

Thursday Session

By: Trent Sheppard

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Announcer: All right, we're going to get started now. It's good to see everyone here. I hope you're having a great time at mission's conference. We welcome you here. I'm just gonna up here to introduce Trent. For those of you that weren't here yesterday, this is Trent Sheppard, and he has come all the way from England. He works with Youth With A Mission, YWAM, and he works mainly with youth discipleship. And so just welcome Trent today.

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Sheppard: Check. All right. Are we on? You can hear me, okay? Wait, that's not a good sign. Can you hear me, okay? Good. Flimsy shirt. I just found out. All right, well, how's it going? Good. You guys feeling all right? Good, man. I guess no normal classes this week. That's true. Yeah. Great rejoicing. Is this a bit more of a mellow week for you, or is it still kind of intense because of all the other stuff? How does it compare? Yeah, maybe. How does it compare? Ah, Relaxing. Very good, man. Cool. I like it. I was on my plane ride over, I was coming here from Hawaii, actually, which I highly recommend the islands. But on the way in, there these two guys in front of me, these sort of older surfer guys, and they were so funny, but when he just said, it's relaxing, it reminded me because this one guy had this habit of repeating everything. They like to say things kind of strange. We were flying into LAX, and he was like, time to relax. We are at LAX.

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And they need to wait a second. He'd go. Yes, we are at LAX. It was very cosmic, but I liked him. He was a cool guy. All right, well, how many of you guys were around yesterday? Any of you here yesterday? A few of you? Good. Okay, what I want to do is I want to tell some about kind of wrap up something of where we left off yesterday to pick up and then pick up on the next step. As you heard a second ago, my name is Trent, and for those of you guys who weren't here yesterday, we lead a team out in England called The Factory. And we're all about, I mean our heart in a really brief nugget is that we want to see God do something in these days, in our generation, that is, that is the aim.

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And when I say this thing do something is a bit vague, isn't it? So maybe I'll go a bit deeper on that. But the ache is this we want to see an awakening in these days, a massive surge of young people who come to know Jesus. But within that surge, the thing that we feel is foundational and essential to what is coming is that this awakening must be marked by Christ's likeness. It can't be marked by hype. It can't be marked by just a good time. Although all of those things, I'm sure, will somehow bear influence on it. But that this coming awakening could be marked by Christ's likeness. People like you and me who look like Jesus, wouldn't that be an epic thing? When the church again, when they looked at us and they called us Christians, it wasn't like that bitter taste in their mouth when they said that word Christian.

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But instead, man, they got an image of Jesus. That's what we're aching for over in England. And we accomplished that through youth discipleship we do a good bit of teaching. My brother has a

band. We also get more and more involved in a cell group discipleship, it's so exciting what's happening right now in England with cell groups. They're exploding in the university scenes. And maybe, I may mention a bit more about that tonight as we're in this time of worship together, because this time in university is the potential is well, I guess it's without limit. It's amazing. It's amazing what God can do during these days. But let me just tell you about this, too. I couldn't bring too many of these. I just brought some of the CDs from our team, the band. They're called 100 Hours, and I've only got a few with me, but if you'd like, I'm not a very good salesman, but if you'd like to, they're up here and you haven't heard them, so you'll have to take my word for it. But I like them.

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The name of the band is 100 Hours. The name comes from an old book called The Other 100 Hours. And the author's premise was that within a week, there were 168 hours a week divided out. Hey how's it going? Good to have you. Yesterday there's some guys who cruised up here. That's always an awkward moment, isn't it? I'm helping in that awkwardness right now. All right, okay. I was talking about this CD and 100 Hours, 168 hours in a week. And then what the author did was he took out the amount of hours that we sleep, 8 hours a night. I'm sure everyone gets that 56 hours a week. That would come up to, that comes down to 112 hours.

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And the author said that even the most conscientious Christian probably wouldn't spend more than 12 hours a week, like in religious activities, going to church Sunday morning, Sunday night, maybe hitting a Wednesday night Bible study, that sort of scene. He figured it out about 12 hours

a week so there's 100 hours left over. And his idea was that God is most concerned with those other 100 hours. What you do with your work, with your study, with your play, when you're kicking back with your friends, that's what God is on about. And so, the band's name comes from that. And these songs, they're original songs that we've written over there in England, and they've been birthed out of a heart in terms of seeing an awakening in these days.

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So, they're \$10. We try to make them cheap because we want to just get them out as much as possible. But yeah, so you guys are welcome to them. Yeah. Well, should we pray? Is that all right? I hope so because this is a Christian college. All right let's do it. Lord, we just say there's nothing like being Your sons and daughters, God, how sweet it is, Lord, to be loved and known by you. God, how we look forward to the day when the things will be removed from our eyes, Lord, that some time keep us from You, Lord, like you, when Your servant Paul tells us that we will know you even as we are known, Lord, like how now, Lord, we see in a mirror, Lord, like in a glass dimly.

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But then, Lord, we will see face to face, Lord, how we burn, and we ache for that day. And we just say, Lord, that's what we are created for. That is what we are created for, God. To know you in that way, Lord, we want nothing less, nothing less. For let me ask You, God, to come and be with us this morning. We do invite You, Holy Spirit, the one who Jesus said to lead us into truth. Guide us, Spirit, God at hand, with us, right here, right now, God. Let it never grow old to us, Lord, that the two are more gathered in Your name, that you're here with us. You are here even

now, Lord, and let that revelation sink into our hearts, to our minds, into our actions, and to the way we live.

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All right, man, I really like this. I've only been here a day, but I surely like Biola. I'm so impressed by a university that would take off from all of their classes for a missions' conference that speaks loads about what the heart of this university is on about. And just to affirm you as students as well, I think, man, you're in such a wonderful place, you know, maximize these days. Suck the marrow out of life, every bit of it. It's such a good time.

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All right, what I want to do is, um yesterday, how about this? Who was here yesterday? I'm going to put you on the spot. Would one of you guys mind up and just sort of briefly and I mean very briefly, sort of giving a brief summation of what we spoke about yesterday. Would you mind someone feeling bold, a little mental perhaps, about it? Seriously, if everybody volunteers at once, it's difficult to keep up with the crowd control. Okay, good. All right, what we talked about, we sort of titled the session was The Marks of the Age. We just looked at a few marks and really briefly we looked at like the global youth culture. The messed-up values from the Western world that mark that youth culture. This bizarre mysticism from the east. Things like a hunger for purpose. A hunger for truth. Breakdown of the family. This basic core of society.

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Things like a callous conscience in our age. Where guys like those dudes out at Columbine have no problem with walking into a high school and just gunning down the dudes in their school because it's a callous conscience. And the reason we went that direction was this. There's a scripture in 1 Chronicles that says, it talks about the people of Issachar. And it says that these guys had an understanding of the times and therefore they knew what Israel ought to do.

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And it's so rad to get excited about what God is doing in these days, and man, I am. And we'll explore more of that. But along with that excitement and the sense of purpose that God is putting within these days in this age, the same time, it's so important that we come face to face with reality. We hang out with people who don't know Jesus. I was hitting my head hard there, and now I'm in pain. [audience laughs]

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But we can come to face with some people who just don't know him because they're broken. I can remember hanging out in this little squatters like, what was it, like a pub almost. This was in Switzerland, and we were kicking back in this place, this little beaten down few pieces of furniture. And these squatters, these are guys, you know, squatters just cruise around, living in abandoned buildings and such. A number of these guys, they're brilliant, they're poets, they're artists, but they've got a bum rap on life. They've come to conclusion that life going through the routine, it's bogus, education in their eyes, it is bogus. And what they realize is, look, if society teaches this that there's nothing really more to life than going through a few years of education, then hitting your university, maybe doing further studies, then you get a job, you live 70 years,

and then you die. Oh, man, if that's all there is to life, I refuse to buy into that lie. And so, they don't.

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They float. They just float, building to building. And I can remember hanging out with these guys and man, just the brokenness you could see within them, the unbelievable potential that rests within them being made in the image of God, but they just had not seen it, yet you know? The reality of these days. We wrapped up yesterday talking about a young guy in New York interview in Time magazine a while back. In his comment, he talked about how that the shock value was gone. There was nothing to do, there was nothing to look at, there was nothing even to stand for. His words were because the shock value was gone, nothing new to do, nothing even shocking in these days. He's done it all, is what he's trying to say.

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And then he goes on to say this we've lost our ability to howl at the moon. We've lost our ability to howl at the moon. What he's articulating in that phrase. It's this concept we've lost that thing that sets us apart. We've lost that thing to which we can give our whole lives to something that we as a generation can say, man, we can live and die for this. We've lost our ability to howl at the moon unbelievable ache for that ability within these days.

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A few months ago, I mentioned this yesterday. We were over in Budapest. Our team was hosting this gathering of discipleship training schools with YWAM in Hungary. And we had such a cool

time. And one of the most exciting things that happened while we were there we were there on November 9, 1999, back in the 1900's, [audience laughs] I love saying that. November 9. And we were there ten years to the date, you know, November 9, 1989. Ring a bell? Anyone? Yeah. Absolutely. The Berlin Wall collapsed on that day, 1989.

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Now, if you look back ten years before that, in 1979, something extremely significant took place in Poland. I'll tell you a bit about it. The Pope had been given the opportunity to do mass in a public square in Poland. And as a result of that, deep within this communist territory, the Pope had been given this unprecedented opportunity. When the Pope gathered there, a million people gathered for mass as the Pope was giving mass. And I'm not sure exactly the chain of events, but at one point during this mass, this was 1979, a spontaneous chant began to break out within the crowd. So, if you can picture 1 million people gathered in the square in Poland, in a communist country, for the first time, they're having mass given by the Pope. And a spontaneous chant begins to break out, we want God. We want God. We want God.

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And one after another, they begin to take up this cry until you have a million people on their feet crying out, we want God. And you probably can imagine that there was something of like a spiritual current. It just rushed into that place as these people cried out for something more in life, knowing, man, there was more to life than this bogus ideology of communism. And in the midst of that, ten years down the road, the Berlin Wall collapses. Ten years further down the

road, in 1999, about 400 of us, not that many, are hanging out in Hungary, waiting on God about what he wants to do in this generation.

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And right in the midst of it, we didn't even realize it until we got there, but that we were hitting this ten-year anniversary. The thing is that whenever God chooses to step into history, you've got something of a revolution on your hands, politically, spiritually, morally. When God chooses to step into a point of history, something begins to take place. And if you ever could describe a revolution, that would be the best way to describe it when God steps into history, because you see this revolution, it's the concept of a it's a force revolting against or like opposing another force. When God steps into a moment of history and he comes against these days in which we're living in and establishes his kingdom here. That changes everything. And what I want to do we don't have a lot of time, so we're going to have to blaze.

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I want to talk to you about a moment in time, which is some of my man, I love this time in history. And I hope what it would begin to do is begin to shape our understanding of what church is, what Christianity is, and what missions are all about. Are you up for it? You trekking somehow? Amen. All right. I'm with you. All right. Bibles. Have you got Bibles? Yes, I hope so. All right, check out Mark, chapter one, verse 15. And let's jump to it. Mark, chapter one, verse 15. Let me read to you what it says here. Mark one, verse 15. We'll start in verse 14. Now, after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God. Verse 15. This is what Jesus was saying. Listen to these words. The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at

hand. Repent and believe in the good news. Hear it again. The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the good news.

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Now, Jesus, if you read through the Gospels and you read through most of Jesus' parables, there was something that he was constantly talking about, and it was this concept of a kingdom again and again. One day, the thing that helped me to dawn on this was actually reading an atheist historian. Get a load of that. I was reading the history of the world, okay, in different portions. And I picked up on this one portion about this author. H.D. Wells his interpretation of what was happening when Jesus was here on Earth. He explained everything, but then he went on to make this point and what he said was the thing that in effect, that he did not understand was why did Christ's disciples, those who go by the name of Christ, Christians, why we spend so little time focusing on the Kingdom of God, when you look at the life and teachings of Jesus, it seemed that everything he talked about was this very kingdom.

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And the atheist historian looked into that scene, and he said, what's the story? What's the story? So, we probably would do well to get a bit of understanding of what Jesus was on about when he said, the kingdom of God is at hand. It's here. The Kingdom of God. What I want to do is just draw a timeline on this nifty overhead. There we go. Nice. Okay, here we go. This is a bit of a timeline here. What we've got going on is we'll just throw in a few marks. Your creation, the Fall, we can throw in like the Abraham, we'll just call him Abe for now, after Abe, let's say, the coming of the law, still in the prophets. This is a little bit of a glimpse of what God is doing

throughout the Old Testament. And I do mean a very little glimpse, but at any rate, we could go on and on on this in terms of looking at these different phases. But in the midst of this, there was a progression of God's purposes.

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And you come to a period of time after these prophets, who were pretty much, the prophet's man, they were unbelievable people to read, read their lives and understand their message, because they were calling the people of God back to God. And they were saying, you were not called to live this way. Remember his law, remember his ways, remember his character, and come back to these things. And then for a period of time, there seemed to have been no prophets in the land of Israel. And then along the way, there's tale of this wild man in the wilderness by the name of John the Baptizer. And he's got hair going everywhere, he's wearing camel skin, eating insects, and he's preaching about the kingdom of God, preaching about someone else who is coming in time as well. Soon enough, after John is preaching. And there's a bit of an awakening that takes place in Israel. As a result of John's ministry, a massive amount of people begin to repent and get baptized, preparing the way for who he called the Lamb of God.

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And then into that, he's there, [audience laughs] ha ha no worries. And into that scene, Jesus comes on and this is what he says the kingdom of God has come near. Or another translation, the kingdom of God is actually at hand, which I think is probably a more valid translation of that. Repent and believe in the good news. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the good news. Now, what I want to do in this time, and this is not a chart that I made up on my

own, this is just biblical scholars and such. This is an idea. And I'm just going to kind of make a few adjustments to tell you what I'm talking about. If we look at this moment in history where we can identify this large line right here at the top, and I put the cross up there to give evidence of this kingdom of God that comes into the earth at this point, when Jesus said, it's actually here now, you see it's here now.

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And in the midst of that, what you see is there is a bizarre thing that begins to take place, this line down here in the Jewish mindset and their understanding of the age in which they're living. And they called it something, the present evil age. And the reason they called it that was because they were waiting a day when a king or a messiah would come and would set them free from that present evil age and in their understanding of that mindset, what it would mean is this king would come. And in that day when Jesus came, how they were interpreting that most likely would be he would come, he would set us free from our Roman oppressors. He would set us up as a great authority over the nations, and then we would rule with Him.

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It's quite appealing, isn't it? But then in the midst of that, Jesus comes on the scene, and he begins to preach a very different kingdom. He begins to say things like, I love those who persecute you pray for those who persecute you love your enemies. And it really doesn't go into their worldview or their understanding of what a kingdom really is. But nonetheless, Jesus calls it a kingdom and he says it's at hand. So, you see two things going on at this point. On the

bottom line, you've got this present evil age, and then on the top line, this kingdom of God, okay? The present evil age and the kingdom of God. And these two things running in parallel.

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Now, biblical scholars and theologians, they've come to call this thing that we're living in right now, this little box. Well, let me just make this point first. We know there's a time when Jesus is going to return, is that true? All right, just checking. Now there's all sorts of probably different beliefs and understandings about how that's going to come about. And we don't have to go into all of that now because I don't even understand them all myself, so I can't. But at the same time, there's a number of different beliefs. Well, the one thing we do agree on is this, that he is going to return. And at that moment, something is going to happen. This present evil age that we're living in will come to a stop entirely. The kingdom of God will continue on.

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And that's the times we read about in the book of Revelation, where there will be no more crying, no more pain, no more death, no more sorrow, because the kingdom in all its fullness will be here in these days. Now, in the meantime, you see this box here? This is called something like an age of tension. And the reason this is called an age of tension is this is because you've got two kingdoms that are in tension. You've got the Kingdom of God that is rushing into the world.

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How? Through men and women who live like Jesus. But at the same time, you still have the present evil age that is still existing. And we'd be foolish to deny that. When you look at the pain,

some of the things we looked at yesterday, the marks of the age, these two ages that are in tension with one another. And that is why sometimes when you're in the place of worship and you're giving your heart out to God. And you know, I'll just tell you this. You know what? Worship is not about us. It's about Jesus, isn't it? So often we come into that time of worship, and we come away from that time and we're like, man, I just didn't get anything from that worship time.

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Well, you know what? It's actually not about us. It's about Him. And he is worthy whether we feel like it or not. And when we line ourselves up with his worth rather than our feelings, you know what, our feelings follow because he's that worthy. It's such a powerful thing. But what you'll find is sometimes in the place of worship man, you'll sense his presence so near to you, like he is right there. And then other times you may be in a time of worship, and you worship Him because he is worthy. You may not feel anything. It may be something of a sacrifice of praise. But I'll tell you what, when we are with Him in the kingdom of God and all of its fullness, we're not going to be wondering if God is there or not in that place. And when we are face to face with Him, there is going to be no questions about his presence. In the meantime, we are in that age of tension. And sometimes we feel him so strongly and sometimes we don't. Nonetheless, he's there.

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Now, I'm just going to draw a little man here. Or a woman. It's okay. It doesn't matter. Okay, what we got going on, this is a guy who's living according to this present evil age, okay? Now

let's jump into the scriptures here. I want you to turn to the book of Acts. How are we doing on time? Okay, turn to the book of Acts. Now, the reason I draw that man here is because I want you to understand. This dude is living according to the present evil age. It is all that he knows. In his understanding of the world and understanding the way in which he lives. The typical in that day and age, the typical Roman man. Okay?

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This Greek civilization that's influencing so intensely, we don't have time to go into all of it. We may a little bit later, but I'm sure in your classes you'll pick up on that along the way of the things that the church when God birthed his kingdom into the earth, the things they were coming against, it was a terrible time. The Roman age was so much far gone, so much further gone than we are in this age. It is not even really comparable. This sin was like nothing that we have ever seen. We may be heading there soon enough, but we're not quite there yet. This man is living according to that present evil age. Now in the midst of that, a strange thing happens. When Jesus ascends into heaven, he gives his followers a commandment. He tells them to go into all the earth, to teach his kingdom to all nations, to disciple people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And he gives them a promise that I will be with you always. It's in Matthew 28, verse 19, I'll be with you always.

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In the beginning of Acts, you read a promise and what he says to them. This is the apostles in verse six who still probably really aren't understanding the nature of his kingdom. This is what they ask Him. Lord, this is one, verse six, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to

Israel? They're still thinking in the old Kingdom pattern, I reckon. Then Jesus responds, it is not for you to know the times and periods the Father set by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. And then he commands them, wait in Jerusalem until that promise, this power comes to you. Now, supposedly we understand from some of Paul's writings that there were about 500 people who saw Jesus following his resurrection, but they're actually waiting in Jerusalem.

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There were only 120. I'm not sure what happened to the rest of them, but we know that 120 were actually there waiting in an upper room, waiting. It was men and women. Make that point really clear in the Scriptures that we'll go into it a bit. Men and women waiting for whatever this promise was probably men and women a lot like us, except they had probably a lot less understanding in terms of the Scriptures and all the rest, because the New Testament wasn't even there at that point, waiting for something, not sure what it was, but trusting in Jesus because he said, wait.

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Now let's look at a couple of things really closely. If you look at verse 26 of chapter one, and then verse two of chapter one, a cool thing takes place. You know, old Judas, there are twelve guys Jesus was investing his life into. Old Judas unfortunately failed the course, and he betrayed the Lord. And after his betrayal, the disciples come to a point where they decide we need to find another one of these to take up Judas' position. So, what they do is a common thing in the Old

Testament. They cast lots. And you can read about that in verse 26, he says, and they cast lots for them. And the lot fell on Matthias, and he was added to the eleven apostles. This concept of casting lots, it's a bit like a form of spiritual gambling is what you could call it.

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And the idea is you're casting lots, you're doing something. So that in effect, what you'll do is by looking at two different possibilities, you're going to be able to determine what the will of God is. And you look at two different things. In the midst of that, God will make his will clear and it was a way of understanding his will. The very next verse something interesting happens. That's verse 26, chapter two, verse one. When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind. And it filled the entire house where they were sitting, divided tongues as a fire appeared among them. And the tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability.

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Now, what you'll see is something unbelievable here in biblical history. You know what you'll never find again in scriptures? The concept of casting lots. Do you know why? Because never again would the people of God need to determine God's will in that way. Why? Because the Spirit of God had now been given to them to interact in such a powerful way that they would be able to ask Him, lord, what are you saying to me? And he would begin to identify his will within their own lives through that still small voice.

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Now you see that happening in the Old Testament as well. But you see it probably happening to specific groups of people. It may be to a prophet, to a king, or maybe to a wild man like Samson, who the Spirit of God rushes on him. You know, my hair is the source of my strength too.

[laughter] But in the midst of that you see these things in the midst of the Old Testament. But then in the New Testament, an unbelievable thing begins to take place and the Spirit of God rushes into these people's lives. And here's the situation that I want to talk about. Everything changes at that point. Everything changes. These 120 people who are waiting on God to come, they are never the same. Let me give you an example of what I'm talking about. Peter.

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Peter, the same guy who had just denied the Lord Jesus previously had such an encounter with God face to face, the resurrected Lord. And then he goes, and he waits in Jerusalem and the Spirit of Christ comes to him. And it so changes Peter's life that he stands up and he doesn't even give that long of a sermon, does he? Yes, he just gives a brief understanding of what God is doing. But there's something so different about what he is on about in his life. 3000 people say, man, I want to follow Jesus too. Something changed in Peter's life.

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Let's talk about Thomas. How do we know Thomas throughout old history? What do we call Thomas? Doubting Thomas. Do you know where old Doubting Thomas probably died? Church history thinks most likely old Thomas probably died in India. Do you know how far away that is from Jerusalem? It's a long way. What took Thomas from Jerusalem to India to die as a martyr in

the name of Christ? Something had changed in doubting Thomas' life. Something had changed. It was the power of the spirit God at work within him. They took him forward and they begin to turn the world upside down. Now, what I want to do is I want to list a few things that were taking place in the world as a result of this kingdom, because I want us to begin to understand the Church and the Christian movement, maybe through some different eyes.

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Can you read that at all? It says impacting the world. I almost couldn't read it myself. And the L is actually a C that is supposed to be a C. Rather than impelting the world, that would be impacting the world, let's adjust that. Impacting the world. Yeah. Okay, let me just mention a few things that begin to take place, and we'll look specifically at this birth of the Church in Jerusalem. One of the most exciting things that begin to take place is this. You've got something of a multiracial movement on your hands. One of the major tenets of the New Testament faith was this concept of all people being brought into the kingdom of God. No longer was it going to be limited to a specific portion of people on earth, the Israelite people. Now, God always had intentions for all people, but for a period of time he was investing into these people so that in time they would bless the entire earth. And that was his command from the beginning. He always had intentions for the entire world. Every people group on the earth.

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Always it was within his heart to bring them to his throne. And at this point, because a number of things that begin to happen Jesus called it the fullness of time, a number of things that begin to take place in the earth. Suddenly the potential was there for really an obscure prophet, prophet

God that is by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, in the midst of a very obscure region of Israel, to begin a movement that 2000 years down the road, we still are here talking about it. The fullness of time had come, and this movement was to be marked by this multiracial element.

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And one of the most exciting things that you see in this book of Acts is you've got this guy Philip, and he's walking along the road, and as he's walking along the road, he comes across a guy from Ethiopia. And this Ethiopian is reading the scripture out of Isaiah 53 like a lamb led to the slaughter. And the Ethiopian doesn't understand what the prophet Isaiah is speaking about. And so, Philip sits down with him, and he begins to explain the nature of what Jesus did at Calvary. And it so impacts this Ethiopian, who is not a Jew, that the Ethiopian decides that he wants to follow Jesus. And Philip does something unbelievably bold that we can't even imagine in our mindset because of how bold it is.

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He takes him out of the chariot. He says, look, I'll baptize you right now. He takes him down to the river and he baptizes this man in the name of Jesus. And an Ethiopian, an entirely different background comes into the kingdom of God. And then a very cosmic thing happens. If you read it in Scripture, Philip is hanging out there with the Ethiopian and then it says he has just transported to another place. I don't know. One moment there, one moment gone. Excellent. It cuts down on airfare. And an amazing thing God was so at work in those days. A multiracial movement begins to take place. Now, let me give you a few more points really quickly.

[00:35:52.880]

Here another essential thing that begins to happen. I'll just put it like this the poor and the rich. Let me explain to you what I'm talking about. I'll read you a Scripture. This is in Acts 2. We're spending most of our time in Acts. Acts 2, verse 44. This is in the Jerusalem church right at the birth. And this is what they say. These are all the people who had come to know Jesus. And there were quite a few by that point, all who believed were together and had all things in common. They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all as any had need. And what you see within this Jerusalem church is a bit, a beginning of a breakdown between the poor and the rich in society. It wasn't as if we understand communism. It wasn't an across-the-board type thing because it wasn't done a top down type decree.

[00:36:42.490]

It was a grassroots type thing where people out of their hearts and generosity because they were beginning to live like Jesus, they said, look, if I have more, my brother has less, I want to help him out. And into the midst of that, they lived in this community together, sharing their belongings with one another, selling everything, giving to each other as each other has need. And this division which so marked this Roman world into which the church was birthed, this division between the poor and the rich, this social implication was unbelievable. It began to break down within this church in Jerusalem. Let me give you a few more points. Number three. Let's look at the plight of women. The plight of women.

[00:37:24.070]

Let me just read to you a few scriptures. Acts 1, verse 14. All these were constantly, these are those who are waiting on the Spirit of God, all these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer together with certain women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers. The reason I want to make that point is to make it so clear that there are women and men who had that encounter with God at Pentecost.

[00:37:48.180]

Then the other thing I want to look in the book, Acts, chapter two, where Peter begins to quote the prophet Joel, verse 17 chapter two, in the last days it will be God declares that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons may hear these words, and your daughters will prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams, even upon my slaves, both men and women. In those days, I will pour out my spirit, and they shall prophesy. Now, let's turn to one of Paul's epistles in the book of Galatians, chapter three, verse 28. Galatians, chapter three, verse 28, and hear these words that again, I think it's hard for us to understand the power of what Paul was saying, and how counterculture he was going with these words.

[00:38:33.690]

Chapter three, verse 28. There is no longer Jew or Greek. There is no longer male and female. There is no longer slave or free. There is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Do you hear that? There is no longer Jew and Greek. There is no longer slave and free. There is no longer male and female. All of you are one in Christ Jesus. All of you. This hierarchy is not within the kingdom of God, males above females. And understanding that is essential in this Roman age, that they were living. A Pharisee when he got up in the mornings,

okay? There was an understanding that many of these Pharisees, the most devout, would pray a prayer. And in their prayer, there were a number of different elements involved.

[00:39:25.370]

But three of those elements were these, number one, God, thank you that I am not a Gentile. Number two, thank you, God, that I am literate. I can read your Torah. Number three, thank you that I am not a woman. Now, imagine in the midst of that, a movement begins where a man stands to his feet and says, in Christ Jesus, there is no longer Jew or Greek. There is no longer slave or free. There is no longer male or female. We are one in Christ. It was revolutionary. It was absolutely revolutionary. Let me hit one more point before we take a next step here. Are you tracking with me? You sure? All right. I'm trusting.

[00:40:14.890]

Okay, slaves, back to the book of Acts. And that prophecy from Joel that Peter is quoting, he says in verse 18, even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days, I will pour out my spirit, and they shall prophesy. And then again, Paul, in his letter to Philemon, that letter is specifically regarding a former slave by the name of Onesimus. And what he is saying is, look, formerly Onesimus was a slave. He was a servant to you, but now he is your brother in Christ. Treat him likewise. And again, I just bring out this issue of slavery. Simply for us to understand again that this New Testament Church was not some sort of a club or an institution. This New Testament Church, it was something of an underground movement with unbelievable social implications that was literally turning the world upside down.

[00:41:11.690]

Now, why do I say these words, turning the world upside down? Turn to the book of Acts 17, verse 6. At this point, the New Testament Church is [audio skips for a second] and you get to this one point where it's making such an impact in this one community that the people get so upset that they decide they are extremely angry, and some persecution begins. And in the midst of that persecutions, those who are not actually following Jesus, this is how they describe those who are actually following Jesus. Okay, consider this those who do not follow God do not follow the way of Jesus. This is how they describe those who do follow Jesus. Okay? Act 17, verse 6. When they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city authorities, shouting, now listen to these words. These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also.

[00:42:09.150]

When was the last time you heard Christians describe like that? I've heard him describe hypocritical. I've heard him describe bogus and judgmental. I haven't recently heard them described as these people who have been turning the world upside down. But something was so powerful happening in that day and age that those who didn't follow Jesus described it, these Christians, as those who were turning the world upside down. And what you find is this. Here's our normal man living according to the present evil age. And then in the midst of that time, in that age, suddenly a people group burst into the earth by the name of Christ. Christians who begin to live according to the kingdom of God, which according to those who are living to the present evil age, it is a way that is upside down to the world. It is absolutely different, absolutely contrary, a complete counterculture.

[00:43:08.050]

Now, it is so counter, and it is so different that persecution begins almost immediately. And when you begin to take place and you can read about it in Acts six, up through the end of chapter seven, there this guy Stephen, who man, what a man of God. We don't know a lot about him, but what we see there is something so deep in his life. And what Stephen begins to talk about is he gives an unbelievable message when he is brought before the religious authorities. He begins to give this unbelievable message about the purposes of God throughout history.

[00:43:39.660]

And the key point of his message at the end is he calls Jesus. In effect, what he says is he calls him the Son of man, an Old Testament understanding of the Messiah. And what he is saying is that this Messiah is going to reach all people. And that is something that those people could not handle the Jewish people. They could handle only a few things. They could handle it up to a point. But when in effect he called Jesus the Son of man, these prophecies out of Daniel and such, that's what he was referring to when he called him that. They went out of control. They could not bear it any longer. And so, what they did is they took Stephen outside of the city in a completely illegal act, I might add. They did not have the authority to do that at this point. They took Stephen outside of the city and they stoned him. But a strange thing happened in Stephen's death. Look at the end of chapter seven. This is supreme. Acts chapter 7 right at the end, verse 59. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, lord Jesus receive my spirit. Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, lord, do not hold the sin against them. Does that sound familiar to you? Father, forgive them for they don't know what they do.

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You see, the problem with Stephen is this he dies just like Jesus. And for some unknown reason in this nature of this kingdom that is upside down in his own death, he discovers victory. Lord do not hold the sin against them. And if you look right above that scripture in verse 58, this is what it says. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. And the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. And the reason Saul is mentioned there, we don't know exactly why, but it would seem because he's mentioned right there at that point that he was somehow instrumental in the death of Stephen.

[00:45:31.670]

We don't know exactly what he did, but he seems to have played a role. And I can guarantee you that day as Saul was watching Stephen, looking at what was happening in his life even deeper than the rage and the anger that he felt against these people who were following Jesus of Nazareth. Something within him was saying, what are they on about? Why would they choose to die for this man Jesus of Nazareth? And why on his deathbed would he say, forgive these people, they don't know what they're doing. Well, Saul goes on a rampage because true Christians usually evoke one of two responses. Either people want to go after them full on or they hate them with everything they have.

[00:46:11.990]

And Paul and Saul at that stage could not handle any longer. And he goes on a rampage against the early church, persecuting and killing and all the rest. In the midst of that, we know what

happens. Saul has an unbelievable encounter with God on the road to Damascus in such a real experience that he is blinded. And then one of the strangest things in all of history takes place. The major persecutor of the New Testament Church has such a radical encounter with God that he goes on to write most of the New Testament, and that is bizarre. Amen. Yeah. The major persecutor of the New Testament Church has such an encounter with God that he goes on and writes most of the New Testament. What a bummer for the enemy. What a turn of events. What a kingdom that is upside down.

[00:47:05.850]

And that movement has been spreading now for 2000 years, this underground spiritual revolution. It's a revolution of a revolutionary band of believers. It was meeting in secret, knowing that at any time the Roman authorities could kick in the doors, and they could be dragged off to persecution or to death. That is what this movement is all about. And if I can express anything to you, it is this. You did not join a club when you came to Christ. You did not join an institution. You joined a movement. You joined a spiritual revolution. You joined something that was intended to turn the entire world upside down.

[00:47:39.970]

And for 2000 years, it has been raging forward. And it is time once again that we get up and we take hold of that. It is burning and brimming with life. And when the world hears us talking about Jesus and how wonderful he is, but then they see that lack of power within us, that lack of Christlikeness. Man, we are exactly what they say, bogus, hypocritical. They go away

completely disillusioned because they're aching for something more, just like the rest of us. Just like the rest of us. Are you trekking with me? I got kind of excited. Sorry.

[00:48:21.830]

Let me just give you a few more points. One of the main things I had to begin to ask myself over in England. One of our most exciting things we're doing in these last two years is we've been giving a lot of our time to studying the New Testament Church. Reading throughout the book of Acts into Paul's Epistles and the other writers of the New Testament. And then taking a lot of time in early church history as well in this first couple of hundred years and you see something.

[00:48:51.450]

There was a number of chain of events that led to a change within Christianity. But I'm sure most of you will be familiar with probably what I would say was the most significant change that we see. And I'm sure most of you are familiar with the Emperor Constantine, who was called the first Christian emperor. The reason he was called the first Christian emperor was this in 312 Constantine is on his way to battle. At this point, you have to understand the Christian movement is still growing throughout the Roman Empire, reaching to the furthest Roman Empire post all over that empire.

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Christianity is now spread. Historians, they disagree on this point, but they reckon that you get anywhere from 5 to 15% of the Roman world. At that point, they think probably we're following Jesus 5 to 15%. Okay, so we'll go middle ground. Let's say 10%. Okay, I'm a bit of a pacifist.

Let's say 10%. Could be more. Could be less. Of this Roman world had chosen to turn and follow Jesus. It was growing like wildfire. And in the midst of that Diocletian the emperor that was before Constantine. The Christians had experienced the worst persecution they had experienced yet. Terrible things were happening. Christians brought together in buildings all of them at once and burned alive together.

[00:50:05.730]

A terrible time. Then into the midst of that, in 312, Constantine, who wants that Roman throne is on his way to battle. And on his way to battle, he has a vision, and it's of a cross that is flaming in the sky and beneath that cross that is flaming in the sky. Supposedly, these are the words that Constantine sees in this sign conquer or by this sign conquer. Well, Constantine on that day makes a very interesting decision.

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And what he decides is, from that day forward, his soldiers, his army will march under the banner of the cross. And so, they begin to take the cross and emblem on their helmets and emblem on their shields. They take a spear and a sword and make a cross with it. And from that day forward, supposedly Constantine's armies marched under the cross of Jesus Christ. Now, a very strange thing begins to happen within Christianity because, you see, up to that time, while the Christians had not endured persecution throughout every emperor, it was difficult times for them.

[00:51:06.930]

But when Constantine came, although he didn't make Christianity the official religion of the empire initially, he, on his deathbed supposedly was baptized into the Christian faith. None of us can judge Constantine's heart. Only the Lord can. But we do know this that there was a subtle shift that began to take place within the Christian movement at that point. And what you see is something of a grassroots movement that was spreading underground, literally, like a little spiritual revolution begin to take a very different vibe.

[00:51:35.360]

And within one generation, these church bishops who were the leaders of this underground movement who were probably some of the poorest of the poor within one generation after the reign of Constantine, they make a transition and become key figures within the land with political favor. All sorts of shifts begin to take place within the New Testament Church. Compromise a discomfort that they have before. They'd know such persecution and such hardship. The comfort that creeps in it gives way to compromise and bizarre things begin to take place.

[00:52:05.420]

Relics of those martyrs, those bygone saints become extremely valuable. Constantine's mother was a very cosmic woman finding all sorts of bizarre relics and as such, that she was deeming this holy side and that a strange shift begins to take place. By the year 400, a mere 87 to 88 years after Constantine comes into power, okay, we're estimating 5 to 15% of the empire as Christians when he comes into a power. By the end of this, at the beginning of 400 AD. Something around 80% of the Roman empire claimed Christianity.

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80%. Unbelievable growth in terms of numbers. But the reality of the Christian movement, probably not any growth at all. If anything, it was going down. And a very strange thing begins to take place within Christianity, and it's something from which we've yet to recover, because what you begin to see take place is this people who live like this one foot in the kingdom of God, one foot in the present evil age. And it is very uncomfortable [audience laughs], this bizarre communion between the kingdom of God and the present evil age.

[00:53:24.810]

And the problem is this the majority of Christians in our generation, you know what they identify with. Which Christianity? This one. This is the Christianity the majority of us identify with. One foot in the kingdom of God, one foot in the presence evil age, back and forth in our commitment in Christ, supposedly at one point in our lives, accepting him as Lord, and then later accepting him as savior, as if that is even biblical reality.

[00:53:59.050]

You see, when this thing that took place in the day of Constantine and Constantine, I don't know who Constantine is Constantine. This thing that took place in the day of Constantine, it shifted everything. And the reason why was because it formed a communion between these two cultures, these two worlds that are actually in opposition to one another. And it created a Christianity that's 1700 years down the road. Although we have made leaps and bounds the history of Christianity, it is full of powerful moves of God, of men and women who have taken the

Christian movement forward and have restored some of that apostolic tradition and heart and fire and life.

[00:54:40.330]

And it's such a powerful thing, and it's happening in these days. But nonetheless, when the majority of nonbelievers look at a Christian church, I believe this is what they usually see. That is the most disillusioning thing in the entire universe. People who go by the name of Christ but deny the power. What is that power? Well, it's to live in the world, but not of it. In the world, but not of it. This institutionalization of Constantine that followed the reign of Constantine, it dealt a blow to the passion of the church that we have yet to recover from. We have yet to recover from. Tortillon, one of the Church historians, who said it like this the blood of the martyrs is the seed. The idea was the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church in the same light even as the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.

[00:55:39.430]

You know what the complacency in this sort of lives within believers? It is the seed of hypocrisy. It is the seed of it. It is a church that has no power. Christianity that has no life and missions that will not impact the entire world because this is the way in which we are intended to live completely upside down. Now we have run out of time, and I'm not done. All right, can I go five minutes? Is it okay? I'm really sorry. I feel really bad. I mean, not terribly, but sort of. [audience laughs] I didn't want to lie. I just felt bad for it. Let me just go five more minutes with you and you have to leave. I completely understand.

[00:56:37.570]

You won't be a lame Christian or anything. Honestly. I mean, if you have to go, it's completely cool. So, I'll answer five more minutes really quickly because I hate to leave on this. When we look at the early church and we looked at the birth of the early Church. Throughout the apostles' letters and then on into early church history. There were two things that seemed to mark the way these people, why the early Church grew. Why it was doing what it was doing. Why they were able to live upside down according to the world in which they were living and why was it spreading like fire. Something like a revolution.

[00:57:13.810]

Okay? And it came down to these two things, and they're pretty simple, but I reckon it probably looks something like this. It was because of the way they lived and the way they died. Number one, the way they lived. And number two, the way they died. Really quickly, let me talk about those two things. Number one, the way they lived. There was a guy by the name of Justin Martyr, okay? And Justin Martyr. [takes a swig of a drink] Wow, Justin Martyr. He was writing about the church, quite an old church historian and writing about the nature of what God was doing in the days of the early church, okay? Pre-Constantine. And into the midst of that, he was writing about the preconstantinian church. And into the midst of that, he began to describe a few things in the nature of how they were actually living their lives, okay?

[00:58:06.750]

Now, he identified a few bondages. What he described or how we can paraphrase, would be bondages of the Roman age, okay? And these are the four bondages that he identified within that

Roman age, okay? Listen to these. Sexual pleasure. He called it sexual adventure, okay? Number two, the magical arts, like occult, okay? Number three greed. And number four, racism. Okay, listen to these bondages of the Roman age. Again, he identified them as sexual pleasure or adventure. Number two, magical arts of the occult. Number three greed. Number four racism. Now, in the midst of the Roman world marked by these bondages, how did the early church live?

[00:58:52.880]

Well, let's look. In the midst of an age that was marked by racism, what do you have on your hands? A multiracial movement. In the midst of an age marked by greed, what do you have? Well, no division between the poor and the rich because we love one another. In the midst of an age, it's marked by things like sexual adventure. What do you have the Apostle Paul writing letters that say things like, Husbands love your wives like Christ loved the church, encouraging that unit of this core family, this thing within society. In the midst of an age marked by the occult and all sorts of bizarre mysticism, what do you have of people who say, no, we will not follow all of these other things, we will follow one God, and his name is Jesus.

[00:59:35.480]

You see, the problem with the early church was not simply that they followed Jesus. Do you know that? It was that they followed Jesus and Jesus alone. Spiritual spirituality was rampant throughout that Roman age, much like the age in which we're living in now, that spirituality is growing. And the problem that we will face again in this postmodern age is not simply that we follow Jesus. It will be that we follow Jesus alone. That's the problem. Because in this age, everything is okay except to say one thing is okay. You see, that's the big problem. If you hang

out with people, you'll know it's true. Okay? They were exhibiting freedom from the bondage of the age.

[01:00:21.130]

When you read these lives of the early church, it's something so different. There are stories of the early church and the Roman age because young girls were so devalued, and they just didn't appreciate them at all. Oftentimes, when a girl was born into this Roman age, what they would do is they would take the girl outside of the city onto these garbage heaps and leave her there to die, similar to our act of abortion. Take her out and leave her to die. Well, you know what the early Christians would do. This is recorded. They would wait around those garbage heaps, collecting these little baby girls. They would take them as their daughters and raise them as their own.

[01:01:03.950]

See, that's the kind of Christianity that turns the world upside down because they were living lives like Jesus, loving their enemies, praying for those who persecuted them. The same is true for our day today. We don't have time this morning. But consider what are the bondages of this age? What are the bondages that you see within your own generation right now, within this age? What are our bondages? And as you begin to identify, I so encourage you, in fact, mention one or two. What's the bondage of this age? Money? Materialism, greed? Okay? Are we living counterculture, or is our life marked by going to the malls and checking out the coolest thing?

[01:01:47.550]

Am I dissing on Malls? No. What am I saying? There is a bigger life, and people are watching everything that we do. And if they see us marked by fashion, they'll be, wow, look at all those cool Christians who don't look anything like Jesus. Simple example, one more bondage, lust. Are we living lives that are free from lust? Or the things that we put into our mind? The things that we watch, the things that we talk about? When the Apostle Paul even said, don't even mention these things. Are we talking about them? Are we watching them? Are we too cool to get up out of a movie when we know we shouldn't be watching what's on the screen?

[01:02:36.410]

You feed your flesh; your flesh will grow. You feed your spirit; your spirit will grow. Paul makes it so simple in Galatians 6, are we living lives free from the bondages of this age? It's contagious, Christlikeness. That's what the world is aching for. Number two as we close, the way they died. You see, these early believers did not shrink from death, man, even in the face of they did not shrink from their convictions in Christ, even in the face of death. And you read unbelievable stories during the days of the early church and on into even beyond the New Testament period. Peter, the one who denied Christ Christian history records that most likely Peter was crucified upside down.

[01:03:21.620]

Do you know why Peter was so obsessed with Jesus something had so happened in his life that when they came to kill him and he was to be crucified, his response was, I'm not worthy to die in the way that my Lord and savior did, crucify me upside down. There in the days of the emperor

Nero, the persecution was so intense that at times they would take Christians, cover them with [inaudible 01:03:48], set them on stakes, and they would serve as lights for the parties of Nero.

[01:03:57.610]

I'll tell you one story. Guy by the name of Polycarp, who is most likely a disciple of the apostle John, potentially the pastor of the church in Smyrna. We're not really sure, but it's likely.

Interesting what you read about that church in Revelation, and old Polycarp man, when he was 86 years old, he was taken before the authorities of that day. And pretty much, I'll paraphrase what Polycarp said. The nature of what he said was they said to him, look, simply deny Jesus Christ and you can live. Bow before the gods of Rome, bow before the emperor. And in Polycarp's response, this dear old 86-year-old man, he said, look, for 86 years my Savior has never wronged me. How then could I possibly deny my very savior and king?

[01:04:51.530]

And the Roman leader at that point got so upset with him. He got so angry with him that he said, look, don't you understand? I have the power right now to release wild animals and to have you torn to pieces. I can burn you alive. Simply bow before the emperor. And Polycarp responded like this since you keep pretending that you don't know what I am, let me simplify your task. I am a Christian. If you want to know more about it, let's set a time when we can talk.

[01:05:25.230]

What kind of boldness is that. Finally, the people became so enraged at Polycarp. The message got around the area and they didn't have PA systems. The message was spread through simple

messengers. Polycarp's response to this Roman leader and the people became so enraged at him that they actually, on their own decision, rushed into the streets, gathered wood, and put Polycarp to the flames. And when the soldiers came to tie his arms to the stake, he said, there's no need to tie my arms to the stake because the same grace that has sustained me thus far will sustain me through these flames.

[01:06:00.630]

And there, with his eyes gazing towards heaven, Polycarp died a martyr in the name of Jesus. There was something different about that man's life. The story of one of the early church fathers when he was in prison on his way to be killed in Rome. And as he was on his way to be killed, he was able to sneak out a letter to the early church to pray for him as that letter went out. I don't know about you, but I probably would have included a lot of things in that letter, like pray that I will be released as soon as possible. Pray that I won't be torn apart by the lions. Pray that perhaps I can die right here so that I won't have to endure such pain and such agony. Do you know what he said? Pray that I can live until I can make it to Rome so that I can die there in front of the most people and give God glory. What kind of a man would say something like that?

[01:06:58.290]

Someone who is living upside down. Someone who is so obsessed with Jesus that nothing matters more. You see, the early Christians, men, they had died in their lives long before they died in their deaths. And that's what Paul said things like, I've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives within me. And it isn't that the steps of dying daily as we every day surrender our will to the will of our Father, and we begin to live lives that are

upside down. In the midst of the world, midst of this generation, we may see an entire generation turned upside down. And I close with this point. Dying daily is probably more difficult than dying dead. Amen. Let's pray.

[01:07:47.230]

Yes, Lord. Thanks for this time. God bless. Bless these guys, God, for giving me a few extra minutes. Oh, God and man we don't want to just understand history. Oh, but Lord, we want the power of what you've been doing, Lord, for centuries now to rush into us, God, and to change the way we live. Because you are the same God who came that day at Pentecost. You're the same God who turned that world upside down. You're the same God who took Peter from denying you to dying upside down because he was so obsessed with you.

[01:08:21.730]

You're the same God who changed Doubting Thomas and took him to his martyrdom in India. You were the same God, Lord, who encouraged those early believers to take those little baby girls and to raise them as their own. You are the same God, Lord, back then who said there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, but we are one in Christ. You are the same God who birthed the revolution. And Lord, God help us know that revolution again.

[01:08:53.390]

Forgive us, Lord, for being complacent. Forgive us, Lord, for living lesser lives. And Lord, now God, and God let something of the revolution, the movement, be birthed within us again. And

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God, in these days, Lord, when our generation who has been burned and disillusioned so many times, God, don't let them see Christians with one foot in the present evil age and one foot in the kingdom of God. Instead, Lord, let them see Christians, Lord, who look like Jesus, who are turning the world upside down by the way in which they live. And oh God it is your grace that does it, and it is your grace that does go that deep. Oh, dear Lord, don't let it be cheapened in us any longer. Yeah. Thanks for this time. We ask you to bless the rest of this day in Your name, Jesus. Thank you, guys, so much for that bit of extra time.