contra, or what? It's been too long. So, when Paul, as he is rehearsing this, says, I am Jesus of Nazareth, what does this add that we don't have in chapter 9? It is a more specific identification, and we have seen that the Apostle Paul is trying to hook into all of the common things. He says, look, I am speaking Hebrew to you.

You are Hebrews. I am speaking Aramaic. I am a Jew like you.

I was born, I was raised, I was zealous just like you. Now, when he mentions Jesus, and he says, Jesus of Nazareth, it's a reminder that Jesus was a Jew. That Jesus was from

Israel, from Nazareth.

One of the common people, so to speak. That's about as much as I can offer you on the change, but I am sure it is significant that he adds that little phrase. So, he says, those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, in verse 9, but they did not hear the voice of him who spoke to me.

In chapter 9, Luke said, the men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one. Here, Paul says, they saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice. But this brings us to another point of observation.

Jesus appears to the group who are traveling through Damascus on the road. Only one man can see him. Only one man can hear him.

It's the same Jesus who appears, but he is not perceptible. He is not understood, either visually or in hearing, by anybody except Paul. Now, why is that? There are two possibilities.

Either Jesus purposely did not reveal himself to the others, it was a selective revelation, and he purposely obscured and hid himself from the other people on the road, or the other people were somehow in a condition different from Saul and could not see him and could not hear him. And really, when you think about it, the two are essentially the same. There is some difference between Saul and his companions.

I ask you this question. Suppose there is another man named Hananiah who is traveling along with Saul on the road to Damascus to persecute the Jews who have converted to Christianity, wants to bring them back to Jerusalem and imprison them. But, he would accept Christ if he got the presentation in the right way.

If he was confronted, he would convert, he would confess, he would come to Christ. Would Jesus appear to Saul and say, well, this guy would convert if I would reveal myself, but I'm just not going to reveal myself. I'm going to leave him in the dark.

I'm going to leave him unconverted and unrepentant in his zealous Jewish persecution mode. Why didn't everybody see Jesus? Why didn't everybody convert like Saul does? Why isn't there a whole group of new Christians or at least receptive to the idea of Christ to the point that Jesus appears on the road? Do you see the point I'm getting at? There's something different about Saul. He is susceptible.

He is teachable. He is turnable. And these other people very evidently are not.

Because if they could be turned, it is blasphemy to say that they could have been, but Jesus just didn't do it, just didn't feel like turning them. For heaven's sake, he died on the cross for them as much as he did for Saul or for us. Do you think he would leave them unable to hear him, unable to see him, if there was any chance that by hearing and

seeing they would turn? Why is it that those people don't hear and don't see? What does Jesus himself say, quoting the Old Testament? Seeing they will see and not perceive.

Hearing they will hear and not understand. The heart of this people has grown callous. There is a susceptibility.

There is a questioning. There is a vulnerability. There is a humility.

There is an opportunity for the Lord Jesus to turn Saul. And these other men are not in that category. A Calvinist would say, No, they were all equally unconvertible, totally lost, totally depraved, and Jesus just arbitrarily picked Saul.

Could have been anyone in the bunch, he just picked Saul for no good reason. The rest of the Bible controverts that idea. It is clear that it is not the will of God that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

So, I ask myself, and it's odd, it didn't occur to me when we went through Acts 9, but it occurs to me hearing Paul talk about it. He says, they saw the light, but they did not hear the voice. They didn't perceive who it was.

All they saw was a light. In another place, Paul is going to say, if our gospel be hid, it is hid to those who are lost. In whom the God of this world blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

The light shines, but they don't see anything in it. Jesus speaks, but they don't hear anything but thunder. It is a qualitative difference in attitude.

It is a qualitative difference in receptivity, in teachability, in humility, and Saul, for all of his vituperation, all of his aggressive persecution, is a student of the word of God. He loves God and he loves His word. He believes that what he is doing is right, but it is his genuine desire to know God and to please God that qualifies him to be able to see the Son of God when He appears.

So, back in Acts 22, those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of him who spoke to me. So I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me, Arise and go into Damascus. In chapter 9 it said, Rise and enter the city.

Luke says in 9.6, Rise and enter the city and you will be told what you are to do. Here Paul says, Arise and go into Damascus and there you will be told all the things which are appointed for you to do. Subtle difference there.

The word appointed here in verse 10, this is the same word that we had back in the passage that talked about as many as were appointed unto eternal life believed, as

many as were put in place with a view toward eternal life, they were positioned, they were put in the path of the gospel, they were caused to be in the city at the time that the apostle arrived so that they could hear. As many as were put in place, arranged, this is used for lining things up or arranging or pre-positioning something. We used to have what we call PPS in the military called pre-positioned supply where when you know you're going to be doing a thing you're going to have people going through you put the supplies out there even before the troops arrive so that they're pre-positioned.

We had pre-positioned ships that used to float in various places the Navy would keep them in various parts of our oceans so that troops needing resupply the pre-positioned ships could supply them without having to send it all the way from the states. This idea of something that is pre-positioned because you know what you're going to need in the future is what is in view here. These things have been pre-positioned for Paul to do.

There are some pre-positioned tasks for him. Now if he doesn't show up to accomplish those tasks God will inevitably send someone else. If you and I miss an opportunity to share the gospel with a neighbor that neighbor is not going to be lost and go to hell because you and I failed.

God is not going to make an object lesson out of some person and spend eternity wagging his finger at us saying if you had just done what you were supposed to that guy in hell would be here with us. Do you honestly think? How would you like to be the person? What if you missed the gospel because your neighbor wiggled out and was afraid to give you the gospel and so you had to go to hell because that guy didn't have the courage or didn't see the opportunity? Can you imagine? Many, many, many people believe this. I better just give the gospel to anybody I can think of or their blood will be on my hands and they'll go to hell because of me.

It's ridiculous. Talk about an egocentric universe as though you can affect someone's eternal fate by your success or your failure. It's an opportunity to participate.

Dishes in the dishwasher are going to get put away if you tell your child to do it and they don't. You might have to spank them and send them to bed without their supper or something but the dishes are going to get put away. You're not going to leave the dishes there forevermore and every time your child walks by and says, see those dishes? If you'd have put them away when I told you to they wouldn't be sitting here for all eternity.

It's just ridiculous. There are pre-positioned, there are appointed, there are set out good works. Maybe a more apt illustration.

A lot of people play video games today. A lot of these are adventure games where you go to certain places and there are little tasks that you're supposed to perform. They're built into the program.

If you do this task, you get fresh life or you get band-aids or you get ammunition for your weapon or you get a coin or some other weird thing that you need to advance in the game. And more and more video games that are of this role-playing adventure type, the programmers figured this out. And if you stand in the right way and push the right thing and say the magic word while a panel slides back and here's something you need.

Well, it's been there all the time, but you have to go through the motions to access it and avail yourself of it. Well, there are good works that God has foreordained that we should walk in them. If we miss them, it doesn't mean either that God failed or that those works will never get done because many of those good works involve blessing and support and encouragement to other believers.

It just means God's going to have to move in the stunt double to go in and do those that we were supposed to do and fail. Somebody else will move in. The body of Christ is composed of parts.

You know how it is. If you bruise yourself, what is that? It's a broken blood vessel. Well, if you break a blood vessel, what happens to the parts of your flesh that were being fed by that blood vessel? Or the waste and things were being carried back by a vein.

It could be an artery. It could be a vein. It could be both.

What about the flesh? Does it just necrotize and rot and turn black and fall out because, oh, I broke a blood vessel and so everything... What happens? The other blood vessels compensate. They increase in size. Your capillaries dilate and other vessels carry the load until that broken vessel heals.

Otherwise, every time you got a bruise, a piece of your body would fall off. We'd be walking around looking like lepers or something. Well, you think about it.

The body compensates. People get brain damage and other nerves and other things compensate. You lose one sense.

You go blind. Your other senses compensate so that you can still navigate around. You can still do virtually all of the tasks that you could do otherwise.

My goodness, you look at some of these people that have had some sort of severe... There was a man that had no arms, was born with no arms. I mean no arms, no shoulders or anything. That guy does everything with his feet.

He drives an unmodified car. He shoots archery. He shoots skeet.

They showed him shooting skeet with his feet. And he's better than a lot of people that have got all of their parts. He does everything.

He boats. He hunts. He fishes.

He does everything. He fly fishes with his feet. He types.

He writes. He writes checks, tears them out, you know, the whole bit. All with his feet.

Why? Because his body is compensated. This is the point. When it says you will be told all the things which are appointed for you to do.

There are things that are appointed for us to do. There are opportunities. There are objectives.

There are marks and milestones. Things that when we see them and when we exploit them and when we do them, this moves us toward the goal of fulfilling our calling, fulfilling our purpose and laying hold of our inheritance. But this is a potential.

It's an opportunity. It's a positive thing. If we miss those, we can cause ourselves grief.

We can cause ourselves to end up at the judgment, weeping and wailing and grinding our teeth. Mainly out of self-condemnation. What was I thinking? How did I let that go by? I think those people that Jesus said would be weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth are going to be gnashing at themselves.

Mad at themselves. Have you ever been mad at yourself? I get mad at myself all the time. It makes you want to just grind your teeth and think, what is the matter with me? But do not let anyone lay some sort of false guilt trip on you and say, well, there's going to be blood on your hands.

There's going to be people starving and having all kinds of... This happens in families. Somebody can say, well, my parents somehow suffered horribly because I was a bad child or my children suffered horribly because I was a bad parent. No, no, no.

There are appointed things for us to do, but if we fail, God will compensate. Nobody can look up from hell and say, I wouldn't be here if you had lived a better Christian life. You didn't let your light shine.

If you'd let your light shine, I'd have seen it and I'd have converted. That same principle is all through life. Nobody can blame anybody for anything.

We all are captain of our own ship, master of our own fate. Each of us has things that are appointed for us to do. Nobody can say, well, Lord, I missed my appointment because of so-and-so.

I would have been a great believer except for so-and-so. I would have had a larger, greater, grander life and opportunity and inheritance in the kingdom, but so-and-so just tripped me up and I stumbled and fell. There's only one way that we can stumble and fall and that is to stumble over the rock of Christ.

He is either a stone of stumbling and rock of offense to us or we fall on that rock and are broken and recognize our need. You look at the scriptures in Matthew chapter 5. Jesus says, Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. That's inheritance.

How do you seize inheritance? Recognize what we lack in our spirit. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Why would somebody mourn? I thought we were supposed to count it all joy.

We mourn when we recognize our shortcomings, our shortfall. We look at ourselves. We don't say it's so-and-so's fault.

It's this circumstance. It's that condition. It's this factor.

We mourn because it's our opportunity to seize these appointed things. Blessed are the meek, the ones who harness their strength, who bring themselves under subjection. They will inherit the earth.

Some people say, well, the earth is messed up. I wouldn't want to inherit it. This is the millennial earth.

This is a good deal. This is something we want. We want to inherit the earth.

This earth, this reconditioned earth, this promised earth, this is the land flowing with milk and honey earth. If we want to inherit, if we want to be land owners, if we want to have opportunities to continue to serve God, we want to understand and get a grip on meekness. Meekness means I look at myself.

I am my problem. I have to bring my strength, my headstrong nature, my willfulness, my emotions, whatever it may be. I've got to bring myself into subjection.

Meekness is not being limp. It's not kicking the toe in the dirt. It is bringing our areas of strength under control.

The things that get away from us, the things that overpower us. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Now, you look at the Apostle Paul.

The man was born into a family of Pharisees. His mother's milk was Pharisaic doctrine. He was raised in a Pharisaic family.

He was trained at the feet of Gamaliel, the foremost, most famous Pharisee of his day. If anybody could say, look, the reason I didn't see Christ is I just had too much of this traditional Pharisaic Judaism crammed down my throat. How could I possibly see anything else? I had it from birth.

What is the difference between Paul and the people on the road? What is the difference between Paul and the people he is addressing here? He hungers and thirsts for righteousness. It's misguided. He makes mistakes along the way.

Grievous mistakes. Mistakes that result in imprisonment and death for other people. But those other people are okay.

God wove them into his plan. He has a far better thing. You think about somebody that's going to have great inheritance.

Look at the martyrs. Those who died for their faith, who did not recant, who did not compromise. This is their hour to shine.

They don't have to live a long, stretched out series of tests. They pass this one test. Do you reject Christ or do you claim him? I claim him.

Alright, you die. And for that, they have inheritance. That's their big major test.

All of their testing, for us, our testing might be stretched over years. For them, it's hours. It's days.

It winds up being the same. It all balances out. Each of us has a kind of test.

Each of us has an opportunity. There are things that are appointed for us. It is appointed for them to pass a martyrdom test.

It's appointed for us to pass a living test. Each of us has these appointed things. If we hunger and thirst for righteousness, Jesus says, we shall be filled.

He doesn't say we might be filled. He doesn't say we'll get a little bit. If you hunger and thirst, you will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. This is an amazing promise.

Because no man has seen God at any time. Moses didn't see him. The elders on Sinai didn't see him.

No man has seen God at any time. But the pure in heart will see God. How big of a thrill is this? Everybody that wants to see God mentally, raise your hand.

How important is it to see God? Depends on what you think of God. When Elvis was alive, he wasn't near the icon that he is now. I personally wouldn't have walked across the street to see Elvis.

I just wasn't an Elvis fan. Still not an Elvis fan. Nice guy, good voice, did some good music back in the 50's.

But he just doesn't do anything for me. So if somebody said, if you meet this condition, you can see Elvis. Why should I bother? Don't care about the guy.

Give me two free tickets to Graceland, I'd have to put them on eBay. I just don't want to go. Don't need to see his Cadillacs or any of that.

It just doesn't motivate me. But you see the analogy? How important is it to us to see God? Paul sees the Lord Jesus on the Damascus road. Why? Even in the midst of his misguided zeal.

Even in the midst of his persecution of the way. He is hungry, he is thirsty, he does love God. God sees that and looks past it.

It's like the song that's to the tune of Danny Boy. It says, he looked beyond my faults and saw my need. He looked beyond my faults and saw my need.

Paul needs the Lord Jesus Christ. He needs to know how to please God. And God shows it to him and he responds.

Other people who don't have that need, who don't have that hunger and have that thirst, can't see it, can't understand it, don't get it. A lot of people you'd say, you know what, if you would do X, you could see God. They would say, well, I don't want to do X. I'm not that interested in seeing God.

The first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. If you don't love Him, you don't care about seeing Him. If you do, then this is an important verse.

How do I become pure in heart? David says in the Psalms, Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Create in me a clean heart, O God.

Renew a right spirit within me. Same thing in Hebrews chapter 10. Let us draw near with our hearts having been sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies having been washed with pure water.

We need to know how that works if we want to see God. Peacemakers will be called sons of God. Those who are persecuted for righteousness sake have an inheritance in the kingdom of heaven.

Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Persecuted for righteousness sake. It's not an easy test.

It's not an easy condition. But if you endure it, your real estate in the kingdom of heaven grows. The number of stories in your mansion increases.

The number of bathrooms, the number of picture frame paneled rooms, the number of

gold faucets, whatever it may be. I have no idea what all is involved in an inheritance in the kingdom. I just know that it's worth having.

It will be beyond what we can ask and think. All of this is related to this simple statement that the apostle Paul makes. You will be told all the things which are appointed for you to do.

We are told the things that are appointed for us to do. We are given the promises and the principles and the doctrines that let us identify those things that we are appointed to do. Whether it's our role as a spouse, our role as a parent, our role as children of our parents, our role as citizens, our role in a community, our role as business people or employees within a business, our role as students.

There is specific guidance from God as to how we are to live this life. How we are to walk our walk. All the things which are appointed for you to do.

Well then he goes on in verse 11. Since I could not see for the glory of that light. Now Acts 9 told us that he was blinded but didn't say why.

Here Paul says the reason he was blind is the light of Christ that shone in his eyes was so glorious that looking at anything else he just couldn't see it anymore. I could not see because of the glory of that light. Once he had looked at Christ he couldn't see anything else.

And it's a great statement. If we look full into the glorious face of Christ everything else is going to fade from view. He's going to be the most important thing.

Pleasing him, accomplishing our appointed tasks is the most important thing. If we are like the Apostle Paul. If we are teachable.

If we are amenable. If we choose that path. You can be on the same road.

Have the same light and the same sound and miss it all. Won't it be tragic to see Paul's companions on the Damascus road missing everything with the very same opportunity. It's a choice.

It's a sensitivity that we choose to have. I could not see for the glory of that light. I was led by the hand of those who were with me and came into Damascus.

Then a certain Ananias, verse 12, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there. Once again, Jewish crowd hooking into their Jewish sensibilities here. Even the man I went to after I saw Christ was a good Jew.

He didn't turn me away when I showed up. He came to me, stood and said to me, Brother Saul, receive your sight. At that same hour I looked up at him.

Then he said, the God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know his will and see the just one and hear the voice of his mouth. For you will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. Now, why are you waiting? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

People have come to this verse saying baptism is necessary for salvation. Baptism is necessary for forgiveness of sins. You can see what Paul is saying here when he quotes Ananias.

Be baptized in acknowledgement, in recognition, as a symbol. Peter himself talks about how the baptismal water is not partaken of. You don't get into the baptismal water to wash away the filth of the flesh.

It is the answer of a good conscience to God. It's all about the conscience. It happened when I returned to Jerusalem.

I was praying in the temple that I was in a trance. In Acts, we saw that there was a three year gap between the Damascus road experience and coming to Jerusalem. We find this in Galatians.

He says he comes to Jerusalem and is praying in the temple. Still doing a Jewish thing. I was in a trance and I saw him saying to me, make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning me.

The last time Paul was in Jerusalem, praying in the temple, what did Jesus say? Wasting your time here in Jerusalem. These Jews will not listen to your testimony. Get out of here.

That was the last time he was there. And at that time Paul argued with him. Look at verse 19.

I said, now this is new information. We didn't have this in Acts. We don't have it in Galatians.

This is new. Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly. They will not receive your testimony concerning me.

So I said, Paul is speaking to the Lord here. Lord, they know that in every synagogue I am prisoned and beat those who believe on you. And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.

Now why does he bring this up to the Lord? He says, they know these things. What's his argument here when Jesus says, get out of town? Why doesn't he just say, aye, aye, sir, and head out? He says, they know my form of reputation. What's his argument? I will be a compelling witness.

If I come back with my credentials and my history and tell them that I have believed in you, wowie zowie, this will really knock them down. This will knock them over. They'll fall like tin pins if I give them my testimony.

This is his argument, right? Jesus says, again, depart. I will send you far from here. Where? To the Gentiles.

Now Jesus said he would bear witness before all men, but that's a prediction. That's not a command, right? Go back up to verse 15. You will be his witness to all men.

You will be his witness to all men of what you've seen and heard. You don't have to try. You don't have to work at it.

You're going to be a witness to all men of what you've seen and heard. Can a Jewish person pick up this New Testament and read all about Paul? Have they been able to for the last 2,000 years? Yes. Have all men had access to this since the early centuries? Yes.

What did Jesus say? Make haste. Get out of Jerusalem quickly. They will not receive your testimony concerning you.

Paul says, oh, Lord, they have to. I mean, think. I'm ideal.

I'm the perfect guy for this. And Jesus says again, depart. I'm sending you far from here to the Gentiles.

Well, Paul has this fresh in his mind. And, of course, the question one asks oneself is, if it was so clear that he remembers it and can quote it to these people, did it not circulate through his mind as he was talking to Agabus and talking to everybody in every city that said, you know, you're heading in the wrong direction there, Paul. Didn't Jesus say, get out of Jerusalem? I'm sending you to the Gentiles.

Are you not the apostle of the Gentiles? Did we not see over 10 or 12 times in the New Testament where he manifested that this was his call, this was his commission? And here, out of his own mouth. And see, this is our problem. Because we, and I say we in every sense of the word, can say things that we're not listening to our own self.

And you just have to sympathize with Paul because we all do this. They listened to him until this word. What word? Well, it is the last word in verse 21, at least in the English.

Ais ethne, unto the ethne, unto the Gentiles. Far from here, I am sending you. That's how it goes in the Greek.

Porou, porou, actually. Depart you. That's what Jesus says.

Depart you, because I myself, ego, Ais ethne, I myself, to the Gentiles, far from here, am sending you out. You. And the very last word is you.

You are sent to the Gentiles. Se, S-E. They listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live.

What had Jesus told Paul? 17 odd years earlier. They will not listen to your testimony. Depart from here, quickly.

I'm sending you to the Gentiles. And even at the rehearsal of this 17 year old command, when they hear what Jesus told them, they fulfill it. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy, if there ever was one.

Well, what does this mean to us? It's important for us not only to listen to the word, but to hear it. To not only look at the word, but to see it and perceive it. To let it sink in.

Remember Jesus tells them at one time, Hear me, let this sink into your ears. And it takes an effort, it takes concentration. I myself can sit here and give a wonderful Bible lesson, if I don't listen to it myself, if I don't make some effort to think of what the applicability is of it to me, I am just a faucet that the water runs through, and the faucet itself is done no good.

All of us need the word of God to give us the vision to see. We choose whether or not we hunger and thirst after righteousness. We choose whether or not we are going to pursue those appointed things for us.

It's our choice. If we make that choice, we go to the Father. And we say, Father, I am asking, I am seeking, and I am knocking on the door.

Father, please open my eyes so that I can see. Open my ears so that I can hear. Don't let me be blind.

Don't let me miss the appointed things that you have for me. The Apostle Paul is talking about these things to people, and he is in the midst of fulfilling the very things he is talking about. It scares me to death, because I know if it happens to him, it happens to me, it happens to all of us.

We can hear it, we can know it, we can write it in our notes, we can talk about it with other people, but the only thing that counts is if we live it, if we choose it, if we go to God and say, Lord, don't let me be blind. Don't let me munch on a rock instead of the bread. Don't let me accept the snake instead of the food from your Word that rehabilitates my soul, that qualifies me to serve, that qualifies me to play a meaningful part in your plan.

We have to have that attitude. We have to pray that prayer. That is loving God with all our heart.

That is accepting the challenge, whatever it entails, and hearing our calling. That's when

all things will work together for good. That's when we are justified and glorified.

That's when we seize and lay hold of everything that God has for us. Well, let's pause and take a break. When we come back, we'll pick up at verse 22 and hopefully finish this chapter.