

Message Transcript

A MOUTHPIECE AND A MEANS | NOW IS THE TIME

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Alright. Amen and Amen. Hey, that's so good. Would you pray with me, together across all of our locations right now?

Father, we come to You right now and may every single one of those applauses be meant for You. God, we give You all the glory and the honor and the praise. We aren't fooling ourselves to think that we could do this without You and that You must do it in us and through us.

So, Father, we may applaud those numbers, but we recognize that behind those numbers are individual lives that have been impacted and changed and they represent families and students and men and women, people who are in need of hope and help.

Father, thank You that You use ordinary nobodies like all of us today to be used of You in powerful ways. To which we say, "God, do it again. God, do it again. Do it again and again and again. May it never end and may we continue to offer our lives as living sacrifices to You because we know that You are still on the move and You still are doing amazing things.

May we be awakened by the power of Your presence and Your Spirit. We ask this in Jesus' name. And the church says: Amen and Amen and Amen.

It's so good to be with you. If you would, feel free to grab a seat and as you are doing that go ahead and grab ahold of your Bible and find Acts, chapter 20. That's where we are going to be together today.

It's amazing to see what God has been doing in the life of our church over the last two years. If you are brand new to our church and kind of wondering what all of this is about, two years ago, roughly, so many of us made a commitment to give God our first and our best. And I want you to know that you are making a difference with your generosity as God is at work in and through you.

And we might be finishing up the Awaken commitment here in just a few weeks at the very end of this year, but there is still more ground to cover and there are still more people who need what only Jesus can give. Do you believe that? God is still on the move. And I want to invite you to jump in with us. Everything between now and the end of the year will be part of Awaken and now is a great time to begin your giving story.



I just want you to know this. There are a lot of great causes that you can give to outside of here. And there are several causes that Lindsay and I love and believe in and give to outside of here.

But I will say this, unapologetically, not as the pastor of this church, but out of our study in the book of Acts, that there is none that is as mission critical as the ministry of the local church. Lots of organizations do great things, but only the church is God's plan "A" to bring lost and hurting people back into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. And eternity is at stake.

We've viewed several analogies to describe Awaken. Awaken is sort of like the caffeine to our system. It is the vehicle over the last few years which has helped foster a lifestyle of continued generosity as we go forward.

And honestly, guys, Awaken has accelerated the depth of our church's discipleship and generosity, I think, by at least 5 years. And what I mean by that is all of those numbers that we celebrated on the back screen, guys, those numbers are just stupid crazy.

And I don't think that we would have experienced anywhere close to any of those numbers—2,910 baptisms—over the last couple of years. We wouldn't have experienced anything close to that. In fact, just to give you a little frame of reference, the year before this initiative we saw 740 baptisms.

I think Awaken has not only awakened us to the move of the Spirit but accelerated our church into the future, so that we wouldn't have experienced those numbers until at least the year 2030. I really believe that.

So, our prayer now, as we wrap this up is that we wouldn't let our foot off of the gas but we would say, "God, do it again. What You did in these last two years that we could continue to do it as we move ahead into the future."

Today, we are wrapping up the series that we have been in the last three weeks called Now Is The Time and this is the tag line of our Awaken initiative, both of those titles Awaken and Now Is The Time come out of our anchor passage in Ephesians 5.

And it is a call to urgency. It is a truth that I think most of us know, but we oftentimes forget because we just take life for granted, that we are not guaranteed another moment of life. Every now and then we get that sobering reality that life is so fragile.



And God is on the move right now. Now is the time. And God wants to work through your availability right now regardless of your age and stage in life. And I think it is really, really easy to kick the can down the road when it comes to the Spirit of God and say, "Well, God, I'll be used of You when I graduate from school." Or, "I'll be used of You when I get the job." Or, "I'll be used of You whenever I get married or have kids or the kids move out or we have grandkids or I retire. And then, God, you can have all of me."

And God is going, "No, no, no, no. You don't understand how this works. I want your availability right now." And you are like, "Well, God, I don't have a lot." And He's like, "Well, can I remind you of the time I fed 5,000 people with a boy's lunchable? I'm not asking for an astronomical amount. I'm asking you to make available to me what you've got."

And as you live open-handedly what happens is that you say, "God, all of it is Yours. It is a temporary stewardship of my life and my dollars and my resources and my gifts. It's all Yours, God."

And God says, "Well, thank you. I'm going to work through you now. And with your hands open, I can bless you with more." That's not health and wealth. That's just good Bible teaching.

And God is on the move now so we want to jump in and be a part of it regardless of where you may be right now, your age and stage in life. Life is short. Eternity is long. People matter. And people are dying every day facing a Christless eternity.

So, what we've been doing is we've been looking at the book of Acts, which is the documentary of how the early church got started and I love the book of Acts, primarily because if we begin to lose sight of the purpose of the church, which I think is an epidemic now a days, a lot of people don't understand what the purpose of the church is and that leads either to a lack of understanding as to the purposes of it and or a mishandling of it.

In order to understand the purpose of the church, we've got to go back to the origins of the church. Now understand, this is God's idea. And this is God's plan "A". And Acts is not the story of some super gifted, super Christians who do impressive things that none of us can touch or relate to, but it is the story of a sovereign God doing impressive things through ordinary, busted up misfits like you and me to accomplish His unstoppable mission.



Aren't you thankful that God doesn't use perfect people? Because if that was the case then all of us would be out of commission. And if God could use the people in the book of Acts, then He can use you and He wants to use you. The question is: Are you awakened so that He can use you?

So, we started of this series in Acts 1, when Jesus said, "I want you to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the power of the Holy Spirit. Last week we ended in Acts 5, verse 11, with the sobering story of a married couple, Ananias and Sapphira who wanted to appear more generous than they actually were, and they both dropped dead, which is absolutely horrifying.

And then I sang a song about it, which is equally horrifying. And it's interesting that I probably got more feedback about the song than anything else about the sermon. I don't know how I feel about that.

In fact, I don't know how many of you heard that story or maybe it had been a while since you heard that story. A lot of preachers kind of skirt around that story because they don't really know how to preach it or know what to do with it.

And last week, at one of the services, I forget which one it was, when I got to that place in the text where it says Ananias and Sapphira drop dead, a lady gasped. And I was like, "Oh, you have never heard that story before." And our modern, western ears were like, "Whoa! That sounds so extreme, God."

And I said a couple of things, if you recall. Number one: This is the early days of the church where everything was magnified—the gifts and the consequences. So, the tongues of fire, the miracles, and all of this amazing, incredible stuff as well as the consequences.

Secondly: these are the early days of the church and God is protecting His baby because it is His plan "A", similar to when you bring a three-month old home, you are hovering over that baby. You interact with that child way differently than you do when that baby turns 30—or at least you should. If you do not, that's a different sermon for another day.

So, the church is in its early days and God is saying, "I'm not going to allow anyone to mess with My mission." That's what He is saying.

I pointed out that Ananias' name means: God is merciful. How ironic. Well, how is that merciful? The guy dropped dead. Well, number one, it didn't say he was going to hell. Ananias' life got way better. He woke up in the presence of God.



And, God is saying, "Hey, you guys are headed down a fast track to cause yourself damage and a bunch of church hurt. I'm going to, by My mercy and grace," my opinion here, "I'm going to pull you out before you can do much more damage." It is an act of mercy.

God was making a statement about how He feels about hypocrisy and a lack of integrity, which is what hypocrisy is, within His church from the very beginning. And God is not down with anybody, leaders or non-leaders, pretending to be more spiritually mature or generous than we really are.

Do you want to know who else, I think, is down with that? You. You're not down with that, are you? You don't want that of your leaders. You don't want that with people in your family. You don't want that of you.

And your friends, family, and co-workers who keep turning down your invitation to church, it is likely for this reason, "I don't want to go to church. Churches are filled with hypocrites."

And you know what? They are not wrong. You want to know what they are overlooking though? It's that hypocrites are everywhere. They are not just in the church.

And God was making a statement from the very beginning that, as Christ followers, we should be set apart—not perfection, but being perfected. And we do that by walking in authenticity and in truth. This is like a heavy weight to carry. Super sobering. But can I just tell you the good news on this?

God receives us as we are, as long as we present ourselves "as we are." So He can change who we are in and through Jesus.

He receives us as you are just as long as you present yourself as you are, that's called confession and repentance, so that He can change who you are in and through Jesus. Man, come on. That is good news. That is good news.

Here's what God is saying, "I already know you are jacked up, just be honest about it. Just come into my presence in all of your jacked-up-ed-ness and let Me do what I do." That's what He does best.



So, I'm going to land the plane of this series in chapter 20, but I left off in chapter 5 last week. And I didn't feel good about skipping to chapter 20 because there is a whole lot of real estate between chapter 5 and chapter 20. Here's what I'm going to do. I'm just going to take a few minutes and I'm just going to give you a clip notes version—30 thousand foot view of everything that goes down from Acts 5 to Acts 20. So, buckle up.

Acts 6:

Right after Ananias and Sapphira drop dead the apostles are arrested. The religious leaders think that they can stop the gospel by jailing them. God sent an angel who doubled as a locksmith and pops the door open and says, "Get up, get out, and go preach." Nothing is stopping this Kingdom, man.

Jesus would say in the book of Matthew, "My Kingdom is forcefully advancing." Nothing is stopping it. Jail can't stop it. Your personal sin can't stop it. Your inauthenticity can't stop it. Culture can't stop it. The disapproval of men can't stop it. When the world says, "Shut up," God says, "Stand up and go." That's Acts 6.

Acts 7:

In Acts 7 we read about the very first martyr, a guy by the name of Stephen. And Stephen was one of the original difference makers that got raised up and recruited into ministry in Acts, chapter 6.

So, if you recall what I said last week, the early church, in just a matter of weeks, grew to 15 to 25 thousand people in a city with a population of 40,000 people. This is a massive movement. And if you've ever read anything on this, that much growth, that fast, is going to present problems. It's an organizational nightmare. And they experienced that in Acts 6 where it said that the widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food—practical ministry. People were getting overlooked because there are just so many of them.

So, the apostles said, "Well, we don't want to take our eyes off of our ministry of preaching the word, so let's raise up some difference makers." They called them deacons. Stephen was one of them.

In Acts 7, Stephen preaches summarizing the entire Old Testament. You think what I'm trying to do now, summarizing Acts 5 through 20 is ambitious? He summarized the whole Old Testament in a sermon. It didn't go well. The crowd stoned him. And as he is done (please don't do that) and as he is dying it says that Stephen looks up and he sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Jesus is standing for the man who stood for Him.



Jesus would say, "If you confess My name before men, I'll confess your name before God the Father. If you deny Me before men, I'll deny you before God the Father."

Tertullian was the church father who said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

Acts 8:

They think they can stop it by jailing them and killing them and all this does in Acts 8 is it sets off a wave of persecution that only resulted in the multiplication of the church. That's what it always does. And as they are scattering like a dandelion on a windy, spring day the gospel goes everywhere over the Roman Empire.

And I don't know. Maybe some of you know what it's like to feel a little bit scattered right now. Maybe you just feel like God has moved you in an abrupt way. You didn't see it coming and you are like, "I don't know how I got here."

Some of you, right now, listening to me, God just moved you here from a sunny, warm climate to Indiana. Welcome. Seems like every year I meet these people and they have no idea why they'd come here, "God moved me here from Arizona this year."

And I'm just like, "Well, just remember on those dreary, January, single digit days that it could always be worse, man. You could be living anywhere north of here." That doesn't seem to help.

Maybe God just moved you out of a really secure job. You were feeling pretty confident and comfortable where He had you and all of a sudden He caused you to go into a career change. And you know He's been calling, but you are still trying to figure it out. You are like, "I don't know why God would do this."

Maybe God changed your plans in some way. You were headed this way. God said, "I want you to go that way." You are like, "I don't know why." Can I just say this to somebody?

Maybe God shook you loose from one thing to "plant" you in another.

Maybe God is shaking you loose from one thing to place you in another. Maybe what feels like chaos to you is actually you right in the smack dap center of God's calling. That's Acts 8.



Acts 9:

Acts 9 records the story of a guy by the name of Saul, who thought he was doing God's work, but he wasn't. He was actually killing Christians and he was not in a search for Jesus at all. But listen to this. Jesus is searching for Saul.

And somebody—I'm talking to somebody today, if you are not searching for Jesus... Maybe the only reason why you are here is you're dating a cute girl and she kind of threw down an ultimatum and said, "If you want to continue to see me you've got to go to church."

And so you came and you are like, "I don't believe any of this nonsense but I'm into her." You are not running after Jesus. Can I just tell you this? Look behind you. Jesus might be running after you.

Saul was on the way to kill some Christians and Jesus knocked him to the ground, blinded him, called him by name, flipped the whole script of his life and his name is changed to Paul. He becomes one of the most powerful presenters of the gospel and writes much of our New Testament.

Listen. Saul was not trending toward Jesus. But it didn't matter. Jesus was in a full sprint toward him. And He will always outrun you. And when you run, hide, rebel, and resist, He is always running toward you anyway. It doesn't matter what your sin is. It doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter how dark your life has gotten. He's coming after you. It's called grace.

Acts 11-12:

In Acts 11 and 12 we see revival and resistance are twins. In Antioch revival explodes, leaders are formed, the name Christian gets used for the very first time. A lot of amazing things seem to be happening to advance the Kingdom of God in these chapters.

At the same time, Herod murders James and arrests Peter. Remember I told you last week, life is not a series of ups and downs, good and bad. It's a set of rails.

Spiritual breakthrough and spiritual attack often show up in the same week.

Spiritual breakthrough and spiritual attack often show up in the same week, and that should not surprise you. So, you be steady. You be steady.

Acts 13-14:



In Acts 13 through 14 Paul and Barnabas make their first missionary journey. They take the gospel message with them on the road. And everywhere they go, two things happen: revival and riots. They preach a sermon, people get saved. Same sermon, people get mad. They touch people, people get healed. Same day, people throw rocks.

Guys, in 25 years of ministry that never ceases to amaze me. In the same sermon I can have somebody reach out to me and say, "God used those words to change my life." Same sermon somebody will email me they are mad —same sermon.

Listen, man. When the gospel is delivered the response will always be mixed. And if no one objects and everyone thinks you are awesome, you might not be doing it right.

Acts 16:

In Acts 16 we learn:

God's "no" often leads to a better "yes."

It doesn't feel that way in the moment, but God is sovereign. Paul wants to go north, God says, "No." Paul says, "Can we go east?" God said, "No," again. Paul goes, "God, I don't know what you are doing. What are you doing?" And God goes, "I'm leading." Closed doors aren't always a dead end. They are often a detour to a better thing.

Can I just give you a little bit of pastoral council? If God closes a door, don't kick it down. Just recognize that He's leading you on a detour to a better thing. You can't see it in the moment.

So, Paul goes to Philippi because of God's no and His redirection. He meets a businesswoman by the name of Lydia. I'm going to talk more about her in a minute. She comes to believe. A slave girl gets set free. A jailor's entire household gets baptized. All because God told Paul no. God's no always leads to a better yes.

Acts 18:

In Acts 18 the ministry catches up with Paul. He's gets really, really discouraged. He's been beaten down and rejected and misunderstood and thrown out of town and he's worn out. And God shows up in a vision and He says, "Paul, don't be afraid. I'm with you. Keep speaking with boldness and truth. I have many people in this city."



Can I just say this to you? Those of you who are worn out and tired and beat down, don't give up. God is at work through your faithfulness.

Acts 19:

In Acts 19 Paul goes to Ephesus. God moves in a powerful way. People repent deeply. And the primary industry in that town that drove their economy was the occult and idol worship. And when people respond to the gospel they literally burned their occult books, and it cut in on the idol making economy.

The whole economy collapses. And the city erupts in anger. Why? Because when the gospel gets into a city it messes with the economy of sin. The gospel doesn't just save individuals it shakes up systems.

And that leads us to Acts 20. That's an overview of 5 through 19 class. You'll be quizzed on it later.

Acts 20:

So, as we come to Acts 20, here's what is going down. Paul gathers the elders from the church in Ephesus for a farewell speech.

Think about this for a minute. If you knew that you were talking to somebody who you really loved and cared about for the last time, you would never see them again, you're not going to talk to them about something inconsequential.

You're not going to talk about the weather or sports. You're going to talk to them about something that really matters. That's number one.

By the way, our Awaken title and commitment comes out of Paul's writing to this church in Ephesus.

Paul has spent three years with these Ephesian elders and he loves them dearly. And he knows he's not going to see these guys again. He's headed to Jerusalem, then on to Rome. And he is assuming that he is going to be martyred.

A little piece of Bible trivia here. What we're getting ready to walk through in the text—this is the only extended talk in the book of Acts that is addressed exclusively to Christians. Every other talk, every other speech or sermon in the book of Acts was either to a primarily non-believing crowd, or a mixed crowd. And so this one is different.



Now, the reason why I'm pointing that out is because the Holy Spirit wants every follower of Jesus to think about what Paul is saying to them in their own lives. If you are a follower of Jesus, the Holy Spirit wants you, as a follower, know what Paul is saying to them.

So, let's pick this up in verse 18. It says:

"When they arrived he declared, 'You know that from the day I set foot in the province of Asia until now I have done the Lord's work humbly and with many tears. I have endured the trials that came to me from the plots of the Jews,' in other words, this was not an easy thing Paul was doing.

"I never shrank back from telling you what you needed to hear, either publicly or in your homes. I have had one message for Jews and Greeks alike—the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus.'" (NLT)

In other words he's saying, "I didn't work for the applause of people, and regardless of the crowd, my message was the same." He's saying, "Guys, I did everything that I could with this one life that God has given me to ensure that my generation knew the truth."

And he's saying, "It didn't always win me popularity contests. And I was oftentimes the target of several plots and cancelations, but I never shrank back from telling you what you needed to know, whether that was in a public sermon or a private conversation in your home. It wasn't always an easy thing that I had to say to you."

And the gospel message never is.

The gospel is not a proposition but an announcement: that the human race stands under the judgment of God because of our rebellion.

Understand that the gospel is not so much a proposition but it is an announcement. It is an announcement of a set of news, both the good and the bad. The news that the human race stands under the judgment of God because of our rebellion. And that's bad news.

We are dead in our sin and we can't do anything to buy our way out of it. It's not that we need to work on ourselves to become a better version of ourselves. We don't need a life coach; we need a Savior.



And so he says, "You are dead in your sin and the only hope is the Good News, the greatest news, that God loves you enough that He made payment for you through the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus."

Guys, the only religion, worldview, or philosophy that says that is Christianity. Every other worldview or set of beliefs says that you've got to do it. You've got to earn it. Christianity is the only one that says, "You can't earn it. Jesus earned it for you."

You place your trust in the finished work of Jesus. He did for you what you could never do for yourself. It is both really, really bad news and really, really good news. And it's a gift to everyone who will receive it, regardless of your background.

The only death that is required is the one that you willingly lay down. I don't know who originally said it, but it's true. If you are born twice, your physical birth when your mom gave birth to you in the hospital, and then your spiritual birth when you gave your life to Jesus, whenever that was, then you only have to die once—a physical death. But if you are only born once, labor and delivery, you die twice: physical and spiritual.

And the death that is required for you to receive salvation is simply the death of your pride, the death of you needing to call your own shots and be your own god, the death of being a slave to the flesh.

And Paul is saying, "Listen, guys. I wasn't responsible for how people responded to this truth, but I am responsible to make sure that they understood it. I've got to deliver the mail." And all of this is changing the way that Paul viewed the stewardship of his life and his stuff.

So, then he says in verse 22:

"And now I am bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem." In other words the Spirit is leading him there. And he says, "I don't know what awaits me except that the Holy Spirit tells me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead."

I just want to stop right there. We can go past verse 23 so quickly. I just want to stop and double click on that and just look at that for a second. That is so weird. It's weird. Because Paul is...

How many of us talk that way? You're talking to your small group, you're talking to your family and it's like, "Hey, I was praying to God this morning," or "In my prayer journal. And most of the time I'm praying to God about it, but I was hoping He'd come through, I was hoping he would deliver me from this thing, ask me what it is that I'm asking from Him..."



But how many of us have ever said, "You know, I went for a walk this morning and the Holy Spirit told me that trouble was coming." Very few of us ever talk that way.

Paul is talking about the Holy Spirit, he's having breakfast with the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit says, "Buckle up, Paul. You're going to jail. Buckle up, Paul. It ain't getting any easier. Suffering lies ahead." And he doesn't get mad about it. He doesn't deconstruct about it. He doesn't walk away. He says in verse 24:

"But my life is worth nothing to me" what he is saying is, this temporary, earthly tent, doesn't mean anything in comparison to all of eternity, "unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God." (NLT)

The message that Paul is getting from the Holy Spirit isn't one of comfort or reassurance, but one of, "Paul, suffering is going to be in your immediate future."

And the only way to describe Paul's resolve in verses 23 to 24 is the phrase that we have been using a lot around here the last year: a battleship mentality. Paul is going, "Hey, guys. The Holy Spirit is telling me that I'm getting ready to go to Jerusalem, and it's not going to be a vacation, I'm being deployed."

From what I understand there is a decommissioned ship in Long Beach that you can visit. I've never visited it; I've just heard about it. It's called the Queen Mary. And it is permanently docked. The Queen Mary was put into production like 100 years ago. It was, originally, an ultimate luxury cruise liner for the wealthy people of its day to go on vacation.

But in World War II it was commandeered as a battleship to carry troops back and forth into battle. And if you tour the ship today, apparently, what I understand, is that you can see examples of both setups on the ship. When it was a cruise ship, and when it was a battleship.

And during peace time as a luxury liner it could accommodate about 3,000 people with all of the modern day conveniences. But in war time, when it was refitted as a battleship, it housed not 3,000 but 15,000 people. And spacious rooms that slept only one (so that you could stretch out and have your space) now slept eight.



Peacetime and Wartime demand different things.

So, the peace time setup and the wartime setup, the peacetime mentality and the wartime mentality demanded different things. Same of us.

Earlier this year we reworded our Mission and Vision Statements. Some of you remember that. You know that to be true. Our mission statement, as a church is grounded in Matthew 28, the Great Commission, where Jesus said to go and make disciples of all nations.

That's every Bible believing, Jesus centered church's mission statement, or at least it should be. Now the way that we phrase it should be contextualized to our immediate context.

And the way that we've chosen to phrase our Mission Statement is:

Clear The Way; Equip For Battle; Deploy For Impact

We want to clear the way—what we mean by that is that we want to do anything that we possibly can do that would remove anything that would be unnecessary to somebody coming to know Jesus. We will do anything short of sin to get you to Jesus.

Then we want to equip you for battle, which maybe needs a little bit more explanation.

And then deploy you for impact, which maybe needs a little bit more explanation.

Vision: Taking Ground For The Kingdom Across Indy and Beyond

Now our Vision Statement is that we've said we want to take ground for Kingdom across Indy and beyond. Where do we get that? Well, Jesus said, "My Kingdom is forcefully advancing. And violent men are attacking it." He would teach us to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

So, we are here, not to sit around, twiddle our thumbs, do our devotions, and wait for Jesus to beam us up into heaven, we are to be His agents and ambassadors here on earth because His Kingdom is coming to renew all things.



So, that's the Mission and Vision Statement. Now, when you look at those two things, maybe you had this thought. Maybe you've had somebody suggest this to you, "That's kind of an unusual Mission and Vision Statement. It sounds a little aggressive. It sounds a little militant."

And I would be the first to admit, I've never seen another church that chose to phrase their mission and vision Statements like that, which is why I kind of like it.

There are a few things that I want to point out to you. Number one: If it sounds a little aggressive to you, I'm going to make this super clear. We are not talking about fighting a war with people or culture. That's not culture war talking. Jesus said our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the principalities of darkness and powers of darkness in this evil realm.

The second thing I need you to know is that we aren't picking a fight, we are merely acknowledging the one that we are already in. You've heard me say this before. The only thing worse than being in a fight is being in one and not realizing you're in one.

I've only been in one fist fight in my entire life. I didn't even know I that I was in one until it was over. And the only thing I had to show for it was a big, black eye. It was awful.

So, here's the deal, man. Satan would love for you to believe that you aren't in a fight because then you are easy pickings. But if you know you're in a fight, Ephesians—put on the full armor of God.

Guys, when I point this out to you, and you do your Bible reading, you won't be able to unsee it. War talk is all over the Bible from Genesis to Revelation—not attacking other people groups or culture, but recognizing that there is a spiritual war that is being waged for your soul.

Satan declared war in Genesis 3. It wasn't just this cute, little story where he was trying to trip Adam and Eve up into taking a bite of some apple. He was declaring war against God's Kingdom.

This war is being waged and Jesus came and He won the victory on our behalf. He came into this world for the first time (we're getting ready to celebrate it in a few weeks with Christmas) as a helpless baby born in Bethlehem in a stable.

And He went to a cross and died so that we might achieve victory over this war that we are in. He's declaring that you are His. And He ascended into heaven.



And He is going to return to earth one day, very, very soon—maybe sooner than any of us may think—except this time He's not returning as a little, helpless baby in Bethlehem. Jesus is returning, as Revelation 19 tells us, as a war General.

Jesus returns as a war General, wearing white, on a white horse, with flames coming out of His eyes, a sword coming out of His mouth, and a sweet tattle on His quad that says King of kings and Lord of lords.

And it says that He will judge fairly and (I'm just reading Bible verses to you from Revelation 19) He will wage a righteous war. Guys, who wears white to a fight? Somebody who knows it's not going to last very long and that blood is going to get on the other guy.

So, who is our war with? Well, according to Galatians 5, which was in my Bible reading just yesterday morning, it says it very clearly:

"The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions." Galatians 5:17 (NLT)

Any of you feel that? Paul is saying, "Man, the good that I want to do, I don't do. The things that I don't want to do, I keep on doing. What a wretched man that I am."

That's the fight. And we're trying to equip you for that battle. You cannot fight it on your own. We need one another, which is why the author of Hebrews would say, "Don't give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing." Because when you fall out of meeting together as a church family, it's always because of a habit. Isn't it?

Kids got involved in travel soccer. It was for a season. Out of the habit. Weather gets warmer, you are going to the lake every weekend, which I'm actually... I'm all for travel soccer. I'm all for the lake. We fall out of habit.

Maybe you got sick and you watched live streaming online, "Oh, this is pretty convenient. I don't have to get up and get dressed." And we fall out of the habit.



Listen. Your salvation is not tied to church attendance, but your discipleship is and your encouragement is. The Great Commission is. You cannot fulfill the Great Commission in your living room watching on a wide screen. You can't fulfill the Great Commission just in your personal devotion time between you and God. Now, that is actually a tool for the toolbox, joined up with the ecclesia, the church, to go fulfill the Great Commission.

We need each other. We need the church as imperfect as it is. And believe me, I've been in fulltime ministry for 25 years, I have a front row seat to all the imperfections of the church. I am very, very aware of the imperfections.

This is a rescue mission. And our mentality as a church is, we are not trying to accommodate passengers on the Queen Mary luxury liner. We are trying to equip you to man your station on the battleship to usher in the Kingdom of God. It's our only hope.

And this is going to require a mentality shift for some of us, especially if you've kind of gotten used to being catered to. And that's a lot of us in the western world; that's us kind of behind a seeker church. It's just kind of like, "Well, I'm just here to get my comfy seat and get my coffee and to sit back and watch other people do the ministry and being catered to."

Hear me. Hear my tone. There is nothing wrong with being ministered to. We want you to be ministered to. We would freely want to minister to you. There is nothing wrong with the provision and blessing that God gives you.

All I'm saying is, please remember that none of that should end with you. It passes through you to others. Because if this battle that we are in is really true, and I believe that it is with all of my heart, then it is urgent.

Can I just ask you this right now? I'm talking to the Christians in the room. Do you have a cruise ship mentality where you are just kind of here to kick back on the cruise ship and have other people serve you, or do you have a battleship mentality where you are like, "You know what? Sign me up. I'm going to man my station."

Paul goes on and he says in verse 25:

"And now I know that none of you to whom I have preached the Kingdom will ever see me again. I declare today that I have been faithful. If anyone suffers eternal death, it's not my fault for I didn't shrink from declaring all that God wants you to know." Acts 20:25-27 (NLT)



You know what Paul is doing there? He's saying to these guys, "Hey, fellas, I'm leaving it all on the field, man. I didn't withhold anything. I was faithful until the end. I knew that saying that one thing in that sermon that one day was going to get me cancelled, but I said it anyway. I didn't shrink back. I declared what God wanted you to know. I knew it wasn't going to be a very popular message with you, but it was the truth.

And, guys. Can I just tell you this? One day, when I retire, whenever that is, I'm hoping that I've got another 15 or 20 years with you all if you guys keep me around, but I think I've already decided my retirement sermon is going to be this passage.

I'll stand up here and I'll say, "Hey, guys. I didn't do it perfectly, I wasn't a perfect pastor, and I made mistakes, and we're not a perfect church. But you know what? I left it all on the field. I emptied the cup. I gave everything that I had."

There is a joke with retired pastors, They say that they keep a file in their file cabinet of all of their grievances against their church members, nasty emails that come in, people who say things about them and the sermons and stuff. And they keep that in a file. And they say, "For my retirement sermon I'm pulling that baby out."

I just want you to know, I do not have that file. I'm serious. I don't keep it. Do you know what I do keep? I keep every email, every letter, every handwritten note where people write things out to me to say how their lives have been changed through the ministry of our church.

I keep every single one of them because one day I'm going to lay them all out. And I thought for a while I was going to lay them all out and it was going to take up a whole gymnasium. Now I think it's going to take a football field.

I'm going to lay that all out and I'm going to look at it and I want to be able to look at you with all integrity and say, "Guys, I wasn't perfect, but I laid it all on the line, man."

Can I just say this to you, to some of you here today? You are sitting here and you want to get fired up with what I'm saying but you're not because of sin and because of shame in your past. And you're like, "I'd love to be used of God, Aaron, but I'm too messed up. I'd love to be used of God but I'm damaged goods." I just want you to know that that is a lie straight from the pits of hell.

Jesus went to a cross to set you free. Jesus went to a cross to pay for all of that sin. Why are you still trying to pay for it? Jesus went to a cross and shed His blood to purify you, so why are you still wallowing in your guilt?



Listen. Read the entire Bible. Read the book of Acts. There isn't a single person who was perfect that God used. God used them despite all of their jacked-up-ness and said, "You'll do. Because I'm going to move through you in powerful ways."

Guys, can I just say this? Some of you started off the race and then you hit a wall and went off the rails, fell into a ditch. You got a divorce. It was your fault. You went through financial bankruptcy. You got fired. There was some sort of indiscretion. You got a DUI.

Can I just say this to you? There isn't anybody beyond the grasp of God's grace. He's in the redemption business. It is not how you start; it is how you finish. So, get back up and get in the game.

So many start well and they don't finish well. And in 25 years of ministry I just see that over and over again and it always breaks my heart. People who were so excited, sat in these seats, I remember. Now they are gone. They are out. They deconstructed.

Maybe it was the pain of following after Jesus. They are like, "I didn't count the cost." Or maybe they loved the emotional pull that Jesus had with them in the moment, but life got tough, smacked them in the face, and they walked away. Can I just say this? Paul is saying here through all of the mixed responses that he had gotten, that he endured and he remained faithful.

Determine that what you started in faith, you'll finish faithfully.

And so you determine today that what you started in faith, you will finish faithfully. Expect things to get hard. Where did we get the idea that it wasn't going to be hard? This is normative Christianity. Expect resistance. Expect challenge and conflict. And if Paul and the apostles would experience that, what makes you think you won't?

So, verse 28. It says:

"So guard yourselves and God's people. Feed and shepherd God's flock—his church, purchased with his own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as leaders." (NLT)



He's saying here, "Listen. The church isn't and has never been perfect as we saw last week in chapter 5." It's the old joke, man. If you find a perfect church don't go, you'll mess it up.

However, Paul says here that Jesus died for the imperfect church. He purchased it with His own blood. And I know it's easy to kind of treat the church... I'm talking about the church, like the big "C" church, church in general, it's easy to talk about the church as kind of like a punching bag where we punch down at it because it's not perfect and we have messed stuff up and we always will because we're fallen human beings.

And yet, Jesus called us His bride. That doesn't mean that the way that we live our lives, our authenticity, the integrity, the conduct of our leaders is any less important. It's more important. It just means that we shouldn't trash on the church because Jesus called it His bride.

Paul is saying, "If Jesus poured out His blood for the church, then we should pour our lives into it." Now, that does not mean that the church should become the center of our lives in an unhealthy way.

It should never come before your devotion to God. It should never come before your spouse, your kids, your family, or any of that. You're not trying to earn your salvation by making the church the center of your world. But so many of us go the other way and maybe we disregard the church and don't give much time or thought or energy to it.

The analogy that I've haven't used in a while is the spiritual bib and a spiritual apron. You need a spiritual bib on to feed and to receive nutrients to grow as a disciple. You need a bib so that you can serve and it's your spiritual metabolism. And if you're only wearing a bib and it's about you feeding, feeding, feeding, feeding, "I can't get enough teaching. I listen to 25 different podcasts and I'm in a bunch of different Bible studies but I'm not applying anything," spiritual bib. And it results in spiritually fat Christians.

Some of us, though, have the other problem. It's just an apron. We're not feeding. We're just serving, serving, serving, serving and we have no nutrients and we're spiritually anemic. That will lead to a type of burnout or deconstruction.

Maybe some of you kind of grew up as a preacher's kid and that's exactly what happened. The church just used up your family. By the way, do you know that pastors receive, maybe, more church hurt than anybody, and their kids and their family.



We're simply this. We recognize that this is Christ's body and it's imperfect, but it's the primary means by which He does His work on earth. And if Jesus died for the church, we should be deeply committed to it, even though it is not perfect, which is why Jesus had to die for it. There is no way the Great Commission gets accomplished individually, at home, in your devotions, but together as a group. Can I just say this?

Make the decision to no longer just "attend" church, but to "be" the church!

Make the decision to no longer just attend or watch church but to be the church. That's what we mean by deploy.

Guys, if our church is a football team, what we're doing right now is the huddle, not the play. When you watch the football game later today, this would be super weird...

The team is going to huddle, but then they are going to break and then they are going to run a play. How weird would it be if they stayed in a huddle with the ball in the middle of the huddle and they shuffle as a huddle trying to get into the end zone? It might be kind of entertaining because the defensive line is going to sock them.

They huddle to line up and then they break to go run the play. Can I just say this? This church service is not us running the play. This is simply the huddle. And when I get done in a few minutes and I say: Amen. We break and go run the play. And in this cultural climate we need one another, now more than ever. That is what Awaken has been.

So, Paul goes on. I've got to finish this passage. I'm way out of time. It says:

"I know that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. Even some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following."

Guys, that's stunning because he's talking to leaders.

"And now I entrust you to God and the message of his grace that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself." (NLT)

And then he finishes it up with this right here in verse 33:



"I have never coveted anyone's silver or gold or fine clothes. You know that these hands of mine have worked to supply my own needs and even the needs of those who were with me."

What's Paul doing? He's saying, "Listen, man. I wasn't a freeloader." He was bi-vocational. He's working hard with his hands. And he said, "Man, I earn my own keep. I do know that I wasn't just after your money." That's what he is saying. And then in verse 35 he says:

"And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard."

And he finishes with this principle from the words of Jesus:

"You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive.""

Now, that's one of those statements that I think we would all listen to and we would all say, "Yeah, I agree with that." But then we betray it by the way that we live our lives. It's a great thing to say, especially the week of Thanksgiving.

I don't know if there is anybody who is in their right mind who would go, "You know, I'm going to push back. I think it's actually better to receive right now." But, actually the way that we live our lives shows that we're probably living more that way than the other way around.

Guys, what I'm going to say in the next minute or two, I'm not saying to... If you are here and you are a non-Christian, you're a first-time guest, this is not for you. I'm talking specifically to Christians here.

If you are a Christian and you have been a part of our church family and this is home for you, and your life has been changed in some way through the ministry of Traders Point, meaning that your marriage got restored here, you gave your life to Jesus here, you dedicated your life here, your kids got saved here, your needs got met in some way, "God has used this imperfect church to move the needle of my spiritual life in some way," can I simply say this to you?

You are the recipient of somebody else's generosity, sacrifice, hard work, prayers, and tears. You are the recipient of that. You've received that—190 years' worth. And all I'm saying is that shouldn't stop with you.



Listen. There have been people who have been praying for you before you came to know Jesus. They were praying for you, shedding tears for you, being generous for you. And the minute you came in here and you gave your life to Jesus and you dedicated your life to Him and you found hope and you found healing and you got restored, you had some needs met through the generosity of our church, the minute that happened is the minute that all of this stopped becoming primarily about you.

Now, hear my tone. It is still for you. It's just not about you. And there is a difference. I mean, you check out of the luxury cruise liner and you man your station on the battleship.

I say all of that to very gently, but very straightforwardly say some of you have still just been receiving the ministry, the generosity of others and it might be time for you to join in with that generosity mindset so that future generations might experience what you've experienced.

What I mean by that is that if you showed up today and you received a parking spot, maybe not very easily, and maybe you're not getting out of here very easily, but you received a parking spot. And you received coffee. And you received the seat that you are sitting in. And you received the climate control in the room that you are in.

You received Kids' Ministry and the worship and the teaching and the preaching, you receive the Men's and Women's Night, and the Christmas services and Worship Nights. So listen, we are glad to do all of those things for you, happy to do so, but all of that—I just want you to be aware of this—all of that is possible not because people tithe their time, it's because people tithed their finances. It is all due to the generosity of people.

And at some point, after following Jesus, you've got to make the decision, "Am I going to continue to just merely be a receiver or am I going to be a contributor?"

Statistically, more people are receivers than contributors. Twenty percent of the people provide 80 percent of our budget. That's been statistically true for as long as I can think. And we have a mandate to reinvest so that others may know.

So, it says in verse 36:



"When he had finished speaking, he knelt and prayed with them. They all cried as they embraced and kissed him good-bye. They were sad most of all because he had said that they would never see him again. Then they escorted him down to the ship." (NLT)

Remember, these are Paul's final words to them. And the final thing he says to them is, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." That's what is on his mind. You know, one of the things that I love about the Bible is that God does not just use platform people, but God uses behind the scenes people. He doesn't just use people with a microphone and a title; He loves to use the people that nobody else is looking at.

You take Lydia in Acts 16. Paul rolls into Philippi because God told him no and redirected him. He doesn't know why he is there. He preaches the gospel. Lydia is in the crowd. She's the one that God has been preparing.

She's a businesswoman. She has resources. She's been successful. She has influence. She sells purple cloth, it's like this Goochy level stuff in the first century. And she hears the gospel. God opens her heart and what does she do? It says that she opened her home, her table, and her wallet. And the church in Europe is formed out of her living room, all of the letters... Lydia made the ministry possible by writing the checks.

Fast forward 1,000 years. A guy by the name of William Tyndale is the guy who gave us the English Bible, maybe you have a Bible that says Tyndale on it. What you may not know is that he would have starved to death in a back alley if it wasn't for a businessman by the name of Humphrey Monmouth.

And Monmouth was not a preacher, he was not a theologian, he didn't have a book publishing industry, the brother just sold cloth. That's it. But he did very well at it. And he said to Tyndale, "Hey, you do what only you can do and I'll do what God has blessed me to do."

Monmouth fed him, housed him, financed the printing of the Bibles, used his business routes to smuggle Bibles back into England, so Tyndale lit the match, Monmouth brought the fuel.

Then you go into the Great Awakening. You might have heard of a guy by the name of George Whitefield. He preached to more people face to face than anyone in history, including Billy Graham. But behind him ran a river of generosity from a woman by the name of Lady Selina Hastings. Sounds so proper.



She was the Countess of Huntington. She never preached a sermon, never sat on a stage. She just kept building chapels, supporting preachers because she was wealthy and she said, "If God is in it, I'm in it." Whitefield preached the gospel; the Countess paid the bills. And millions heard about Jesus because a woman with some means said, "I want my resources to roar with the gospel."

If you want to know more stories like that there is a book on Amazon you can order called Gospel Patrons and there are a whole bunch of them.

Here's the point, church:

Every Time God Moves He Uses:

**A Preacher And A Patron.
A Mouthpiece And A Means
A Voce And A Vessel**

**One Sows. One Sends.
One Speaks. One Supports.
God Brings The Increase.**

So, as I wrap this up here's my question to you. When the story of what God has done in our generation gets told a long time from now, what role do you want to play? I doubt very many of us are going, "Ooh, ooh, ooh, Ananias and Sapphira."

Maybe God is calling you right now to step out in faith and start the FCA at your school or work, a Bible study in your office. Maybe God is calling you right now to be a campus pastor. We need 10 of them right now. And our best campus pastors come from within. Maybe God is calling you to spiritually lead your family in some way.

Maybe He's calling you to sell land, sell stock and write the check. Maybe He's calling you to build the platform for somebody else to stand on so the name and fame of Jesus will move forward.

Whatever you do, whatever role it is, don't you dare sit on the sidelines while God is writing history because heaven does not just celebrate the ones who are in the spotlight, heaven celebrates the ones who make the spotlight possible.

And it's not a matter of what you have a gift for, gift wise monetarily. Some of you are going, "Aaron, you just don't understand. I'm a single parent." Or, "I'm struggling."



Listen. I'm not talking about you putting yourself out or your family out on the street. I'm saying when you come to God you say, "This is what I've got. This is what I'm available with." And Jesus goes, "Five loaves and two fish, perfect. Now watch what I do." And you get invited on this incredible journey of faith.

Others of you, you don't have that problem. Some of you have been blessed with much. And that is fantastic. And I celebrate that with you. But I just want you to recognize that God did not entrust that to you to increase your standard of living. He entrusted that to you to increase your standard of giving.

Paul, in his final moments with these Ephesian elders was saying, "The most important thing is that it is more blessed to give than to receive." And that is a fundamental principle that holds true.

Over the last few weeks we've been looking at the rapid, explosive growth of the early church in the book of Acts and that it was marked by selfless, faith-filled generosity.

Guys, we are bringing the Awaken season to a close in the remaining weeks of 2025. But God is still on the move and I think we are just getting started. So, let's finish strong and let's go, "God, do it again. God, do it again." And what role will you play?

Here's how I want us to end, in an old fashioned commissioning across all of our campuses. Would you please stand to your feet? I want to commission you into the service of King Jesus. I want to commission you out of the cruise ship mentality into a battleship mentality.

Our Father, we come to You right now and we thank You for who You are and what You've done and what You are doing and what You will do. And we don't want to sleep through it. We want to be awakened to what it is that You desire to do in and through us.

So, God, we come to You just with what we've got. That's all You ask of us, just what we've got. And, God, help us to go from believing that it is better to give than to receive to actually living in such a way that it is better to give than to receive. For the name and the fame of King Jesus.

We're so grateful for what You have done. And we ask that You would do it again. That it would not stop with us but it would go through us into the lives of others who need to know. We ask this in the powerful name of Jesus. And the church says: Amen and Amen and Amen.

