

Authentic Christianity in a Synthetic World

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[0 : 00] Don's going to be preaching to us from the book of Acts, so perhaps you'd turn with me now to Acts chapter 20, and we're going to read together. If you don't have a Bible, some at the side, some at the front, some at the back, go and grab one.

And I think it's page 929 in those Bibles, if you'd like to follow along. I'm going to read from Acts 20 at verse 17, and through to the end of the chapter.

Now, from Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.

And when they came to him, he said to them, You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and tears, and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews.

How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks, of repentance towards God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 16] And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

But I do not account my life of any value, nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I receive from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

And now, behold, I know that none of you, among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom, will see my face again. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he has obtained with his own blood.

I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves, your own selves, will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them, and therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I didn't cease, night or day, to admonish everyone with tears.

[2 : 53] And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.

You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things, I've shown you that by working hard in this way, we must help the weak.

And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, it's more blessed to give than to receive. And when he said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

And there was much weeping on the part of all. They embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful, most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again.

And they accompanied him to the ship. Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, good evening. It's great to be with you here this evening.

[4 : 06] My name is Dom. I'm the minister over at Grace Church in Dundee. And as Willie said, you'll have prayed for me, many of you, but not put a face to the name.

So it's great to be able to do that a bit this evening. And thank you so much for those prayers. And there's a number of you as well that I do recognize. We've crossed paths a few times. So it's good to see you also.

I bring with me warm greetings from Dundee, where we pray for you regularly too. It's reciprocated. We greatly appreciate your partnership in the gospel.

And we always enjoy hearing updates from you and praying for you too. But as Willie said, I'm here on sort of formal business from the presbytery, I suppose.

And so I wanted to take a few moments just to share a little bit with you about Didasco. Just before we come to the word. Didasco is a family of churches that you're part of, as well as ourselves.

[5 : 06] Grace in Dundee, Cornerstone in Stirling, Gilcompton in Aberdeen and Edinburgh North in Edinburgh. And it's our belief that it's right, it's biblical, it's healthy as churches to be interdependent.

And so what that means is that there really is a proper relationship, accountability and authority of external elders supporting your local elders here.

And so we as churches together stay engaged and involved with the ministries in each city. Now each of our churches will look quite different in some ways if you went along on a Sunday morning. But we each have shared convictions and a shared story. For each of us, there was at a moment a painful departure from the Church of Scotland. But none of us left the Church of Scotland because we wanted to be independent.

And so Didasco came together because of the existing relationships and shared experience we had together. And a shared desire for a biblically faithful relationship.

[6 : 18] And so what we would want together to experience and enjoy is a warm-hearted form of Presbyterianism. One that is light on bureaucracy and red tape, rule books, church manuals, micromanaging, all these things.

But strong on proper gospel relationships, on partnership, on accountability. Strong on our shared reformed doctrinal convictions, our confessional pattern of worship, and our focus on the ministry of the Word.

And so if you visited each one of our churches on a Sunday, you'd see some different stylistics perhaps in places. But what you will see in each city is a congregation formed around the Word of God and living in gospel community together.

Believing that the Word of God has the power to bring salvation to our cities and to our nation. And so Didasco provides a relationship and support for us as ministers and elders of these churches.

And gives a sense of a wider mission for us beyond just our one city. And so for me, that's something that I've really appreciated. I moved to Dundee almost five years ago.

[7 : 32] And I came from an independent church where we were out on an island. And so I really value the community that we have together as a family of churches. But it's also good to know that there's a body of qualified and called men to oversee ministry.

That is good both for me as a pastor, but also for my church. To know that we're not alone. We're together. And so one of the things that we regularly do is we visit one another's ministries.

And the point of that is to build those relationships. To share encouragements together. And to be mutually accountable. And so last summer for Grace Church, we had Callum Jack from Cornerstone in Stirling come and visit myself and the elders there.

And so this week I've spent some time with Willie and with the elders here. And then with the elders and with Willie. And I've enjoyed hearing about everything that's been going on here.

Some of the joys. Some of the challenges. Some of the opportunities that lay ahead. And this relationship, of course, is particularly important in times of transition for churches.

[8 : 45] And so Grace Church benefited from this in its early days when the presbytery helped in some particularly tricky pastoral matters. And over the course of this year, one of the things that I've been doing is helping with Edinburgh North as they've been going through a process of vacancy.

And you'll have heard in recent weeks how they've appointed Stephen, one of your own, to that post. And we're delighted that that's been the outcome. But one of my jobs has been just to come alongside them and encourage them and help them along that journey.

And you can keep your sort of ears out for a date for the ordination in the sort of autumn time that we'll have shortly for you. But I think it's reassuring to know that when there are these times of transition, you will have help.

And you'll have that help quickly. And so I should say this quickly before I say this next bit is that I'm not dropping a spoiler for you here at all. Because Willie isn't planning on going anywhere.

But one of the things is that even for the Tron here, there's a document on file somewhere that we know that if and when that should ever happen, that there'll be a clear process and there'll be help and there'll be support.

[9 : 52] Again, members of the presbytery will be here and will be with you and will support you and help you through that time. And so I think it's good to have this relationship together, isn't it?

It's healthy. So I'm really appreciating getting to be with you this evening. Why don't we turn to the word then? Open up those verses for me, if you have them there with you, if you would.

And what I want to think about this evening is authentic Christianity in a synthetic world. I wonder if you've ever eaten fruit and thought to yourself, this is just flavourless.

I can't taste anything here. This really doesn't even taste how it's supposed to taste. Maybe it's a strawberry that comes out of season.

Maybe it's something that just seems to have or advertises itself as having the flavour of. But somehow it's just not quite the same. I love to holiday in the West Coast.

[10 : 59] And one of the joys is the fruit that grows there. When you taste a raspberry from Ayrshire, you taste the difference. You taste the difference between the real thing and the synthetic flavour of.

The lab develops, the heat lamp grown, the water injected, the additive laden imitations are just no good by comparison. And there is a danger here of synthetic Gospels.

Gospels that are airbrushed, that are edited, that are sweetened, that are cropped, that are twisted. And when it comes to the Gospel, there is no comparison between the authentic Gospel and the synthetic.

It is the Gospel that had transformed the city of Ephesus when Paul had preached there. You can hear about it just a little previously in the book of Acts.

But synthetic Gospels now threaten to disrupt the authentic Christianity that had taken root. Look at where it picks up. It tells us now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.

[12 : 12] And then he gives them this speech, doesn't he? Let's catch up briefly with where Paul is in his ministry. Paul is on the return leg of his third missionary journey. He undertakes this journey between 53 and 57 AD.

To put it in a bit more context, the letter to the Ephesians isn't written for another five years. So this is before that material. And the book of Acts that Luke is writing for us here is written another five years after this visit.

And Paul is on his way back to Jerusalem. He's hoping to get there in time for Pentecost. He's heading from north to south along the west coast of modern-day Turkey through a bunch of islands on that coastline.

And they're sailing these islands one day at a time in the day because the wind dies down in the afternoon. And by the time you get to the evening in the dark, you just wouldn't sail around that terrain.

It's too dangerous. And he stops here in Miletus and calls the Ephesian elders to him a distance that, as the crow flies, would be about 30 miles.

[13 : 18] But in reality, would be much more circuitous. Would take them about three days to get there. Because he has something important to tell them. And so why does Luke include this speech for us?

Because what Paul has to say here is true not just for the elders in Ephesus, but at all times. Because the spiritual health of a church depends in large measure on the health of its leaders. And even if your role within the church isn't to deliver sermons regularly, you will be involved, I hope, in ministry to a degree.

Whether that's in your home, in your growth group, amongst your peers, in a workplace, at school, at university, in your Christian union. And so Paul wants to ensure that authentic Christianity flourishes by ensuring that authentic ministry flourishes.

And so I want to show you, just as we journey through these verses here, his ministry among them. The journey that's ahead of him. The threat that's ahead of the church.

[14 : 34] And that tearful goodbye. If you turn your eyes there to verses 18 to 21, we see Paul reflecting on his ministry amongst them. When they came to him, he said to them, You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia.

And Paul has some things here to say about how to handle the task of ministry. He says, You know how I lived among you. Paul's living had matched up to his teaching.

The Puritan Richard Baxter, in his book, *The Reformed Passive*, which really is a commentary on verse 28 of Acts 20, says, All that a minister does is a kind of preaching.

And if you live a covetous or a careless life, you preach these sins to your people by your practice. But they knew how Paul had lived among them.

He has a particular focus in mind, doesn't he? Look at verse 19, that he was serving the Lord with all humility. With tears. With trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews.

[15:50] And you might notice there that there's a balance in Paul, isn't there? There's a balance here between a man with a soft heart and tough skin.

He has a soft heart, doesn't he? He serves. He's a servant. He's humble. He cries before them. He puts the Lord first. He doesn't think too highly of himself.

He's willing to be vulnerable. And yet he is tough, isn't he? He has tough skin. He has endured trials.

He's someone who is determined, resilient. He doesn't cave in under pressure. And by the way, Paul's very generous with the way he puts the plots of the Jews. What that really meant was his life being threatened.

He's threatened multiple times. The most recent being that Jews in Asia who follow him later to Jerusalem. And cause him to be arrested before he's killed. We can read of that in chapter 21.

[16:52] He's balanced. He has a soft heart, but he has a tough skin. And can't the problem so often be, we are prone to be the opposite.

To have a hard heart. And to have soft skin. To be very easily hurt. To be quick to be muzzled and silenced.

When we ought to be bold and to speak up. And yet to have a tough heart. To become guarded. To become cold. Maybe even bitter.

But at the centre of Paul's ministry. Was the ministry of the word. And this is at the heart of his defence here.

Verses 20 to 21. We see him sort of addressing how to handle the word. And there's three things he shows us in these couple of verses. He is comprehensive.

[17:51] He's constant. And he's consistent. He's comprehensive. Look at verse 20 there with me. You know how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable.

Paul was bold amongst them. And taught them all that scripture teaches. Now, there are profitable things in life.

That you may not want to hear. There are profitable things in life. That may be inconvenient. For you. That may be uncomfortable.

That may be confrontational. But Paul has not shrunk. From declaring anything that was profitable to them. And you see.

A good teacher. Has the stomach. And loves you enough. To tell you no. To tell you you're wrong. To warn you.

[18:56] And so what was profitable for Paul? What is he thinking of in his mind here? When he says, I didn't shrink from declaring anything that was profitable. Well, perhaps how he speaks elsewhere guides us.

2 Timothy 3 verse 16 says, What was profitable for Paul was the contents of Scripture.

All of them. Let's ask for a second. Why might you not do this? Why would Paul have to commend this as if it might be possible you'd be tempted to not do it?

Or maybe we could ask more pertinently, Where will you be tempted maybe to avoid certain subjects? Well, we know today, don't we?

Some of the areas you might be tempted to avoid. It might be easier. It might be less uncomfortable. To speak of gender. To speak of sexuality. To speak of marriage and parenting.

[20:11] To speak of abortion and euthanasia. It would be easier to airbrush those bits out, perhaps. Well, Paul doesn't shy away from that. Because the Bible does speak.

And it speaks clearly. It speaks authoritatively on these things. And being winsome is not enough of an apologetic in the world to redeem skeptics.

Simply being winsome will not win over skeptics. It is just a loss of bottle and fear, isn't it?

It's not trusting that the gospel has power within it to change the rebel's heart. Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel.

For it is the power of God for salvation to all who believe. To the Jew first. And also to the Greek. And they've experienced that here in Ephesus.

[21 : 07] The whole culture has been changed by the gospel bearing fruit amongst them. They've come and they've gathered and they've burnt their occult books, which have come to a great value.

It's changed the values of the city. It's meant that the temple is struggling to turn a profit on sin. The city is gathered and organized around the temple to Artemis.

And it can't make a profit anymore. Because people have turned to Christ. He's comprehensive. Secondly, he was constant.

There again at verse 20. I didn't shrink from carrying to you anything that was profitable and teaching you in public and from house to house. He's had a public and a private ministry beyond the Sunday.

And he's given the same message in all those settings. He's not suddenly bold in private and carrying away in public. He's not just bold in public but not telling you to your face privately.

[22 : 11] He's constant. And he's consistent. That's 21. Testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance towards God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's one of those things that doesn't quite translate immediately over very easily for us. Why does he particularly pick out here Jews and Greeks? Because he's thinking of the cultural differences. Because in the Hebrew mind, you've either Hebrew been brought up within that worldview and way of thinking and living.

Or you're Greek. Everything else. Secular out in the world. And so I suppose you might perhaps carry it over and think of this speaking both to those who are religious and those who are irreligious. Those who are church and those who are unchurched. My message has been the same. The gospel. Repentance and faith. And that's at the very heart of the opposition that Paul was facing. Reading on into chapter 21, we can see that problem. James warns Paul, verse 20. You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law.

[23 : 16] And they've been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses. Telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs.

And we see those Jews from Asia who I mentioned earlier catch up with him in the temple. Chapter 21, verse 28.

Men of Israel, help! They cry. This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.

He's accused of forsaking the law because he doesn't insist on it for salvation. And that is always the accusation that comes when you preach the gospel of grace alone.

Of faith alone. In Christ alone. Paul shared his life with the Ephesians. He's served humbly and he's had the word of God at the center of his work.

[24 : 17] He then turns to think about the future and he's thinking about the journey that's ahead of him. You can see that there from verse 22 down. He says, now behold, I'm going to Jerusalem constrained by the Spirit.

It foreshadows what's going to happen to him as he's going to be bound up. As he's arrested and taken away. But Paul is saying here, I'm going to Jerusalem under the constraint of the Spirit. It's not my captors who are overpowering me. But I am walking into this challenge knowing I have no alternative but to be faithful to the call of God to go.

They don't take me against my will. I'm going willingly. He's constrained by the God whom he serves. Think of examples through history, can't we?

Perhaps the Protestant reformer Martin Luther standing before the council and saying, here I stand, I can do no other. I will not recant anything. And Paul is accepting that he doesn't know what will happen to him, doesn't he?

[25 : 29] And as God's servant, you often won't know what is to happen for you. He says, I don't know what will happen to me. Only that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

So he has something of an inkling of what might be before him. He has that, no doubt, from his conversion back in chapter 9. We're told in the aftermath of that, Jesus speaks and says, I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.

But look at Paul's reasoning here, verse 24. Here is why he goes on this journey, that he knows will be so painful.

But I do not account my life of any value, nor is precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I receive from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And there's a serious piece of theology here, that he doesn't take himself too seriously.

[26 : 49] And he can not take himself too seriously, because he takes Jesus incredibly seriously instead.

And there's the focus for him, that I would testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And it contrasts Paul's ministry with his opponents.

In Galatians, which he wrote in 48, a few years before this, Paul has addressed a very similar problem to what's rising up again here. And back then, people were angry with Paul, because he said that observance of the Mosaic law does not contribute to your salvation.

Galatians 2, verse 15, he says, These Jewish opponents are very happy with the concept of having faith in Jesus.

But they also believe that you must follow the Torah too. By keeping the law as well as faith, you will then be saved and sanctified as made like God.

[28 : 18] But Paul says, no, you're saved only by faith. He says a little later on, having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

See, observing the moral law of God is a fitting response for the faithful. But it is not the prerequisite to being saved. It has always been this way, by the way, and that's what Paul develops in that argument in the book of Galatians.

Think about it. The law is in fact actually only given after Israel had already been saved from Egypt. And so Paul summarizes his ministry by contrast with one word.

Grace. It's about being given a favor that you do not deserve. And it is about not being given the justice that you do deserve.

Because Jesus faced a judgment he did not deserve in our place for us. And gave up some of his favor that he did rightly deserve.

[29 : 28] It is all for Paul about grace. And Paul knows he won't see them again, doesn't he? And so has some things he can't leave unsaid in the rest of these verses here.

He defends his ministry in verses 26 and 27. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

Very similar to verse 20, isn't it? It didn't shrink from declaring anything that was profitable. It didn't shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

And then there's a call to arms for the Ephesians, isn't there? Look at verse 28. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

To care for the church of God which he obtained with his own blood. There's a call for these leaders here to wake up. And to take responsibility.

[30 : 36] Pay careful attention to yourselves. It begins with spiritual self-care. Get yourselves in shape here. And then it turns outwards, doesn't it?

And to all the flock. You can only look after the flock to care for them. If actually you're taking care of yourself. They've been made overseers by the Holy Spirit.

God has appointed them to be leaders and gives them authority. So you could rightly say that to trust God is to trust his leaders. To trust his leaders is to trust him. Because he's put them there for you.

And what are they to do? Look at verse 28 there again. And that it's a care for the church of God. Which he obtained with his own blood. And it shows the value of the church, doesn't it?

It could be put actually, maybe it's easier translated. That he obtained the church with the blood of his own. That the Father has given up his Son.

[31 : 36] So that the death sentence over us might be lifted. It says both how valuable you are. That God would do that for you. That he would gladly give up his Son.

To spare you. But it also puts a responsibility upon the church's leaders, doesn't it? That the church has been gathered and brought together at such a cost. And it is a weighty thing.

To be in leadership, isn't it? And yet, as soon as we say that, we must counterbalance it. And say it is God's church. Father, Son and Spirit all active here.

And God leads and builds up his church for his glory. Jesus says, I will build my church. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

He thinks about this journey ahead of him. And then he turns thirdly to think of the threats before this church. Verse 29. I have a member of my church who works in data analysis.

[32 : 45] For the agricultural sector. And this is things like cameras and artificial intelligence. To sort of help recognise the right moment to change feeding patterns. In salmon farming and things like this.

And so with algorithms and AI. It will make this process more standardised and efficient. But currently, a human being has to actually check that the algorithm is working.

And so one week of my friend's work involves sifting through thousands of photographs. And deciding, did they have a seal in them or no seal? And so he became painfully aware of what seals look like in that week.

And so there is a danger here. That wolves and false teachers may destroy all that has been built in Ephesus. And how will they avoid this danger?

Well, they will need to learn what a wolf looks like. They'll need to learn what a false teacher looks like. And so Paul instructs them.

[33 : 50] Firstly, there's a threat resigning outside of the community. Look at verse 29. I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you. Not sparing the flock.

They will not be sparing. They'll not be protecting and caring for the flock. There'll be a destructive force from in the world that will seek to destroy.

You might think of this as the danger of syncretism. Forces outside of the church seeking to change the gospel message to fit the secular culture around us. And so Paul's encouragement, what do we do with a wolf?

Well, wolves need to be removed from the flock. Or they attack the sheep. And sheep need to learn to spot the wolf. And a good pastor helps their flock to do that.

There's a threat from outside of the community. But there's a threat within the community. Look at verse 30. And from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things.

[34 : 53] To draw away the disciples after them. Among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things. This is the danger of schism of false teachers seeking to gain a platform and build a following by distorting the gospel.

Look at Paul's approach there in verse 31. What does he commend them to do? Therefore, he says, be alert. Remembering that for three years I didn't cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.

He has been constantly warning and correcting false teaching. Not because he loves doing that. It's been painful. He's done it with tears.

He's done it out of love. You need to hear why this is unhealthy. Why this is wrong. And where this is going. He's done it with people. He's done it with people. He's done it with people.

He's done it with people. He's done it with people. He's done it with people. He's done it with people. Loving them enough to not always be liked for everything he says. The problem is that wolves and false teachers, if allowed to, will divide and destroy the flock.

[36 : 06] And in both cases, it comes because of a departure from that whole counsel of God that Paul teaches. From everything that's profitable in his word.

Well, that's his approach. But what's the antidote? Fourthly, look at verse 32 with me there. And now, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

It's not in human skill, but in holding to the gospel that we're built up. The word of his grace. That's the antidote.

And then he has some words about motive. This is 33 to 35. It might seem like a bit of a departure from what Paul has been saying up to this point.

But I just wonder whether Paul might be suggesting that this is the motive of wolves and false teachers, really. That there are those who like to rise up and cause a stir because they covet position.

[37 : 43] They see a chance to make money. See a chance to become relevant. And Paul, on the other hand, has worked hard. He's been self-reliant. He's not sponged off of them.

As many super apostles have been doing. Why? Because of the words of the Lord Jesus. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

You will never regret living generously for the Lord. You'll never wind up at the end feeling short-changed. As if that didn't really work out very well for me.

It is more blessed to give than to receive. It's the gospel that has saved them. It's the gospel that's brought them together. And it's the gospel that will grow them. And so they need to hold on to it. And so lastly, and this will be much shorter. We see that tearful goodbye at the end, don't we? An authentic ministry is about forging real, meaningful relationships through the gospel.

[38 : 46] Look at them there. When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all. They embraced Paul and kissed him. Being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken.

That they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship. Whoever God gives you in life to serve. Whether in your home.

Your family. Your friends. Your peers. Work colleagues. Whether that's a ministry at church. Or beyond.

Whoever God gives you to serve. Love them. Love them well. There's a sad goodbye here.

And authentic ministry and Christianity embraces and encompasses very painful life events. But sometimes we're parted. Sometimes we have to say goodbye. Wouldn't it be lovely in a way if Paul hadn't had to leave them?

[39 : 50] If he wasn't going to be arrested. If he wasn't going to be put to death ultimately. But he was. That was the calling. And this is painful.

Because they've really loved one another. Authentic ministry is one in which we suffer alongside the people whom we serve.

And we are showing them. Hopefully. Prayerfully. How to suffer well. Paul reflects later in Colossians.

In my flesh I'm filling up. What's lacking in Christ's afflictions. For the sake of his body. That is the church. There's nothing lacking in what Jesus has done. Is there? But what he means is they can't see it physically.

Jesus isn't on the cross before them right now physically. So in some small way they see something of that suffering for being faithful to God the Father. In the sufferings I'm facing.

[40 : 48] Authentic ministry incorporates all the sadness and sufferings of life. And here is a painful goodbye. As we come to close.

I wonder if you've ever seen the Titan Arum flower. It's currently in Kew Gardens and has flowered. It originated in Sumatra in Indonesia. But it doesn't grow there because of deforestation.

Deforestation. It is bright. Sort of electric yellow. And it is huge. It grows to around about 10 foot. And it only flowers sort of every two years.

But what makes this flower particularly significant. Is that despite its very striking appearance. It has a very pungent smell. It's called the corpse flower.

Because for all the beauty. It smells like death. And that is the problem with all synthetic gospels we find in the world around us.

[41 : 51] They have something of the beauty of the gospel within them. And they certainly promise us so much. But in reality. The smell of death is all about them.

If you get close enough. Because they cannot save us. Authentic Christianity comes in large part from authentic ministry. An authentic ministry holds to the authentic gospel.

That may look like death. But speaks life. It is the gospel verse 21. Of repentance towards God. And of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who has fulfilled every expectation of the law. Who was everything that we are. Who was everything that we are not. In our place for us. The one who died on the cross.

Facing the full weight of the law. For bearing our sins. Upon himself. The one who has therefore freed us. From the just wrath of God.

[42 : 49] For our rebellion against him. And his rule. Which we receive by turning away from sin. From repenting. And putting our faith.

In the righteousness of Jesus. It's not about the strength of our faith. It's about the object of our faith. The righteousness of Jesus. In our place for us. And it's for us.

Verse 28. The church of God which he obtained. With his own blood. With the blood of his own. His people spared from death. By the death of our saviour.

Not by what we've done. And a church held together. By verse 32. The word of his grace. Which is able to build you up.

And to give you the inheritance. Among all those who are sanctified. The word of God has power to save us. To change us. To build us up. And to see us safely home.

[43 : 48] What does authentic ministry look like? Well in life. In heart. And in work. It holds.

To this gospel. And so Paul calls the Ephesians. To pursue. Authentic Christianity. And resist. The synthetic gospels.

Moving up around them. To come. And find life. In Christ's death for us. To repent. And to put faith. In him. Why don't I pray. Before we respond. In worship. By singing again. A song that comes from all of these themes.

That we've thought about. Rock of ages. Cleft for me. But let's pray. Before we. Sing again together. Father God.

[44 : 46] We thank you. For your mercy. And your love. And your compassion. Towards us. We thank you. That as Paul puts it. In the letter to the Ephesians.

In a few years time. Because of the love. With which you've loved us. Whilst we were yet enemies. You have raised us. From death to life.

From being dead in sins. Following the prince. Of the power of the air. Following our passions. Of our body. And mind. Enemies of God.

While we were yet enemies. Because of the love. With which you've loved us. You have. Given your son. Father God.

That we might be spared. That Lord Jesus. You would willingly come. And live. The perfect life. The life we should have lived. But never could. Being everything that we're not.

[45 : 48] That you might give yourself up. For us. For us. And that Holy Spirit. You would be pleased. To have revealed your son to us. For us. We thank you for the power.

For the gospel. That it is salvation. For all who believe. And so Lord. For those of us. Who. Do believe. And have our faith in you.

We pray that you would strengthen our faith. And strengthen our resolve. Give us. Good heart. And encouragement. In the trustworthiness. And faithfulness of your word.

In you at the heart of your word. Help us to keep relying. And placing our faith in you. Not shrinking back. Not being afraid. Or giving up.

And Lord. For those of us. Who might still be exploring. Or not sure. Or fairly sure. That we don't believe yet. Father. I thank you. That your word. Is power for salvation.

[46 : 48] And so Lord. I pray. That you would. Bring faith. Even in the. Sternest. Most resistant. Most stubborn of rebels. That Holy Spirit. You would. Bring life.

To their hearts. It would find joy. In you. Help us Lord. To turn in repentance. And faith to you again. And as we go out.

Into this week. To have reason. For the hope. We have within us. For those you place us around.

To testify. Like Paul. To the grace. To those who don't know you yet.

For your glory. And for our good. And for the good of others. Amen.