December 27, 2020 Notes

Year End Summary and Vision Cast

Aaron Brockett | Acts 27

Anne Wilson

Welcome Traders Point. It’s so good to be with you from wherever you are on the other side of that screen. I’m Anne. I get to lead our youth team. I’m with Kyle, our Downtown campus pastor. We are so grateful to be with you.

If this is your first time, we’re especially excited to have you. We want you to know you’re invited back any week, whether in person at one of our campuses or online.

Kyle Riley

Yeah, and if you are in with staying connected with us throughout the week, or you just want to take your next step, it’s very easy to do. You can follow us on social media, you can download our app, or go straight to our website.

Anne

So, Kyle, it’s been quite a year and before we dig into our sermon, we’d just love to hear from you. Obviously, this year has had some downer moments, but it’s also had some really awesome moments. So what’s been one of your favorite moments of 2020?

Kyle

Yeah, when I think back, as crazy as this might sound, over the summer time we actually moved our services online. So as I reflect over the summer on what God built into that time, by far one of my favorite moments was when we had an outdoor worship gathering at our Downtown campus and at all of our other campuses as well.

People were tuning in online and then they were coming to those outdoor worship gatherings. And people were also expressing interest in following Jesus and getting baptized. So it was just cool to be reminded about what the church actually is, that we’re not confined to a building, that God is still moving in incredible ways. What about you?

Anne

Yeah, I know for us this summer was awesome too. I think one of the big highlights is this fall we did something we’ve never done. We launched Youth Ministry Outdoors just because of the season. And we didn’t know how it was going to go, but man, young people were hungry to meet with God, meet with one another. They would sit in the parking lot or in the grass to huddle together in groups—socially distanced, of course. But it was just amazing to see how many students were starving for community and for connection to God. So it was really, really incredible.

Kyle

What would you say is one of the things that God has taught you this year?

Anne

I think the thing that my husband and I have been reflecting on a lot is that we were stronger and weaker than we knew. What I mean is like we were able to do things that we never thought we would do through God’s strength, by God’s grace. And we were weaker too, which I think also drew us to God. We felt so vulnerable, we felt so scared, we felt so isolated and that drew us to God even more. What about you?

Kyle

God really taught me, reminded me, the importance of connection, I would say. I think there were so many things that took place this year that helped feed into that. I mean, we were obviously quarantined because of the pandemic. There was racial tension that was surrounding our country and our world. The divisiveness around the election, all of these things.

But God used all of them to remind me of how important connection is relationally, how we are not supposed to be isolated, how connection is really God’s method and tool for us to really be unified. And we need that unity so that’s what I really appreciate about this year.

Anne

That’s good. That’s really good. So are you looking forward to 2021? I know that’s a little scary to peal the calendar back, but are you? And if so, what are you looking forward to?

Kyle

I am looking forward to 2021. I was just joking the other day. I said, “It’s funny because you don’t see anybody saying 2021 is going to be my year or they’re doing their vision boards. None of that is taking place. I think what this year has shown us is that we don’t know what lies ahead, right? We aren’t in control. We only think that we are.

But what we still can count on is that God is with us. And I think that’s what I’m looking forward to most about next year. Walking with God and continuing to walk with people. That’s what I really can’t wait to be doing. What about you?

Anne

I think in a lot of ways 2020 brought everything to the bare minimum and I’m excited to see God continue to grow the church off of that. I feel like God has stripped us down to our roots as followers of Jesus and it’s just going to be exciting to see the way that God continues to grow us. Out of that humility, which was hard, I’m not going to lie, but I think it’s going to be really exciting.

Kyle

Well, hey guys. We are so excited because we’re getting ready to hear a message from our lead pastor, Aaron Brockett, and then we’re going to go into a time of worship. And what we just want to do is we want to close out this year by focusing on Jesus, all that he has done for us, and what we hope for him to do in the next year—2021.

Aaron Brockett

Well, I hope you all had a great Christmas, and Happy New Year. We are so glad that you could join us today for this very special, online worship experience and message.

I just want to say we made it to the end of 2020. Aren’t you so glad that we can say that? Because this has undoubtedly been the most challenging and difficult year that, likely, any of us have ever faced, for all kinds of reasons.

We had the global pandemic. There’s been an economic meltdown, job loss, financial strain. We’ve had racial and social tensions, all of the stress from e-learning at home and social media non-sense. And all of that has contributed to just higher levels of anxiety, isolation, and suffering of mental health.

So, I just want you to know right now that if you’re wrestling through any one of those things that you are not alone.

You know, a couple of weeks ago I had somebody ask, “Hey, how are you holding up?” And I said, “Maybe the best way that I could describe it is that I feel a little bit like I’ve been in a boxing ring in the 12th round in the corner just being pummeled and all I can do is just hold the gloves up over my face and just try to stay on my feet until the bell rings.” Maybe you can relate to that.

If I could maybe jump to another analogy, I might say that 2020 feels like one big, massive storm. Now, I like a good rain shower every now and then, on a lazy Sunday afternoon they are great to take naps to. But that’s not what 2020 has been—2020 has been a full-on storm.

One of the worst storms that I think I’ve ever seen in my life was one that took place in my home town about 10 years ago. There was a massive tornado that went through Joplin, Missouri, which is where I grew up. And this tornado was a mile wide. It was rain-wrapped so it was almost impossible to see. And it went 13 miles straight through the heart of the city that I grew up in. It just wreaked all kinds of havoc and destruction.

And in the month to follow, I probably spent way too much time on YouTube just looking at videos that people shot on their phones being stuck in the storm. And there was one that really stood out to me more than any other.

There was a husband and wife who were on their way to Walmart and you could tell that he didn’t want to go but she wanted to go. And once they pulled into the parking lot of Walmart, they found themselves right in the path of that massive tornado. And it was bearing down on them and it was too late for them to drive away.

So the two of them turned on their phones and they started recording and they hunkered down on the floor of that car and it was terrifying to hear the wind and the debris that was smacking up against their car. They were so frightened that they just over and over again said, “We should have stayed home. We should have stayed home.”

We’ve been caught in a massive storm and there have been more than a few occasions where I just kind of felt hunkered down on the floor just feeling the debris hit against us. And storms are unpredictable. Storms are frightening because storms remind us how little we actually control in this world.

All of us have been shaken by the storm of 2020 in various ways and we’re just trying to stay afloat, trying to weather it, doing the best that we can to get through it.

So, I would just imagine that throughout the course of the last 10 months or so you’ve experienced a wide range of emotions. Maybe right now you would say that you’ve experienced anger. Maybe you’ve experienced exhaustion, fear, confusion, loneliness, and stress. If that’s the case, that’s totally normal. And if that’s the case, I just want you to know that you are not alone.

In fact, I want to read a section of Scripture in which a guy named Paul really identifies with so much that we are experiencing in 2020. I want to read out of Acts, chapter 27. Paul finds himself in a literal storm. If I could paint just a little bit of context, in this passage he is with some other prisoners, they are in custody of a Roman officer by the name of Julius, and they are setting sail for Italy.

Now, this isn’t a cruise to Italy. That sounds really great right about now. This is a totally different journey than a cruise and they find themselves in a massive storm. Pick it up—look with me at verse 4 of chapter 27. He says:

“Putting out to sea from there, we encountered strong headwinds that made it difficult to keep the ship on course, so we sailed north of Cyprus between the island and the mainland.”

Now, the storm that suddenly came upon them made it difficult to keep their ship on course. When I read that, that deeply resonated with me and I’m sure that it does with you as well.

See, maybe your ship here in 2020 has been your family or your marriage. And, you know, family dynamics—raising children, being married to someone—can be challenging enough as it is without going through the kind of storm that we’ve been navigating.

Maybe your ship, so to speak, has been your business. Maybe you’ve lost business, maybe you’ve had to shut down, maybe your business permanently closed.

Maybe your ship is relationships. Maybe relationships with extended family members or somebody who you used to see all of the time but because of the isolation and quarantine you don’t get as much face time together any more. And just due to the added stress and tension, it’s really strained those relationships.

Maybe your ship is your physical, mental, or spiritual well-being. It’s just been difficult to keep all of those things on course when you’re in the middle of a storm.

2020 has made things that are already challenging enough as it is even that much more difficult to manage.

Paul goes on in verse 7, and it says:

“We had several days of slow sailing, and after great difficulty we finally neared Cnidus. But the wind was against us, so we sailed across to Crete and along the sheltered coast of the island, past the cape of Salmone. We struggled along the coast with great difficulty and finally arrived at Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea. We had lost a lot of time.”

See, once again, what Paul describes here just sounds so familiar to us during this year, because in so many ways hasn’t 2020 felt like it’s been going in slow motion, like when is this year ever going to end? And then in other ways is like, “Oh, man. Where has this year gone?” And it has been wave after of wave of great difficulties. And now, it sort of feels like we’ve lost something.

I think that all of us have lost something during the course of this year. And maybe it’s someone. Maybe, like I said earlier, it’s a job. Maybe it’s just a vacation that got cancelled. Maybe it’s an opportunity that you were really looking forward to.

You know, this year in April I had scheduled a trip to go to Paris. I had to be in Paris for a board meeting, actually. And I was going to take my 15-year-old daughter as part of her 16th birthday celebration. That got cancelled.

My wife had a monumental birthday this year and we had scheduled a trip to Napa Valley—that got cancelled.

This is my son’s senior year of high school. And a pandemic is looming over all of the activities of his senior year.

There have been so many things that have gotten cancelled or lost during this year and I think that it touches every single one of us. And I think it is important for us in maintaining our emotional, spiritual, and mental health to acknowledge that and agree with it.

So as we come to the end of 2020, before we set our sights on 21 and make New Year’s resolutions and plans as we venture into the year, I think it would be really important for us to take a little bit of time to just grieve what we’ve lost.

I shared with all of you a few months ago that as soon as the pandemic started, I set up a time every other week to talk to a therapist via phone. I’ve been talking to her all year long. And she said something to me just before Thanksgiving that hit a little too close to home, because, you see, I’m such a driver, I’m such an activator, I’ve always got to be accomplishing something. So 2020 has been so frustrating because of that.

And she said to me, “Aaron, it feels like your foot is on the gas and yet the emergency brake is pulled at the same time.” And she said, “You know just as well as I do that that is not good for a car.” And she said, “That’s not good for you as well.”

I think that all of us have felt that tension. We want to go. We want to move. We want to do life. We want to see people again. And yet, there is this emergency brake that has been pulled. And all of us are grieving. And we grieve in various ways. I think that it is important for us just to acknowledge what we’ve lost so that way we can head into the New Year as healthy as we possibly can.

Well, as we go back to our passage, it just goes from bad to worse. Morale was really low. Paul and his companions can’t agree on what to do. They were divided, hungry, and afraid.

Look at what he writes in verse 21. He says:

“No one had eaten for a long time. Finally, Paul called the crew together and said, ‘Men, you should have listened to me in the first place and not left Crete. You would have avoided all this damage and loss. But take courage! None of you will lose your lives, even though the ship will go down. For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me, and he said, “Don’t be afraid, Paul, for you will surely stand trial before Caesar! What’s more, God in his goodness has granted safety to everyone sailing with you.”’” Here it is again. ‘“So take courage! For I believe God. It will be just as he said.’”

Now, I’ve got to acknowledge that in that passage right there, it seems like he’s trying to share some good news, but it doesn’t necessarily seem like good news. He says, “Take courage. I mean, the ship is still going to go down, but take courage.

You’re going to survive.” Like, “Take courage, Paul. You’re going to stand trial before Caesar, not the best of news. But, hey. At least you’re not going to die.”

It kind of reminds me of that work out t-shirt: Well did you die? And it’s kind of like, “Well, thanks for the encouragement, I think.” And what he is getting at here is that the ship may go down, we still may face trials and difficulties, but I believe God, that he has got us secure, that God is going to see us through, that God is still good even when life is not.”

And he just keeps saying over and over again, “Take courage.” You see, before you will be encouraged you’ve got to take the courage that is made available to you and to me by the promises of God, by his Holy Spirit, and by the community of other people around you.

Can I just say this to you as your pastor? I believe God. I believe that God has said that he will see us through. That Jesus said, “In this world you will have many trials and troubles, but take heart, I have overcome the world.”

And God has reassured us that he will see us through the storm. Will one of our ships go down? Will we face trials and difficulties? For sure. But God will see us through.

So, with all of that said and with that passage being read, can I just wrap up this really tumultuous year? I just want to say three things to you as your pastor. Number one, I just want to say:

THANK YOU

You know when I think of everyone who makes up our church family, whether those of you who have been coming to a physical campus or those of you who join us online—whether you live in Indianapolis or you live around the world you’re a part of our church family—you make up who Traders Point is. I’m reminded of Paul’s words to the Philippians when he says, “I thank my God every time I remember you.”

As a leader, one of the things that I’m responsible for is to just anticipate problems and challenges so that as a church we are ready for them so that we know how to navigate through them. And I’ve got a list. I’ve got a list of things that I just keep my eye on.

But can I tell you that the events of 2020 never, ever, crossed my mind? I never thought to be ready to lead through a year that has been this challenging. And I’ve faced a lot of doubts. I’ve awakened in the middle of the night wondering if I am doing enough, if I’m saying enough, if I’m making the right decisions.

So, I just want to thank all of you. First of all, I want to thank you for staying engaged. I know that this has been challenging. I know that a number of you haven’t been able to join us physically for whatever reason—thank you for staying engaged with us.

I want to thank you for your encouragement. In fact, just this morning I was cleaning out some of my office before the end of the year and I came across this. And this is just—this isn’t all of it—but this is just a sampling of some of the cards, letters, and emails that many of you have sent me, actually from all around the world.

And I just read through a sampling of them today and, once again, it just brought me to tears. I want to thank you so much for your prayers and your encouragement.

Can I thank you for your grace? As I look back across this last year, there are some things that I’m really proud of, decisions I made, some things I said, some moves that we made as a church. And there are other things that I wish I could take a mulligan on. I haven’t done everything right. I haven’t said everything right. You all know that I’m not perfect and I want to thank you for your grace.

Finally, I just want to thank you for your generosity. Thank you for the way that you continue to believe in what God is doing in and through our church. Your giving has encouraged us so much. And we want to utilize those resources to make as big of a difference in the lives of the people in our city and all around the world.

Here’s the second thing I want to say. I just want to urge you to:

STAY COURAGEOUS

If I could borrow the terminology from Acts 27, I would just say stay courageous. I said this to our staff just a couple of weeks ago in a staff meeting. I said, “Listen. We’re not backing down from this. We are stepping forward in faith.”

Church history shows us that when there were plagues and pandemics and challenges in the past, it was the church, it was Christ followers who ran to the problem instead of running away from it.

And we really believe that God is up to something so big right now. I mean, what we see happening in our world is—we’ve heard terms like unprecedented, we’ve heard terms like, “This is a once in a century type of crisis.” I believe that God is up to something really big. And right now a fearful world needs a fearless church.

I have a good friend of mine who said this to me a couple of weeks ago. He’s far better with words than I am and he said, “Listen, Brockett. The bounce back is going to be greater than the set back.” And I believe that to be true. So, stay courageous.

Here’s the third thing:

HOLD ON TO HOPE

Hold on to hope. This world is not our home, so let’s stop acting like it. You see, when the pandemic is over, and it will eventually be over, let’s not look back and be ashamed of our behavior, our speech, and our tone. So much of what ends up coming out of our mouth is laced with fear and insecurity. It’s because we’re emotionally exhausted.

And we need to be reminded that government is not our savior, Jesus is. We need to be reminded that it’s oftentimes painful to be in God’s waiting room, but it’s oftentimes the best thing for us. We said in a service just a few weeks ago, “God, if you are not done working, then we are not done waiting.”

So as we come to the conclusion of this storm of a year, I just want to thank you. I want to ask you to say courageous. I want to ask you to hold on to hope, because as we go into 2021, I really am excited and expectant for the big things that God is going to do in your personal life, in the life of your family, and in the life of our church.

And I hope to see you soon, whether that’s online or maybe at one of our physical campuses, as we really rally together as a church to say, “God, what would you have for us? What would you have for us in this brand-new year? We’re not going to settle for just New Year’s resolutions. We want to settle for life transformation. So, God, have your way with us. You’ve had to force some things out of our hands this year so now we willingly give them to you.”

And I just want to look into the camera right now and say to that person maybe sitting on a couch, or a chair in the back yard, or maybe in a car listening to this while running errands, if you are without a relationship with Jesus Christ right, for whatever reason…

Maybe that reason would be confusion over what he’s really offering. Maybe it’s indifference. Maybe it’s anger that has separated you from God. Maybe it’s just the religious baggage that you grew up with.

I really do want you to know that I understand and get all of that and I want you to know that that’s not what Jesus wants to give you. Jesus genuinely desires a relationship with you that comes by faith through the grace that he freely offers.

So today, wherever you are you can just simply make that confession of faith, that you believe in God, that you believe God, and that you trust that he sent his Son to reconcile you back to him by just confessing your sins and placing your trust in him. What a way to end 2020 and begin 2021.

Let me pray.

Father, we come to you today and I thank you for the encouragement that your word always gives us. It’s always relevant to our lives and the challenges that we face.

So, God, today I just ask that you would give us the strength to stay courageous and to hold on to hope, to keep our eyes fixed on you. We don’t know what 21 is going to bring. We do pray that it wouldn’t be quite the storm that we faced in 2020, but even if not, God, we trust you and we believe you.

We ask that you would use our lives and you would use our church to make a real difference in as many lives of people as possible so that your Kingdom may advance through us. And we ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.