

4. The Church's Continuing Pain

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Date: 05 October 2008

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[0 : 0 0] I'll do turn with me, if you would, to Acts chapter 1. Now, I had hoped that we would be much further on in the book of Acts by this stage.

In fact, actually, I hadn't meant to be in Acts chapter 1 at all. I planned to start a short series beginning in either chapter 3 or chapter 4, but when I got down to study, I just, for some reason, couldn't resist starting at the beginning.

Maybe that's just because I'm a bit of a perfectionist. I don't like things to be incomplete, but anyway, for whatever reason, here we are. We've been in Acts chapter 1. And in fact, we've been in Acts chapter 1 longer than I expected to, because I expected really to be just one week in this chapter.

But we've discovered, really, that there is so much of vital importance for us to learn if we're going to understand what it means to be a truly Pentecostal church, a truly missionary church, a witnessing church.

And so, instead of one week, it's taken us three weeks. That's why I couldn't ever work with that system of term cards, where every single sermon is laid out, you know, six months in advance and given a title and everything else, because if you come to a passage and you just can't possibly do it in one, then that's just too bad.

[1 : 1 7] So I've never survived that system, and since I decide what system we have, I'm all right. Anyway, Acts chapter 1.

First of all, what we saw in this chapter, that Jesus promises his church certain power, the invincible power of the Spirit. But he clearly teaches them, and Luke records it for us, he teaches them what expectations they should have for that power now, in the here and now, in this age.

And he's very clear to tell us, it's not yet the power that brings the restoration of all things on earth. That's the question the disciples ask in verse 6, and Jesus' answer effectively is, no, not yet.

Not yet. Restoration in that sense, but now is the time for witness. And the church can be certain of that power because of the enthronement of the Son of God, and because it's real and permanent, and they see it with their own eyes.

And yet, as we saw last time, at the same time, although that power is a certain reality for the church, that doesn't mean that there's no need for the church to pray and ask God for power to be at work among them.

[2 : 3 3] No, we saw that, in fact, precisely because God is sovereign, because the power is certain through his Spirit, therefore we must pray. And we must pray so that we know that it's Jesus and his power that is at work, not just us.

It's his mission. It's his continuing work from heaven as it was on earth. And therefore the church must be constant in prayer because our expectation of the Holy Spirit in answer to our prayers is real and is permanent.

But now tonight, the final part of this chapter, this first chapter of Acts, has another vital reality that we've got to grapple with and we've got to come to terms with. And it's this. It's the sobering truth about the church's continuing pain.

There's another thing that's real and permanent. The enthronement of God's Holy Son is real and permanent. The expectation of God's Holy Spirit is real and permanent. But also, we've got to face the fact that the experience of human sin is equally real and permanent.

And that means that the church is always going to face continuing pain because the church's experience of human sin is real and it's going to be permanent right till the end.

[3 : 52] Even in the New Testament church, the Pentecostal Spirit-filled church, even in the New Covenant people of God, there'll be pain, there'll be disappointment, there'll be scandal, there'll be betrayal.

But, and this is vital, don't miss this, even the church with all those kind of problems can be and will be a church that can bear much fruit for the Lord Jesus Christ in the world.

And so this section from verses 15 to 26 of Acts chapter 1 declares to us two things, both the painful reality of the church's persistent sin, but also the powerful reassurance of God's even more persistent salvation.

I want to look at those two things tonight. First of all then, the painful reality of the church's persistent sin. In verse 16, Peter says, it had to be fulfilled.

It had to be fulfilled that Jesus would be betrayed by one of his very own, that the Messiah, the Christ of God himself, would be let down and made to suffer and destroyed by one of his very closest associates in ministry.

[5 : 14] That sin and deception and self-serving and gospel-hating attitudes would be at the very, very heart of the leadership of the church of Jesus Christ.

Right at the beginning. And cause agonies to the Son of God and agonies to those who truly loved him and served him and served his gospel. That's a pretty painful reality, isn't it?

For the church to have to come to terms with then and today. If ever there was a death blow to the idea of a perfect church, of a pure church or a perfect leadership in the church, then this is surely it, isn't it?

But Jesus himself had fellow workers, had leaders. He chose himself who betrayed him and as callously and cruelly as Judas did.

And, says Peter, it had to be. Scripture itself foretold this. Verse 20, he says, for as it is written in the book of Psalms, may his camp become desolate and let there be no one to dwell in it and let another take his office.

[6 : 25] Why did this painful reality of sin right at the heart of Jesus' experience, why did it have to be? Well, because, says Peter, when you understand God's word, you begin to see that that is a pattern that occurs everywhere.

It's a persistent reality that God's anointed servants, all of them, who love him and who serve him and who reflect him, will be persecuted and betrayed, often, even by those at the very heart of the group who ought to be most loyal.

Now, I say that that's obvious when you understand God's word. Peter says that, but it doesn't seem to be obvious to everyone. In fact, if you read the scholars, you'll see that many of them are very scornful of Peter's use of the Old Testament here.

They'll say, well, it's quite arbitrary. He's pulling some text totally out of context. It's got nothing to do with Judas and he's just using it to sort of back up what's happened and encourage people.

Well, I think Jesus would simply say to people who take that view what he said to the Sadducees in Matthew 22, verse 29. You're wrong. You're wrong because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God.

[7 : 45] And alas, that's too true among many scholars and teachers in our colleges today, but let's think about this. Don't forget, Peter has just spent 40 days listening to Jesus himself, teaching them all about how to understand the Bible properly, not to misuse it.

40 days personally receiving tuition from Jesus about his kingdom, as Luke tells us here, about how the Christ must suffer and then, only then, enter his glory.

That's what it records for us is the teaching in Luke 24. teaching them that all, all must be fulfilled in the law and the prophets and the Psalms, notice, concerning him, concerning his mission, his death, and then, only then, his ultimate glory.

And you see, here's Peter at the very beginning in Acts chapter 1 saying, yes, and as Jesus taught us, the very pattern of Psalm 69 is being fulfilled right now in our midst.

The very spirit of Psalm 109 which is the second Psalm he quotes from. It's exactly what we're seeing right in front of our eyes just as he said. Peter only quotes one verse from each of these Psalms but he's calling to mind the whole message of those Psalms.

[9 : 00] The Psalms, remember, of David, the anointed king, the man after God's own heart, the lion of Judah, the one who more than any other servant of God perhaps pointed forward to the true Messiah.

To the one who would at last come and establish his kingdom forever. And the Psalms, you see, the Psalms speak so often of David's experience of suffering and betrayal even at the hand of his very closest and dearest associates.

You remember the stories, remember Ahithophel, his great counselor who turned against him. Remember his own son Absalom leading a revolt against him. Armies brought against him.

And that's what's expressed in Psalm 69. You might like to just turn for a moment to that Psalm. It might just help us to see. It's page 493, I think, in the Church Bibles.

This Psalm is one of the most quoted and most referred to in the New Testament and especially in the Gospels and surrounding Jesus himself. Especially in connection to the reproach and the rejection of the Lord Jesus.

[10 : 06] The Psalm begins by showing us David as God's king, being rejected and despised, sinking, he says, in the mire. Mighty are those who would destroy me, who attack me with lies, he says in verse 4.

Well, why do they hate him? Well, the answer is in verse 9, isn't it? It's zeal for the Lord's house that has consumed this man. And therefore, the reproach of those who hate God is falling on David.

Now, all of Jesus' disciples would remember that they themselves remembered those words when Jesus cleansed the temple and the rage and the ire of the authorities fell on him.

Look at verse 21 of Psalm 69. They recalled that too, didn't they? They went on the cross, they lifted up, soured wine for Jesus to drink. Or verse 20, reproaches have broken my heart.

The comfortless vigil of Jesus in Gethsemane when his heart was broken and yet none was there to comfort him. All of them fell asleep. Look at verse 6.

[11 : 16] They would resonate with these words as David prays that none of the righteous would fall away on account of him being abandoned apparently by God. Well, all the disciples had all but fallen away, hadn't they, at Jesus' arrest and trial, thinking him abandoned?

And yet the prayer of the end of this psalm had certainly supremely come true on Jesus' lips, hadn't it? Verse 29. Let your salvation, O God, set me on high.

And they'd have witnessed his ascension, hadn't they? Verse 34. Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and everything that moves in them.

They'd seen the king ascending to his throne. And they had the promise of that great restoration that the psalm ends with. Verses 35 and 36. The restoration of Zion and of God's people.

Although, as Jesus had said, not yet. They understood the disciples. They understood that the pattern of the reproach and then the vindication of God's servants in this world is real and it's persistent.

[12 : 26] And that was so for David especially because it was a reflection of the great rejection of God by rebellious human beings. And that rejection was never ever in the history of this world, never made so plain as on the cross at Calvary where Jesus, the Holy Son of God, was despised and rejected by his own.

Where he was betrayed to death by one of his most intimate associates. But they also had seen the pattern of God's vindication of his victory.

And they'd also seen that part of that is the inevitable defeat of all his enemies. And that's what verses 21 to 28 of Psalm 69 are all about.

And those are the verses from which Peter quotes here. Verse 25 is the one he quotes. May their camp be a desolation that no one dwell in their tents. And so it must be for any enemy who stands foursquare in rebellion of heart against God's Holy Son, Jesus, whom he has vindicated.

And so the end of Judas ought to be no surprise to Jesus' disciples. No surprise at all. In fact, just as it had to be that God's own Son would be opposed and betrayed by his very own, by the nearest to him.

[13 : 56] That's something, isn't it, that exposes, perhaps in a way nothing else does, the real heart of the awfulness of human sin, isn't it? Human sin is treachery.

It's rebellion and disgraceful revolt against the one who has lavished love and mercy and grace upon us. It's betrayal of the lowest kind.

But just as it had to be that God's own Son would be betrayed in that way, so it had to be that ultimately all who opposed and rebelled against him would be cast aside and would be made desolate themselves and receive themselves the curses that they were heaping up upon God's Son.

That's a pattern that's witnessed to all through Scripture, not just in Psalm 69. The second quote is from Psalm 109. It just makes the same point. We won't go into it, but it resonates in just the same way with the scorn and the cursing that Jesus had on the cross from his accusers.

I'm the object of scorn to my accusers, said the psalmist. When they see me, they wag their heads. Now just think of them going past and shaking their heads at Jesus on the cross.

[15 : 13] But likewise, in that psalm, he speaks of vindication. Now the tables are turned. They're in the dock. Let them know that this is at your hand, he says. You, O Lord, have done this.

And you see, God's vindication of Jesus by raising him from the dead and his ascension into heaven does exactly that. And just as the psalmist cries, may they be wrapped in their own shame as a cloak.

May they be swept aside. May another take their office. So it is in the particular case of Judas. Now you see, when you understand the scriptures, you understand that this pattern of scorn and rebellion and treachery against God and his anointed is everywhere.

all through history. Stephen himself in Acts chapter 7 says the same thing, doesn't he? You're just like your forefathers, he said to the leaders of Israel. You always resist the Holy Spirit.

And we see it, of course, in all its climactic horror, its sordid horror in the betrayal and rejection of Jesus himself. But, here's the point.

[16 : 28] just as that persistent pattern meant that it had to be in the experience of Jesus himself throughout his earthly ministry, so the painful reality of ongoing human sin is going to be a reality that has to be faced up to and dealt with right to the very end until Jesus comes again in glory, even in his church, even in the leadership of the church of Jesus.

Because, just as the serpent opposed Jesus to the very, very end, so the Bible tells us the seed of the serpent will oppose the seed of promise right to the very end as well.

It's a pattern that runs all the way through scripture, from Genesis 3.15 right to the end of Revelation chapter 20, when at last the devil will be utterly destroyed forever, no longer ever able to harm God's people again.

And you see, we need to come to terms with that. If we're to be an effective Pentecostal church, a missionary church, we never will be until we come to terms with the painful reality of the church's persistent sin.

The first issue, it's astonishing, isn't it, the first issue that we see the New Testament church having to deal with is a tragic failure of Christian leadership. It's very striking, isn't it? Replacing one of the apostles.

[17 : 49] But you see, we're not defeated. We're not without hope. And even a sinful, imperfect church is promised certain power from God.

And the prayers of even a sinful, inadequate church like this will be answered. The promise of Jesus is true. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

And that's the second thing that we mustn't forget in this passage and we mustn't fail to see. Because just as it tells us about the persistence of human sin, it also declares wonderfully and loudly the powerful reassurance of God's even more persistent salvation.

The church will go on regardless. And that's another thing that Peter tells us here must be according to the scriptures. That rebels and betrayers will arise and cause damage and pain.

But not only will they be set aside to their own great loss, but others, others will always rise up and take their place. Look at verse 22. One of these men must, same word, must become with us a witness of his resurrection.

[19 : 08] Again, it's easy to get caught up in the side issues in what's going on here, but notice what the emphasis is. The emphasis isn't on the personalities involved. It's all the names, Matthias and Joseph.

Yes, Matthias and Joseph. But all the emphasis is not on themselves, it's on the reason why they're chosen. They're witnesses to Jesus' whole ministry and his resurrection and his ascension.

And that's what matters. That's what qualifies one to be a founder apostle of the church of Jesus Christ. And that's the only qualification. That's why there can't ever be another generation of apostles, nor need there be.

When the apostle James is martyred a little bit later on in this story, he's not replaced, he doesn't need to be. But Judas must be replaced, because at the beginning there must be twelve founding apostles, just as there were twelve tribes of the first Israel.

So it must be for the church, the true universal Israel of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, as Paul says in Ephesians 4. But you see, the focus isn't on their personalities, and Matthias never pops up again in the whole story, he's never mentioned again.

[20 : 16] Nor is the focus on the particular method of their choosing, using lots. Lots are never mentioned again either. It's probably because the Old Testament era where lots were used passes after Pentecost.

But all the focus, do you see, the focus is on the fact that this is actually Jesus who is directing his church in this. Jesus is the one who is sovereignly choosing the twelfth apostle.

Do you see verse 24, their prayer? You, Lord, show which one you have chosen. And it's not some second best, you see. This is not some sort of patch-up job of the church.

This is part of God's sovereign plan and purpose from the beginning. And the choice of apostles is under Jesus, just as the betrayal of Jesus by Judas was under God's sovereign plan and control.

If you doubt that, look at chapter 2, verse 23. We're told it absolutely explicitly, aren't we? Peter says, this Jesus delivered up according to the definitive plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified by the hands of lawless men.

[21 : 26] Do you see? You're responsible, you did a terrible thing, but it's not out of God's control, not at all. He says the same thing again in chapter 4, verse 28.

And that's the real point here, you see. The church must have been pained, mustn't it? Pained deeply by the awful aftermath of the tragedy of Judas.

Of course they were. But you see the point that Luke is making, they needn't be panicked by it. They needn't think that God is out of control and doesn't know what he's doing.

Far from it. It was all to be expected exactly as the Bible told it to them. They're to expect to have to deal with the persistent reality of human sin, but they're also to expect to rejoice in a powerful reassurance of God's sovereign salvation.

He's in control. Even if his ways are sometimes mysterious and involve us in great pain in the church, nevertheless he is at work.

[22 : 30] He's working his purpose out. And you see, the big point in this section is that the persistent sin of men, even in the church, cannot threaten the even more persistent salvation of God.

Can't do it. And where one apostle has to be set aside because of shame and tragedy, God has not just one, do you notice, but two men, perfectly adequately qualified to take his place, where sin abounds, grace super abounds.

And this church, remember, this church with all its warts, with all its foibles, with all its persistent human sin that has to be dealt with all the way through the New Testament that the apostles are always having to write letters about, this church, nevertheless, is the church that turned the world upside down.

And there ought to be surely great encouragement for us in that today, shouldn't there? Even as there ought to be, yes, a reminder about the reality and the persistence of sin.

There will be pain for the church to face. And there will be many painful disappointments, even scandals to be overcome right to the end, just as there were right at the beginning.

[23 : 50] But despite all this, the message of Acts, the message of the whole Bible, is that the unstoppable kingdom of Jesus will go on, unhindered by these things.

And right from the beginning it's been so. The church's joy was mingled right at the start with real pain, with real sadness. Their ministry, their missionary outreach was tinged with grief right at the very heart of their fellowship.

It must have been dreadful. Just think how personal their pain was. Verse 17, he was numbered among us and allotted his share in this ministry.

Judas had been right in the midst of the apostles. Right in the midst, back in Luke chapter 9, when they'd been sent off together on mission, proclaiming the kingdom, doing wonderful works in the name of Jesus.

He'd been one of those who had said, Lord, increase our faith, when Jesus had warned about temptations to sin. And now this had happened.

[24 : 52] Terribly painful, isn't it, for us when we can recall someone right at the heart of ministry with you, who's fallen away, who's perhaps now utterly opposed even to what they once rejoiced in.

But so it was from the start, real personal pain. And it was very public pain as well, wasn't it? That's what Luke's telling us in that little aside in the brackets in verses 18 and 19.

All Jerusalem knew about this. It was in the public domain. They all knew about Judas' suicide, about the sordid story of bribery, about his field, the lasting monument, the field of blood.

You can imagine it, can't you? Everybody talking about it. Why is that field called the bloody field? Oh, well, a terrible scandal. Didn't you know about it, you see? Those Jesus people.

It's all very sordid. One of their leaders, you know, betrayed him. Oh, corruption and mess. Dreadful business. Keep away from that, Lord, if I were you.

[25 : 56] It's just like today, isn't it? The media love a scandal like that. Love a scandal in the church. Look at those Christians. Look at those clergy. There are scandals. Charleston, there's a lot of them.

Perverts, most of them. It's very, very hard, isn't it, when the church is caught up in that kind of thing. And of course, many Christians lose heart.

They're ashamed. They're disgusted. They're turned right off. Their faith is really shaken when something like that happens. Just think of perhaps when a well-known church leader is engaged in terrible scandal, how damaging it is.

You see, that's one reason that Luke records these things for us right at the very start, the birth of the church. It's very personal pain. It's very public pain. But also, he's telling us, it's very predictable.

That's his point. It's been a pattern from the beginning that there will be opposition to Christ and to his people because of the persistent sinfulness of the human heart. And even the church of Jesus Christ won't be immune from that.

[27 : 08] There will be continuing pain for us and in the church of Jesus, right to the end. And the Holy Spirit is telling us we have to expect it.

We have to prepare for it. We have to be able to deal with it, just as the first disciples had to. But we must never be floored by it. That's his point. Because greater by far, even than the persistent sin of man, is the persistence of God's salvation.

God is marching on. He's unhindered. Greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world, our enemy, the devil, who loves to sow sin, who loves to see scandal in the church.

But our God and his salvation is greater. My friends, I can't tell you how important a message this is for us. Very practical one, too, for our life together as a church.

Let me just press home two implications of this. First, we need realism in our Christian lives and in our church lives together. There's no room for naivety in the Christian church.

[28 : 16] The Bible is supremely real and it's because it's so real that it's so comforting for us. Peter says it had to be precisely because of the persistence of human sin because that's real and therefore we are to expect to have to deal with pain in the life of the church.

Sometimes very personal pain, alas, sometimes even very public pain. There will be those who fall away.

There will be those who even apostatize so terribly as to join Judas, as verse 25 says, going to his own place.

And that can only surely mean a place of eternal loss. And sometimes it will even be like Judas, those who have perhaps preached marvelous sermons about Jesus, who have done marvelous things in Jesus' name, who have been leading lights in the evangelical establishment, who turn aside like him.

And alas, I can think of some just like that. Perhaps you can too. But we're not to be rocked by that.

[29 : 29] We're not to be unnerved by that or have our faith destroyed. The scriptures predict this very thing. It had to be. And it will be. Jesus' own words predict that very thing, don't they, in the parable of the sword.

Jesus told that parable of the sword to his disciples precisely so that they wouldn't despair in their ministries when they experience that pain. And in particular, the pain not so much of those who reject the gospel at the beginning and never believe, but the terrible pain of those who hear the gospel, who receive it with joy, who join in the mission, who are great supporters of mission, who are serving in the church and witnessing and praying and leading in Christianity Explored and mentoring others.

But then, in a time of testing, well, fall away. Or perhaps the cares of life or family or career and success, they just expand to fill all their horizons.

And the zeal for the Lord that once was there leeches away and they just become cold and fossilized. Their spiritual life drains away.

It does happen, doesn't it, alas? And you see, the church has to come to terms with that very real thing. It has to do it right at its inception here in Acts chapter 1.

[30 : 52] But because they understood the scriptures, and because they listened to Jesus and weren't naive, they weren't rocked, they weren't shaken, they weren't put off their stride and their calling.

And nor must we be. Nor must we be if things like that do happen among us. And, friends, they will happen among us if we are staying true to being a true gospel church.

Because there will always be opposition to real gospel mission. Even from within the professing church, some, alas, will go like Judas to their own place.

It's a tragedy. But others will simply just drift away from the challenge of a community that's determined to commit itself to the way of the cross.

To a life of real sacrificial service. Read John chapter 6 later on. After Jesus expounds the way of discipleship as being a way, he says, of sharing in his death, verse 66 of that chapter says, after this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

[32 : 13] It had to be. And alas, it always will be. But we're not to despair when we have disappointments like that. I know some of you have been discouraged because some have left us because of our building project and our vision for the ministry there in Buchanan Street.

That's been very painful for some of you. I know it has. For all of us. But you see, it's the pattern of the Christ. Wherever Christ's people are responding to his call, especially when that's a call to great and greater personal sacrifice together, then there will always be those who turn back and no longer walk his way.

And don't be shocked either. Don't be rocked when we see public scandal in the church, even in the evangelical church. Some people will be greatly shaken. Their faith is left shattered when somebody they've trusted or they've known or they've learned from.

Somebody like that departs from the truth through some awful scandal, some sexual scandal perhaps. And that's totally understandable. But understand the scriptures.

Understand Jesus' voice. These things have to be because of the painful reality of our persistent sin. And even in the church of Jesus, that's going to be the case right till the end when Jesus comes.

[33 : 42] It was right from the start and so it will be to the end. So we need realism. Not naivety, not fantasy in the church of Jesus Christ.

But second, along with that realism, and don't forget this, we have reassurance. Great reassurance. Powerful reassurance. It's true that we cannot trust, we can't put our hope in human beings.

Not even Christian leaders. Not even apostles. But we can stake everything, everything on the apostles' true gospel. About the wonderful, extraordinary, persistent salvation of God.

Accomplished in Jesus' earthly ministry and continuing with certainty in his ministry from heaven. He is in control. And Acts 1 is testimony to that.

The church's pain is real. But the church's power is no less real, even for that. And the Saviour's presence is real and it's wonderful. He's still in the midst. He's still in control.

[34 : 45] He's dictating the pace. And despite our persistence in Jesus, who in his earthly ministry surrounded himself with sinners, he's still happy to do the same with us.

And his mission goes on unhindered. He, through his word in scripture, reassured his church that nothing was outside his control. Not even heinous sin.

And he, through his living presence, directed them and helped them to deal with all the aftermath of Judas' betrayal and all the pain that it involved. And he himself provided men to stand in the breach.

He set them apart and anointed them to take up the service and to assure that his church had the solid foundation he promised from all eternity. Isn't that a wonderful reassurance for us?

I will build my church, said Jesus. And the gates of hell themselves will not prevail. See, we can trust Jesus to build his church.

[35 : 49] He'll never fail us. He'll never disappoint us. He'll never abandon us. He'll never turn and walk that way with us no more. Of course, none of us are apostles.

This is a unique period in the life of the church and so on. But surely the point is this. Jesus knows the needs of his church. The church that he loves and that he gave himself for.

And he won't abandon her. He won't let her suffer loss. He's alive. He's present. And he's persistent in his plan of salvation. If he helped the church then deal with pain and disappointments.

If he enabled them to pick themselves up. To take courage. To go on fearfully. Fearlessly and faithfully. If he did that then. Do you think he won't do that today?

When we may have to deal with pain and sadness and sorrow in our church life. Personal pain perhaps. Disappointments. Even public pain and embarrassments and derision.

[36 : 57] Or when we face discouragements because we lose people who once served gladly among us. Sometimes for very good reasons because God's called them to go and serve elsewhere. But sometimes too for reasons that we do grieve over.

Well, the Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. He hasn't changed. Jesus himself said, behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

He's with us. He'll oversee all of our needs. He'll oversee and provide for us. And help us through every single pain and sadness.

He'll help us overcome the painful reality of ongoing human sin in our own life and in our church life. And he'll use a church today, warts and all, just as he used the church then, with all its sin, to turn the world upside down.

So friends, let's be realists about what it means to share in Jesus' kingdom mission. Jesus' earthly ministry, what he began to do until he ascended, involved walking the way of the cross, the way of pain.

[38 : 15] He was scorned. He was betrayed. He was betrayed, even by his dearest and closest friends. And so it will be for any church that's involved in his continuing ministry from heaven.

Because, well, because of the persistence of human sin. It must be. And we must expect it. But let's be reassured, too.

Let's be wonderfully reassured at the overwhelming message of this chapter. That God's salvation is even more persistent. Abundantly persistent.

And nothing but nothing can hinder or will hinder his ongoing work in his church. That must be. And there must be and there will be witness to Jesus Christ through his church right till the very end.

Even through churches like us. And people like us. Who are, alas, persistent sinners. Aren't you glad, though, that we've got a savior like that?

[39 : 26] I certainly am. Let's pray. Mercy in our time of failure. Grace to help in our time of need.

This sure promise of our savior is a word that we may plead. Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ. That though our sin is painfully persistent in our lives and in our corporate life.

Yet your grace is even more so. And so we turn to you. And we ask that you would lift us and lead us.

That like your church from the beginning. Even such as we. May through your gospel. Turn this world upside down. For Jesus' sake.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.