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## Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

### **R<sub>2</sub>L – Resolved to Live: Living Life Without Regrets (Part 4a)**

*Living to do the work of God (Acts 20:25-38)*

*Acts 20:25-31 - Shepherding*

25 “And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. 26 Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. 28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

Four of the most painful words we might ever utter in our lives are, “*If only I had...*” Some of you can already fill in the blank; “If only I had taken that one job opportunity, I would not be stuck in this dead end job.” “If only I had never started with those drugs, I would not be dealing with the consequences all these years later. “If only I had listened to the advice of my parents, or of a friend when they warned me of the outcome, then I would not be suffering now.” Or how about; “If only I had spent more time with my children, then maybe their lives would have turned out differently.” “If only I had never gotten my heart addicted to what I see on the internet, I would not be so ashamed.” If only had taken my children to church rather than just sending them by themselves.” If only I had spent more family time teaching God’s Word, but now they are older and not interested in God at all.” “If only I had put a stop to that foolish habit earlier, then my health would not be suffering now.” And let me give you one more “if only I had,” indeed the very worst of them, “If only I had received Jesus Christ as my Savior when my family, for friends or pastor called me to, then I would not be suffering the eternal torments of hell!”

For the past several weeks we have been looking at the events the led up to as well as the actual farewell speech of Paul given to the Elders and church leaders of Ephesus. Our message has been entitled, Resolved to Live, Living a Life Without Regret.” The goal of these messages is to give you the biblical hope and assurance that it is possible to live a life free of regrets; not on the basis of our own abilities; not on the basis of ignoring our past, but by resolving to live in this present moment and every subsequent moment by the grace of God. This is how Paul lived.

Here in in our text we have Paul’s departing words to his beloved church of Ephesus. The date of this event would be around the Spring of 57 A.D. Paul was on his way to deliver a benevolent offering to the famine-suffering saints in Jerusalem. His goal was to arrive by Pentecost in the late Spring. Being so pressed for time, Paul had to forge a direct visit to the city of Ephesus, but wanted to encourage and challenge this strategic church once again and therefore he called the elders to meet him in the seaport city of Miletus, some sixty miles south of Ephesus.

As you read through Paul’s goodbye address here in Acts 20, there is one thing that strikes me about what he said, or really what he did not say. Do you realize that even with the sorted and violent past of Paul toward Jesus and the Church, that Paul never uses, in any form whatsoever, the phrase, “If only I had...” In other words, there is not even a trace of regret for how his life has played out. Why, because Paul learned that his life was being currently lived out by the grace of God; that God had guided and directed the course of his life by grace and that even

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though Paul had intended much harm by his past actions, by the grace of God, God used them for good.

But the question is, can this be true for us as well? Is it possible to live a life without regret? The answer has been yes, if we will follow the example of Paul, an example that is revealed to us by noting three resolves of Paul as seen in Acts 20:13-38. We have already examined the first two, and started the third, but let me quickly mention them before we move on. First, we need to...

## I. Live with a resolve to live in the will of God (20:13-16).

In verses 20:13-16 we find Paul not living according to his own agenda, but rather resolved to live in or for the agenda of God. This reminds us that people who live life for their own agenda will end up having regrets. It is as simple as that. Paul, understanding this, he made little and not so little sacrifices; like choosing to walk rather than ride the ship to Assos (20:13); like taking the risk of going to Jerusalem even though he knew it could be dangerous. Paul was resolved, committed, determined to live in and for will of God, which was simply to make Jesus known. Once this was settled in his mind, he did this and left whatever the consequences might be to God. Beloved, if you choose to live in obedience to God’s will you will never have to look back and say, “If only I had...” Is resolving to live in the will of God settled in your heart and mind? Have you resolved, “*I will live with resolve to know and live in the will of God?*” Second, we need to...

## II. Live with a resolve to live by the Word of God (20:17-24).

It was Paul’s resolve to live by the God’s Word that took Paul to Ephesus in the first place. It was his resolve to make the Word of God known that had Paul teaching in the synagogue of Ephesus for three months (19:8). And when the Jews rejected his teachings of the Word of God; Paul simply moved to the lecture hall of Tyrannus where he continued to teach the Word of God daily for two years (19:10). How great was Paul’s resolve to make the Word of God known? Great enough that after two years of this teaching ministry, Luke recorded in Acts 19:10, “**so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.**” So then, when Paul said things like what we read in Acts 20:20, “**how [he] did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house...**”; such was not an exaggeration.

But this brings us to the third resolve of Paul that enabled him, and will enable any believe to live life without regret. We need to...

## III. Live with a resolve to do the work of God (25-38).

As we come to these verses, we are reminded that the Christian’s purpose in life is for something greater than living for the next paycheck, the next technological gadget, the next life event. Some of you are simply living to get through school; to graduate High School, College, Tech School, or Grad School. Some are living for the next toy, the iPhone 3000s or the Samsung Smart TV that makes coffee and presses your laundry. Some are living for the next promotion at job. Some are living for a wedding; or for having children. Some are living for retirement. And some are even living with the anticipation of their own death. These things may be fine and good, in and of themselves, but they are not the believer’s purpose.

The Christian’s purpose, the things you do today, tomorrow, next week and in the years to come can and are to matter for eternity. Are the things you do today; are the things you will spend time thinking about and conversing; will they last? Are they moving you toward God; a

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better understanding of God for a better worship and proclamation of God and His salvation? As believers, we have work to do, God’s work. What is God’s work? It is not being in “full-time Christian service” as though someone like a pastor is to do the work of God all the time but the rest of the Christians are just part-time workers. The work of God is simply summarized in the statement of Jesus, where He said in John 17:3-4 where Jesus said,

**3 This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. 4 I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.**

How is this work of telling people who God is and why Jesus has come to the earth as the Lamb of God who would take away our sins also our work? Does anyone remember Acts 1:8 and the mission of the church? We are to be Christ’s witnesses, declaring His teachings about God, man, sin and salvation to the remotest parts of the earth. This is the work of every Christian. This is God’s work, a work that will take on a variety of forms in the lives of God’s people. And this is to be our resolve. Paul had a resolve and passion for this work of God. What is involved in a resolve for the work of God? If we would resolve to do the work of God; to be involved with more than just living and dying, more than trying to just make it from day to day and month to month; but rather to truly make a difference, a godly difference during our time of stay here on the earth; then there are three expectations that you and I MUST expect, look for, and be engaged in. They are inferred by Paul in our text. Let me outline them for you. If we would resolve to do the work of God, we must...

- Have the right pastoral expectations (25-31);
- Have the right personal expectations (32-35); and
- Have the right public expectations (36-38).

Now, I would hate to disappoint anyone by having you think I might actually try to cover these three points in one message; so we will break these down looking this morning at having right pastoral expectations and then pick up the final two expectations next week. So, let us get after this first point. If we would resolve to do the work of God, we must...

### **A. Have the right pastoral expectations (Acts 20:25-31)**

Acts 20:25-31 is not only a vital passage for any man who is interested pastoral ministry, but also equally vital for anyone who is intending to be an engaged and obedient Christian in the church. It is not only the pastors and elders who must know what is expected in pastoral ministry, but all believers are to know what is expected of their pastoral leaders.

In context, Paul is speaking to the elders, the pastors of the church in Ephesus. He uses an agricultural metaphor, one emphasized not only in the Old Testament but also used by Jesus Himself, to illustrate what it takes to be God’s kind of leader. Let us be clear; whatever are your expectations of a pastor, right or wrong; this before us is God’s expectation. In verse 28, God calls these elders, “to shepherd the church of God.” Pastors and elders are to be shepherds. If God’s work is to be accomplished in our lives, then both the pastor and the congregation must expect the elders to be shepherds. But what does this mean, “to shepherd” in practical terms? What should this look like? What is it that shepherds do; that you, as a believer in Christ and one who obediently attends church, ought to expect from these men? There are three such expectations found here in verses 25-31.

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### 1. Shepherding involves feeding (25-27).

**25 “And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. 26 Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.**

Both the shepherd as well as the flock, the people of the church, must expect a pastor to genuinely feed them. What is the diet the shepherd is to bring to the sheep of the church? Not grass or hay, but, as we note at the end of verse 27, he is to feed them from the whole purpose or council of God. Nothing less is to be expected.

The story is told of a candidate for church membership who was asked, “What part of the Bible do you like best?” He said: “I like the New Testament best. So he was asked, “What Book in the New Testament is your favorite?” He answered, the Book of the Parables, Sir.” They then asked him to relate one of the parables to the membership committee. He hesitated a bit; thinking through what he might say and then began:

*“Once upon a time a man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves; and the thorns grew up and choked the man. And he went on and met the Queen of Sheba, and she gave that man a thousand talents of silver, and a hundred changes of raiment. And he got in his chariot and drove furiously, and as he was driving along under a big tree, his hair got caught in a limb and left him hanging here! And he hung there many days and many nights. The ravens brought him food to eat and water to drink. And one night while he was hanging there asleep, his wife Delilah came along and cut off his hair, and he fell on stony ground. And it begin to rain, and rained forty days and forty nights. And he hid himself in a cave. Later he went on and met a man who said, “Come in and take supper with me.” But he said, “I can’t come in, for I have married a wife.” And the man went out into the highways and hedges and compelled him to come in! He then came to Jerusalem, and saw Queen Jezebel sitting high and lifted up in a window of the wall. When she saw him she laughed, and he said, “Throw her down out of there,” and they threw her down. And he said “Throw her down again,” and they threw her down seventy-times-seven. And the fragments which they picked up filled twelve baskets full! NOW, whose wife will she be in the day of the Judgment?”*

The membership committee was astonished; and after much discussion, they agreed that this man was indeed a knowledgeable candidate!

Obviously that is not a true story; or at least we hope it isn't. Yet, what is true is that there are a lot of people who have been sitting in churches for years who simply do not know their Bibles. Why? To begin with, many simply do not study the Bible on their own; but that is another issue. Another reason they do not know the Word of God is because they are not hearing rightly taught it in their churches.

When Paul went to a city he did the same thing over and over again. He did God's work by giving people God's Word. That is the key task of a shepherd; as Paul said in verse 24, **“to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.”** In verse 25, Paul uses a different phrase, saying that he came to Ephesus **“preaching the kingdom.”** By comparing verses 24 and 25 we discover that **“to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God”** is synonymous with **“preaching the kingdom.”** To tell people there is a King is to tell them the good news of God's unmerited favor. To tell them this King has come to earth to save them from the kingdom of darkness so they can serve Him forever is to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

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In verse 26 Paul said he was **“innocent of the blood of all men,”** picking up a phrase from the prophet Ezekiel. What Paul was saying was that he had no regrets. Why not? He gives the reason in verse 27, **“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.”** Meditate on this a moment; that this though marinate in your mind. What is the right pastoral expectation? Yes, shepherding involves proclamation, but what kind of proclamation? Is the pastor to give the flock his opinions? No. He is to declare; to rehearse before others, **“the whole purpose [the whole counsel, the whole will] of God”** as contained in the Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation.

It is all so black and white. Shepherding involves feeding and the diet is to be the Word of God. But is this the diet the sheep are eating in the typical church today? Is this the diet the sheep are expecting in the typical church today? Sadly, the answer is *no*. There is a famine in the land. What did the Lord declare to Israel just before they fell into the hands of the Assyrians as a judgment for their disobedience to God’s Word? In Hosea 4:6, the Lord declares... **“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”** The priests had rejected the teachings of the Word and so then had the people. As the pulpit goes, so goes the church! When we have prominent and supposedly evangelical leaders like Pat Robertson declare nationally that the belief in a literal understanding of Genesis 1-2 is a “joke”; in essence declaring that to interpret Genesis 1-2 with the same rules of interpretation as we would the resurrection of Jesus is a joke, not only calls into question then the validity and foundation of the book of Genesis, which describes for us the beginnings or origins of all things; but then, by inference, calls into question the very resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Something I believe Pat Robertson would never intend to do; but nonetheless, he is doing it. **“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”** The need is great for solid, thorough, and comprehensive Bible teaching in our days. And I will not have my children; and if I can help it; I would not have your children hijacked by the godless, irrational, and illogical premises propagated in our schools, in our government, and now even in our churches that we do not need to believe God, or in God, or in God’s Word to make sense of our existence. As the Lord cried out,

***Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, Thus says the Lord God, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? (Ezekiel 34:2)***

The shepherd’s first and foremost responsibility is to *feed* the sheep from the Word of God. The diet is to be the *whole* will, the entire council of God. This is to be your expectation; to be fed the Word of God. If you are not being fed the Word of God wherever you attend church, then leave before you are spiritually staved. As Steve Lawson has aptly stated; the true nature of preaching is “the man of God opening the Word of God and expounding its truths so that the voice of God may be heard, the glory of God seen, and the will of God obeyed. Shepherding involves feeding from the Word of God.

2. *Shepherding involves leading (28).*

***Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.***

It all begins with feeding, but notice what comes after the feeding; the leading. The order is important. The feeding from the Word of God builds the credibility and gives validity for the leading. There is something else to note here before we expound on the verse. Let me ask you, *who* are pastors to shepherd? You say, “Well, that’s obvious. The flock; the sheep!” Yes, but note

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again Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesian elders. How does it begin? He said, **“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock...”** Let me remind you that shepherds are also sheep. Thus, the shepherds need accountability as well.

A church janitor was once heard to say, “The blower still works, but the fire has gone out.” He was discussing a problem with the furnace, but the parishioner who overheard him thought he was speaking about the pastor.

And yet, sadly the fire has gone out for many shepherds. Some of you might remember one year at the Tournament of Roses parade when one of the floats suddenly sputtered and stopped. What happened? It ran out of gas. The whole parade was held up until someone could get a can of gas. The irony was that this float was sponsored by the Standard Oil Company. With all of its vast oil resources, its float ran out of gas. If a leader neglects his own spiritual maintenance, if he and his congregation fail to keep him accountable and growing in the word, then both he and his congregation is headed for trouble. They may soon discover that he has run out of gas.

There is something else I would have you notice in verse 28; and that is Paul’s expectation of a plurality of elders and church leaders. He said, **“Be on guard for yourselves...”** If a pastor or elder functions like a maverick or lone ranger, he may run a great enterprise; but he will not be shepherding a church. Paul calls the Ephesian elders to look out for one another as they together led the church in Ephesus. You are to expect that your shepherds are holding one another accountable in their spiritual lives. You are to expect that you ought to benefit from this accountability. The well-known fourth century pastor John Chrysostom said, “The minister’s shortcoming simply cannot be concealed. Even the most trivial soon get known...However trifling their offenses, these little things seem great to others, since everyone measures sin, not by the size of the offense, but by the standing of the sinner.”

Before shepherds can lead others (and by the way, this principle applies to pastors and anyone who does pastoral type ministries, so teaching a ladies class, or a men’s group discussion, or being an Awana leaders, or serving as a deacon) all such persons must take heed to (watch over; examine) themselves. The expectation is that they are to be part of a part of a team where there is accountability and evaluation. In other words, I cannot keep watch over others until I am keeping watch over *me*. And I cannot keep watch over others if other are not also keeping watch over me. To say it in today’s vernacular; we are to have one another’s backs. Leadership starts *here*.

So, having established this accountability, it is with this that a leader must lead. Paul said, **“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers...”** The term “overseer” is from the Greek *episkopos* which comes from *skopos* (“to look”) and *epi* (“over”). An *episkopos*, then, is “one who looks over” or “one who keeps watch over” someone else. Shepherding involves feeding and *leading*. God has given to His church certain men who are to lead, to guide; to direct. It is true that the Bible teaches the priesthood of all believers. This means that every believer comes equally to God directly through Christ. But the Bible also teaches that the church needs leaders, men who will watch over our souls, according to Hebrews 13:17; and who will teach us God’s way and rebuke us when we wander, according to Titus 2:15.

The church needs leaders. You and I are to be part of a local church where we are in submission to God-ordained leaders. Some balk at this citing the concern, “But what if a shepherd becomes a dictator? That can happen, you know.” Yes, it happens; but that is why Paul gives these leaders of Ephesus some cautionary truths to remember here in verse 28. These are

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pastoral expectations you and I are to have for our leaders. If you are a leader or if you are being lead, then remember these three truths:

- First, remember who made your church leaders overseers. **“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers”** Who places pastors in leadership positions? Someone might be tempted to say, “The local church does when it calls a man as pastor.” While that is true, it is not the ultimate reason. The word of God here says that it is *the Holy Spirit* who places shepherds over congregations. A pastor, as well as the congregation, needs to remember this. This will help keep him from running when times get tough.
- Next, remember whose church it really is. Paul said, **“...shepherd the church of God...”** Sometimes we might hear a pastor say, “At *my* church we do this.” Now, there is a sense in which this is my church and our church, but sometimes we need to be reminded that this isn’t my church; it isn’t the Elder’s church; it isn’t even your church. It is God’s church. It belongs to Him; you and I belong to Him; our worship belongs to Him; the songs we sing belong to Him; the word that is preached belongs to Him. We must remember this.
- Finally, remember why the church exists. Paul said, **“...shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”** Ultimately, why are we here today? Because my parent made me? Because my pastor expects me? But ultimately we are here because two thousand years ago the Great Shepherd stepped into human history and laid down His life to purchase us out of the market place of sin. He bought us at the price of His own blood. This is why the church exists, because it was purchased by Jesus. And if you want to become a part of the church you must enter through the blood of Jesus.

I hope you love the church as God does. Do you know it is a demonstration of our love to God; to so love the church? How do we know God loves the church? Notice that the Father put His name on it; it is **‘the church of God.’** See that the Son shed His own blood for it. And recall that the Holy Spirit calls and equips His people to minister to the church.

So, we are to have the pastoral expectation that shepherds will feed and lead; but there is one final consideration...

### 3. *Shepherding involves heeding (29-31).*

As important as feeding and leading are, by themselves, it is not enough. There must also be *heeding*. Heeding means to give careful, protective attention to something. What’s involved in heeding? It’s what Paul did in verses 29-31:

**29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.**

In addition to feeding and leading the sheep, a good shepherd must also give attention to *heeding* the sheep; to be carefully protecting them from ever-present dangers. Notice that Paul predicts a twofold hazard. First, in verse 29, he warns of wolves that would come from the *outside [hand motions]*. Who are these wolves? Jesus called them false prophets in Matthew 7:15-17,

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**15 Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.**

Our expectation of a good pastor is not just one who teaches the Word, but who also warns the flock to beware of bad food. Theistic evolution; the idea that God used the godless process of evolution to bring about the creation is bad food from the outside. Organizations like “COEXIST” that promote both religious and behavioral tolerance and acceptance without question or proselytizing is bad food. We find Peter given such warnings in 2 Peter 2:1 when he wrote, **“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.”**

But I had said that the hazard is twofold. In verse 29 Paul warned about wolves on the *outside* of the church. Notice in verse 30 that he warns of those from the *inside*, **“among your own selves...”** who would distort the truth for personal gain. How powerful is this? Even as Paul looked into the eyes of these church leaders that day at Miletus, he warned that even some of them would turn from the truth. How could Paul have known this? Did God tell him directly? I don't think so. I think Paul simply knew that wherever the truth is proclaimed Satan will counter it with lies, lies sometimes so convincing, that even some church leaders will fall. But this is why God expects the shepherd to be engaged in a *heeding – a warning* ministry. It may not seem very encouraging or positive that the church is to expect her pastor and elders to warn their people to beware of well-sounding, but godless or truth-twisting teachings; but if it keep the purity and thus the focus of the church on the truth of Christ, then it is extraordinarily encouraging.

Paul's language is predictive here and it did and still does come to pass. False teachers did begin to spread their gangrenous ideas in Ephesus within a very short period of time. Because of this, Paul would send Timothy back to Ephesus to correct and warn again; and later he wrote the letter of 1 Timothy, just some five years after this warning at Miletus. Listen to what he wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:3 –

**As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines,**

And in 1 Timothy 1:18-20 he said,

**18 This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, 19 keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. 20 Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.**

It didn't get any better either. Just three or four years after sending 1 Timothy Paul penned 2 Timothy and had this to say in 2 Timothy 1:15 –

**You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.**



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And in 2 Timothy 2:16-17 he wrote:

**“Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus.”**

How bad did it get in Ephesus? Some 40 years after Paul gave this warning of Acts 20:28-31 to the elders, consider what the Lord Himself had this to say about the church in Ephesus around 97 AD through the Apostle John. In Revelation 2:4 Jesus said, **“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”**

To recap, shepherding involves feeding, leading, and heeding. We need all three, and those who are resolved to do God’s work will be passionate about feeding, leading, and heeding. You will look for it and expect it from your elders. You will pray for it and encourage it in your elders. You will teach others to have such godly expectations so that the work of God; the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the only Savior from sin; who must be called upon for salvation; may continue. This is a work for which no one will have regrets on the final day when we stand before our Creator and Savior.

All of this begins with a commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you truly come to know Him? Have you trusted that 2,000 years ago He came to this earth to die in your place on the cross you deserved so that by His death you might have the hope of eternal life? Have you trusted that He rose again from the dead, proving that your hope in eternal life is valid; that just as He rose from the dead; so too, will those who have trusted in Him, one day be raised to newness of life? I pray that each one here would call upon Jesus to save him and to trust Jesus to open your heart to His truth.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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