

Labor of Love
Tom Rempel – Faith Bible Church
Series: Faith On Mission
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Acts 13:44–13:52

I'd like you to take your Bible this morning, and I want you to find the book of **Acts**, if you would, find the thirteenth chapter. As we introduced last week, many of you were here and some were finishing up summer vacations on a holiday weekend, but through the fall, we're going to step back and take a look at what the Scripture says about God's expectation for His church. In our twenty-second year it seems appropriate to ask the question as we asked last week, "If Faith Bible Church succeeds at everything it does, what would happen if, however, we discovered that we were doing the wrong things?"

I've had the privilege, as I said last week, of living through one church renewal movement about forty years ago, and was enormously impacted by guys like Ray Steadman and Larry Richards and Gene Getz who challenged us to put the books back on the shelf and to pull out our Bibles and examine the Scriptures and say, "What does Jesus want His church to be?" So through the fall we're going to take that journey. I'll just give you a heads-up this morning, this is not a masterpiece of homiletical construction. It just kind of wanders here and there. I call it one of my Southern Baptist sermons. We're going to start in a text and then when our boat launches from that dock we hope by the end, we pull the boat back into the dock we departed from and we get back to the text. But I just want to kind of lay out some understanding of how we believe God would have us do evangelism as a church here at Faith Bible Church.

So I want to begin by reading ...

Acts 13:42-52

⁴² As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. ⁴³ And after the meeting of the

synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism found Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

44 The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered together to hear the word of the Lord. 45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. 46 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

47 For so the Lord has commanded us, saying,

“I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. 51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

On Friday morning on Linda’s and my “two-point-five” we were just about halfway through, just approaching South Street when Linda said, “You know, it’s not going to be very long and a younger generation is going to be responsible for leading the church. It might be a good idea if you guys prepared them for that.” So with that kick up the side of the head, that’s part of what we’re trying to do this fall, to take a look at the Scriptures and say, “What does God want his church to be, not just now, not just next year, but over the next five, ten and twenty years? What does God want?” The elders have been working since early this year on a strategic plan, trying to hear the voice of the Spirit of God, and say, “What does He want us to do?”

I don't anticipate that this series is my retirement series. I don't think so. I certainly can see the finish line a lot clearer now than I could forty years ago, but I don't think it's there, yet. But I do know that Faith Bible Church was, as I've often said, I've been involved with a lot of church planting and church-plant coaching, but I always felt it was my one opportunity in a lifetime to get it Biblically right. Now we haven't always got it exactly that way, but that's my passion. That's what I would want.

So we summarize what we think that our mission and vision is in this simple statement. Over the next three or four months, I trust that you will have heard it so often that you'll be able to repeated yourself.

4:55

That we are "reaching as many as are called to eternal life and bringing everyone to maturity in Christ Jesus and equipping all to serve and many to lead and doing all of that to the glory of God."

So I hope that over the next few months when you're having a cup of coffee with somebody at Starbucks and they say, "Why do you go to Faith Bible Church? What's that church all about?" that you'll be able to say, "They are committed to reaching as many as are called to eternal life, and having reached them, they are committed to bringing them to full maturity in Christ Jesus. And they equip their members to serve and many of them to lead, but above everything else, they do it for the glory of God alone." That's what we want them to believe.

This morning we're going to pause, we're going to take a look at the first one, that is "reaching as many as are called." When you teach, preach, meditate on evangelism, you are you are throwing down a line in the sand with the Adversary. You understand that. There is a spiritual war that's taking place. A really dark cloud moves in. I told Linda that this morning when I was leaving the house. It's just like that because of the subject that we've chosen, that God's led us to study, it's just like this cloud, and right before the first service, she said, "I think it's good that you preach under

the cloud because what we're talking about is life and death ... it's life and death. It's eternal issues.

You see, the Scriptures are very clear that there is a forever heaven and there is a forever hell. And between the two of those there is a great chasm fixed. If you've been one of the gracious members who have come to support our brothers and sisters at memorial service times, then you have heard us go to **Luke 16** and talk about that. The rich man who wakes up in Hades, and he looks across and he says to Father Abraham, "I am in torment in this place. Would you send Lazarus over to dip his finger in water and cool the end of my tongue?"

And the answer of Abraham is, "You can see that between us there is a great chasm fixed. We cannot come over to you, and you cannot come over to us." And then for the first time the rich man thinks of somebody other than himself, and he says, "Then Father Abraham, would you send someone to my father's house? I have five brothers. I don't want them to come this place."

There is a forever heaven and there is a forever hell and there is a chasm fixed between. And there is a bridge across, but the bridge across is on this side of the grave and not that. The bridge across is the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A couple of years ago I had preached that at a memorial service, and then, as we were going to the cemetery, the mortician invited me to ride in the coach with him. And we had no sooner got out on 84th Street, and he said, "Boy, Tom, what I just heard you say just kind of blew my theory of purgatory out of the water. You made it sound like there's only two places, heaven and hell and nothing in between."

And I said, "Yeah, that's what the Bible says."

And he says, "WOW! I'm in my seventies, and that's something I've got to think about." He said, "Are you sure?" So we talked all the way till we got to Fairview Cemetery, and as we were turning the corner, he says, "You know, we need to talk about this some

more. You've really unsettled me." And then after we did the committal, he came over to me and he said, "Joe's going to drive you back to the church." In two years, I've done other services with that group. He still works there, but he hasn't chosen to be part of that. There is no place where you can pay or pray people out. There's a forever heaven and there's a forever hell. What we're talking about is life and death. It's serious stuff.

Reaching as many as are called to eternal life.

Now this text. The setting in Antioch, Syria is about five hundred miles roughly from Jerusalem. You read about it in **Acts 13** at the beginning. So the church has sent out missionaries, Paul and Barnabas, and they have gone out and they are preaching the Gospel here. And it's here that they began to extend the invitation to the Gentiles. But there is an unsettling set of words in the middle ...

Acts 13:48

... and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

... "as many as were appointed." There is in my understanding of the Scriptures an irresolvable tension, humanly irresolvable tension, between the doctrine of the sovereign elective grace of God and the doctrine of the human responsibility of man to respond to the invitation.

9:57

As you read the Scriptures, I'm convinced that you must allow those to remain in human tension, understanding that they are not contradictions in the mind of God. But this idea that God chooses those that He saves, and He calls them to Himself is very unsettling. Linda and I both grew up in a theological world where that wasn't the case. My father was a very gifted evangelist, but my father believed that salvation was man's decision, "The Hour of Decision," the Billy Graham phrase, and that if you just preach it rightly and passionately and clearly, that moment the Spirit of God would stir hearts, and people would believe.

Linda's and my Bibles, from the early days of our marriage and our study of the Scriptures, are marked up with text in the flyleaf. Every time we would read one, we'd go, "AH, there's another one." "Every perfect gift comes down from above." That's this whole tension of "Is it of God or is it of man?" was always before us.

The truth of the text is simply this: "In salvation man does not choose God, but God chooses man." When we talk about reaching as many as are called to eternal life, we recognize that there are many that God has chosen, that he is drawing to Himself, that the problem is, is they don't wear kind of like up a black light stamped on their forehead where you can take your iPhone and kind shine this special light on it, and you go, "AH, there's one of the elect, I'm going to go to share Jesus with them."

He says in **Romans 10**, he says that "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." But he says, "How are they going to hear if no one is sent?" and "How are they going to hear if nobody tells them?" And then he goes on to say, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the Good News?"

So when we're talking about Faith Bible Church reaching as many as are called to eternal life, we're talking about the tension between God's choosing and drawing work and man's responsibility to respond to the invitation of God.

Now when we go out to share the Gospel, we have to be clear on what the message, and again this is just kind of shot-gunning, this whole thing falls under three categories: our MESSAGE, our METHOD, and the MESSENGER. Somewhere, by the time were done, hopefully you can connect all three of those dots together.

Our **message** is the Gospel. As we said last week, too many people today, especially on media, preachers, have made the Gospel good advice. You extract some things from the Bible. You can have a great marriage. You can have great children. You can have financial success. You can have healing over your diseases. You can live forever, and all that. They have made the Gospel good

advice. It's NOT. Does this book talk about those things? It certainly does, but that's not the Good News.

The Good News has basically four components to it, and all through, the fall you'll see these, and hopefully they get more clear. But this morning it's just kind of like scattering seed broadly. Are you ready for that?

The first component is God. When you are sharing the Gospel with someone that does not yet know Jesus, you must start with the character of God. He is holy. He is unstained righteousness. He is separate. He is perfection. He created man for a relationship with him for fellowship, but because He is holy, He is totally separated from stains of sin. He is, as it were, transcendent.

Add to that, then, the Bible teaches us about **the character of man.** Man is fallen. He is a rebel. He is living in rebellion to a holy God. And he is hopeless and helpless to do anything about his condition, that he is depraved to the core of his being, that there is no way, though, inside him, he is the creation of God, and he was created, as God says, to put eternity in the heart of every man. He was created for this relationship with God, but the reality is that though he longs for it, he cannot have it. He wants that intimacy. That's why all through the Bible when it talks about the promise of God, it talks about "And they will see the face of God," suddenly that relationship is restored.

So the third component is the **work of the person of Jesus Christ,** that in our hopeless and helpless situation, God the holy God, in Grace sent One who could pay a debt we had accumulated that we could not pay. As we said last week, every course we took, we got an F. And He took every one of the same courses and got an A+. And in His grace He was willing to exchange report cards with us. And all of a sudden, though I failed every one of the courses, I walked away with an A+ record because of His grace.

15:00

You have to talk to them about Jesus' coming to be our Savior, our Redeemer. His death on the cross, His burial in the grave, His resurrection to life again.

But then the fourth component is **believing**. Now belief is so critical that John uses the word ninety-eight times in twenty-one chapters. Belief, it involves first of all **repentance**. Repentance is simply turning. It's from this to that. It is a change of mind and direction. Repentance is when you come to someone and you share the Good News of Jesus with them, you are challenging them to release their grip on all of the gods that all of their life have given them significance and security and hope and confidence and stability. And you're asking them to let go of all of that package of gods in order to embrace the True and the Living God. That's what repentance is.

It begins by this willing to turn from and to turn to. So many, when they're sharing the Good News, because they think that maybe if I tell them what they really are, they're depraved sinners and rebellious against God, and they thought they were a really nice guy. After all they were the god in their life that I'm afraid to tell them that, that they'll be offended. So we let them continue to keep one arm wrapped around their gods and another arm wrapped around the Savior.

But repentance begins with releasing your grip. Read about it in **1 Thessalonians 1**. Releasing your grip on this and embracing fully the person of Christ. It means **trusting**. It means leaning totally and completely upon, that I have no other argument, that I have no other presentation, that I have no other thing to say to God. On the basis of this You must receive Me into your holy presence. I trust only on what Christ has done.

And then it also goes to **leaning**. There needs to be this on-going trusting, the leaning on Him. That's why when you read the New Testament, the Old Testament brought to application in the New, there are continual warnings about turning back again. You continue in the faith that you have professed and proclaimed. So

there is the **repentance**, and there is the **trusting**, and there is the **leaning**. That's the heart of the Gospel.

When we come, then, to this tension between a sovereign saving work of God and the responsibility of man to accept or reject His offer, which is what you see in **Acts Chapter 13**, we see first of all **God as King**. As King God declares all that will be. And therefore, on His authority He determines who it is that He will draw to himself. But on the other hand, we see **God as the Judge**, and God as the Judge has the authority to hold every man, woman, and child responsible for the decisions that they make in the directions that their life takes.

So when you're dealing with reaching as many as are called to eternal life, we do that by recognizing that God in His grace, I mean, it's not discouraging, it's encouraging. Early on you hear that and you're thinking, "Well, why share Jesus with anybody? If they've been chosen by God, whether I do anything or not, they're going to be saved. God is very creative. You may have recognized that when He spoke the heavens and the earth into existence in six days. He's very creative. He could have come up with all kinds of strategies for this, but He didn't. He chose to bring the message, incarnationally, to man, and entrust the salvation of the lost of the world to fallible human beings. He gives us that.

But the exciting thing is in **Acts Chapter 18**, things are getting really kind of testy in Corinth, and so Paul is thinking about moving on, and God says, "No, I want you to stay longer in the city because I have many souls here. I have many people here." So as you're sharing the Good News, even though you can't take your iPhone and shine some kind of a black light and see if they have the stamp or not, the reality is that in your sphere of influence, God in His grace has prepared many hearts to receive.

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. How are they going to hear if nobody sends them? How are they going to hear if nobody goes and speaks? So we have to recognize that God in His grace is providing.

Now one of the problems is the world I grew up in. I had a distorted, a false view of what the state of man was. My view was that first one. I felt that everybody was basically neutral and that they kind of came into the world and at some point, as Billy Graham would say, they came to their “Hour of Decision.” And at some moment they heard the offer of salvation by faith alone in Christ Jesus alone, period. And they heard it, and they made a decision, they said, “Yes,” or they said, “No.”

19:58

And if they said, “No,” they immediately got on a buttered slide and slid straight to hell. But if they said, “Yes,” then suddenly they begin the journey to glory.

Several years ago I was having Bob Whitson, whom some you remember, and he was teaching the theology class for me, and Bob put this diagram on a chalkboard, and it suddenly made sense. We are not all born neutral. We are depraved to the core of our being. We are all born hell-bound. We are all sentenced. For some unexplainable reason, once in a while, God rescues someone on this road to hell, and He calls them to Himself.

Everyone around you, the thing about reaching as many as are called, is you’ve got to learn to start seeing your family and your friends, your children and your grandparents, your spouses, perhaps, your classmates, your work associates, the people at the health club, your running buddies, your biking buddies. You have to start seeing them as eternal souls ... that are someday going to spend a forever in either heaven or hell. And knowing that only God can rescue them, only God can save them, but if you do nothing, God’s plan is that the message, oh, He can come up with a host of ways. He chose not to.

Notice how many times he, right in the middle of this evangelism thing in a Gentile world, he says,

Acts 13:44

... the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

Notice ...

Acts 13:46

... Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you.

Notice ...

Acts 13:48

and they began rejoicing
glorifying the word of the Lord.

Acts 13:49

And the word of the Lord was spreading
throughout the whole region.

You say, “When I go to share the Good News, what do I tell them?”

There is only one message that has the power to take someone from death to life, from darkness to light, and that’s the message of the word of God. It’s the Gospel. That’s why he said ...

Romans 1:16

I’m not ashamed of the Gospel, it’s the power
of God to salvation to everyone that believes.

... it’s the power.

I says in ...

Hebrews 4:12

... the word of God is living and active, sharper than ...
(... a surgeon’s scalpel.)

It’s able to divide, to separate.

So it’s the word of God that does the saving work. We’re just simply the messengers, the mouthpiece, for the word of God.

It’s a wonderful thing if you can tell them your story. It’s a wonderful thing if you can tell them someone else’s story, but the reality is the only thing that will call them out of death into life is

when the Spirit of God takes the word of God and He convicts their hearts, and they are saved.

Now when you talk about evangelism, it just scares of the beegeebies out of everybody. We start sweating, and we start thinking, “I’m glad I don’t have that gift, and I don’t have that responsibility.” One of the professors at Moody, one of the most sought-after professors at Moody, is a longtime friend who used to pastor and in York, Nebraska. I remember one time when he was standing in the pulpit for us at Indian Hills, and Dr. Van Landingham got up, and he says, “I was going to do door-to-door evangelism, and I had the same response all of you have, which is you go to the door. You ring the doorbell. You dive behind the shrub in the front yard and pray nobody’s home.

Evangelism is not that scary a thing. It is simply expressing what I have in Jesus and explaining to others how I came to possess it. So what I’ve found in Christ, the forgiveness of sins, the removal of my shame and my guilt, a restored relationship with the God Who created me.

So now we move to the **method**. In evangelism you’ll notice at Faith Bible Church that we don’t do attractional, big, evangelistic-crusade kind of activities. Once in a while we’ve had you bring your friends kind of event, and we always promise you that when your friends are brought here, we will do whatever God will allow us to do to verbalize or articulate the Gospel. But basically we believe in incarnational evangelism, which is simply that we gather together to encourage one another so that when we go out into the darkness, we shine there as light. So we challenge us **to be intentionally engaging lost peoples for the sake of the Gospel**. The point is this. You cannot tell them that they have a friend in Jesus until you show them that they have a friend in you.

Two weeks ago this week, the pastoral team went down to a conference in Kansas City, and part of buying the ticket for the conference was you could get discount tickets to the Kansas City Royals, and we all had to endure pastor James’s Tigers finally winning one.

25:02

And those of you who have been to Kauffman Stadium understand the traffic that's there as you're coming in, there's just cars everywhere trying to get into the parking stalls. And standing on the median are a bunch of supposed born-again Christians with signs that told us that if we didn't repent we were going to hell.

You see the problem with that is that it's a distortion of what the Gospel's all about. The fellow has become a friend of mine over time, but you remember going to the east side of Memorial Stadium, and there would be a man out there yelling at you about damnation, and you're going to hell and all of that if you didn't repent. One time I had a chance to see him in a coffee shop, and I said, "How many people do you think have come to Jesus because of that condemnation kind of thing?"

It says in ...

John 3:16

God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever would believe in Him wouldn't perish, he'd have everlasting life.

But ...

John 3:17

He didn't come into the world to condemn the world that He had created. He came in order that the world through Him might be saved.

We believe that what our mission, the way do it is, we go out and we befriend people for the sake of the Gospel. We show them the love that Christ has shown us, and we show it to them by the way we treat them. We just go and simply say. So many people have been introduced to Christ that is a mean Christ. It is a vicious and a harsh Jesus. And so they can't hear the message because they don't know if they trust the messenger. We encourage you to befriend. We'll keep going on that.

The second thing that we do are **acts of kindness and grace**. He says in **Luke 16** that the men, the leaders of this world, are smarter than the leaders of the kingdom of heaven in that they use

the mammon of unrighteous for own purposes. So he goes on to say in **Luke 16**. So use the mammon of unrighteousness to buy friends for eternity, and so the point is that we treat them not with harshness, judgmentalism, we treat them with kindness. There is a God Who is separate from you, but His love for you sent His Son in order that He might reconcile the two of you together.

I like the way Russell Moore put it. He said, “Scripture commands that we be gentle and kind to unbelievers, not because we are not at war, but because we are not at war with THEM. They are the victims of the Adversary. They’re not our enemy. And the Gospel is a Gospel of saving grace. For that reason we extend saving grace to them.

When you’re going out and you realize, OK, I can’t take my iPhone, and I can’t shine my Brock light and figure out who has been chosen of God and who is not. I’m just in love and grace, befriending people and sharing with them the Good News. It’s important that we understand the soil into which we are planting and watering the seed.

According to the Scripture the soil of the unsaved heart, the non-Christian heart, is, first of all, it is lost. It is wandering in darkness without a clue as to where it is going. It doesn’t know that. When it sees light, it’s either magnetized by it or repelled by it. If they like their sin, they don’t come near it. If they don’t like their sin, they’re drawn to it, but the reality is, without the light, they are wandering in darkness as Jesus said in **John 8**.

They are also spiritually dead. We don’t try to make cultural Christians out of people to bring them to Jesus. The invitation to come to Christ is come to Him just as you are. Don’t try to clean them up. Don’t try to get them to kind of reform themselves, and then finally when they get to a certain stage, introduce them to Jesus. But we come just as you are. They are spiritually dead.

For over forty years I’ve been doing memorial services. I have been time and time again in the funeral home, and not one time have I ever been able to say anything to someone who has passed

away that would cause them to even wiggle a finger let alone get up and walk in response.

We have to understand that when we are going out with the Good News, that we are expecting a response from them that unless the Spirit of God supernaturally gives them life, they are dead. They cannot respond. They are degraded. They are ashamed. Their sin and their depravity and their immersing themselves into it has created an embarrassing track record for them, and they can hardly look you in eye because of the shame of their sin.

And they're intellectually handicapped. He says in **Romans 1** that there's not one man, woman, and child in the world doesn't have a knowledge of God, we all got it. But rather than embracing that, he says that they chose to worship creation rather than the Creator, and for that reason, God turned them over to a depraved mind. He literally turned them over to a mind that is no longer able to function the way that it was functioning.

30:01

We can spend a lot of energy on apologetics and reasoning, but the reality is their mind can't follow the pattern. Or as Linda will sometimes say, "We never disagree on anything, but once in a while we see things from two different perspectives." And in the middle of that she'll sometimes say, "Now you're trying to reason with an irrational human being here," you know. That's the problem. You are trying to give a reasoned explanation for everything, but their minds don't function that way anymore because they've suppressed the truth. They're skeptical. They think it's a sales job. They think that you want them to become an Amway distributor or something. I mean, they're just like, "What is in this for you?" and they're deceived.

Satan is a liar, and they're looking at it, as one guy said this morning over his coffee, trying to share the Gospel with the man, and the guy said, "Hey, doing just fine. I'm doing just fine, and lots of my friends believe the same thing I do."

You see the reality is that not every road leads to God. We're not all climbing up two different sides, three different sides of the same mountain, but when we all get to the top, there's God. It's not that way. And they're deceived into thinking they are because broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are that find it. So they're in good company on their way to an eternity without Christ.

They're disillusioned. They expected more out of life. They thought there would be meaning and purpose, happiness that would never go away. And all of a sudden life doesn't make sense anymore, and they're unloved ... they're unloved.

They jam into Memorial Stadium, or they go to the bar, and it just seat to seat of people, but on the inside of their being, they're alone, they're lonely. And they're unloved. That's the seed into which we plant the Gospel.

So in order to break through the seed, sometimes you just need to have a fish-and-chips lunch. That's what Jesus did. **John 6**, Jesus took a little kid's fish-and-chips lunch. He had everybody sit down in groups of fifty, and He broke it, and He fed five thousand men, their wives, and their children.

They looked for Him the next day, and Jesus reading their heart, said, "You're not looking for Me because you want spiritual truth. You're looking for Me because you got a free lunch." And He says, "I am here to offer you the Bread of Life, and if you eat the Bread of Life, you will never hunger again."

This last year I kind of crossed over a personal ministry line. A couple had contacted me and asked if I would minister to them, and they had only seen mean Christianity. The first time I met with them, and I heard their story, I said, "The Jesus you were introduced to is not the Jesus of the Bible." And so after an hour-and-half, the first time I was with them in a very public place, I pretty much assumed that it was over, but at the end of it, they said, "Well, we need to be honest with you, we're living together."

And I was like, “This is not my first rodeo. I pretty much figured that out about ten minutes into our conversation.” I thought that was probably the last time, but a couple weeks later they contacted me, “Could we get together again? And they said, “We could meet you at your office, or you can come to our house.” Now see, the safe one is my office. It’s very sterile, and it’s very professional. But when the invitation came, I thought, “What would Jesus do?” And I said, “I’ll come to your house.”

That first time in their house was a little bit uncomfortable, but we made it through. They asked me to come back again, and that time I called up and said, “I’m going to bring some pizza.” We sat at the dining room table, and we ate pizza together. We started to talk about the Gospel.

The next time I went, I took them a Bible. I said, “You guys probably have a Bible, but here’s a very readable one. I just wondered if, you know, if you would just read John together. It says, many other things Jesus did that aren’t written. These are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Why don’t you just read that together? And then ask yourself, does John make his point or not?”

One of the times later I went, and it was getting late, and a storm was moving in. So I was ready to leave, and they said, “Can you stay a little longer?” They said, “We’ve got a lot of questions out of the first four chapters of John.” And two hours later I drove away.

Sometimes you need to start with a fish-and-chips lunch. Take some of your resources. Take somebody that you’re concerned about. You’ve looked him in the eye. They’re your classmate at school.

35:01

They’re a partner at work, or it’s a neighbor. And you need to invite them out for a really good hamburger, and pick up the tab. Jesus calls that indebting them for heaven. Start and prove to them that they have a friend in you. And perhaps they’ll come to discover they have a friend in Jesus.

And then it's team engagement. We don't do this solo. That's what the church is all about. It's the gathering us together, and as a church we partner up together with a lot of things. In a few weeks you will be introduced again to the Crisis Pregnancy Center, but we've been involved with City Impact and the City Mission, Juvenile Justice, FCA, Youth for Christ, short-term missions trips. We've had the privilege of sending people around the world for the sake of the Gospel. But as a church it is our task to bring the Gospel. Reaching as many as are called to eternal life means that we partner up together. We don't fly solo. We're praying one another. That's what the whole chalkboard on rescue is all about. It's getting kind of smudged and smeared, but every Sunday morning at eight o'clock people gather in front of that board, and as we ask the Lord to bless the day as we gather together, we ask God to stir in the hearts of those names that are on that board, that God would lead them to faith in Himself.

The church is not a haven till heaven or a refuge, till rapture. It is an Army base from which spiritually equipped soldiers are deployed. I think one of the things that is going to happen this fall is that a few of our assumptions about why we gather and what the church is all about are going to get challenged a little bit.

And like I said before, I had the delight of living through one church renewal forty years ago that season. And I think of God's grace as I'm going to live long enough to see a big part of another church renewal coming. It's basically coming back to saying, "What is the church? Again, what if we succeeded at everything we're doing only discover that we're doing the wrong things." The church is not an escape place. It's just not like kind of a place where we go away and we hide, and sinners can't penetrate.

When we gather together, we're here to encourage one another, to build each other up, to remind each other that in the midst of the war, we've read the last chapter of the book. We win.

So we go out again for the sake of the Gospel. We gather together to be deployed into the spiritual battle for the rescuing of the souls of them chosen by Him before the foundation of the earth.

And then the last one is corporate worship. People have often said down through the years, “Why don’t you give salvation invitations or altar calls, as they used to be called? Why don’t you give those crisis moments of decision.” We always go back to **1 Corinthians 14**, which I think articulates clearly why the church gathers together. This gathering is for the believers. Now that was challenged over the last twenty-five years with the whole “seeker” movement and the “church growth” movement to where Sunday mornings were planned specifically for those who didn’t know and follow Jesus.

But when I think if you read **1 Corinthians 14**, we come together. And as we sing these songs every Sunday, we know that there are inquirers among us. In fact, you might be one of those here this morning. And you might be going, “I have no idea what he’s talking about.” But you’re in good company. The people near you don’t have any idea, either! But the fact is that there is something happening here. You came in, and all of a sudden you saw these people singing like they really thought that there was an unseen audience, that this God that was being celebrated was actually listening and receiving their worship. And when he said turn in your Bible to **Acts 13**, they opened their Bibles like they expected that this was a word from God. And you go out of here saying, “I don’t know what they have, but I wish I had it.”

There have been a lot of great moments in our years together, but I’ll tell you, one of the saddest moments was a fellow that used to sit four rows from the back on the end. And when he became a part of our church, early on we had him teaching Sunday school. We had him doing Bible studies. He had a gift of administration. He was giving us advice and counsel. After being here a couple of years, one time he met me at what is the old Garden Café in Clock Tower, it’s not there anymore, but we met there on an evening, and I just said, “Things don’t seem to be going right.”

And he said, “Tom, I gotta tell you, I come to church on Sunday and when we’re standing and singing, and when our Bibles are open, everybody around me seems to be just totally enjoying that. They really have that sense that God is there and is at work.

39:59

Quite honestly, I am so jealous of what they have. I don’t have that.” And within six months he had left. He said, “I no longer believe it.”

I said, “What are you going to do about God?”

He said, “I have a God. My God is myself and my health and my career.” And he walked away.

When we gather together, we encourage one another because we remind each other that He’s still on the throne, that He is still the sovereign saving Lord, and that when we go out as His representatives, as we go out, we can be gracious to others because somewhere in there are souls that He has chosen for Himself. He could’ve done it in many different ways, but for some reason the creative God decided that He would entrust the message of hope to a fallible group of people who would simply be light in their square mile.

Sheldon Vanauken, I love the book, *A Severe Mercy*. Never read it without a box of Kleenexes by you. I would loan your mine, but it doesn’t come. It’s not available in hardbound anymore, so you can go to library and check it out. Sheldon Vanauken says the best argument for Christianity as Christians, their joy, their certainty, their completeness. But the strongest argument against Christianity is also Christians, when they are somber and joyless, when they are self-righteous and smug and complacent consecration, when they are narrow and repressive, then Christianity dies a thousand deaths.

One of God’s methods for bringing the Good News to other people is we invite our friends to come, but we don’t plan our services and structure for that. We recognize they are here, and we’re

gracious and kind to them. But we let them see us celebrating the goodness of the Savior and the messengers. It's very simple. Our plan for reaching as many as are called to eternal life is for each of us to just be Jesus in our square mile. It literally means open your eyes to see what Jesus would see if he lived or worked where you live or work or go to school. And when you see it, to feel what Jesus would feel, and then to do whatever Jesus would do.

Our challenge is to cultivate our own cul-de-sac. Some of you know that our daughter went to be with the Lord about eight years ago. But about two years before that they had moved into a home in a nice subdivision of Lincoln. And when they moved in, she said, "I believe that God put me here for all of the women in our circle." She's the most gifted evangelist in our family. And the amazing thing is that in six months she had found a way to share the Good News with everybody in the circle and two blocks each direction from her home. God put her there for her cul-de-sac. Almost all of them were here for her memorial service, and they got to hear Brian Clark preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

That's God's plan that He uses us. Your friends are your personal mission field. You know people I don't know. I can't be a professional headhunter. You know them. They trust you. Your friendship with them will be the bridge that they will cross to come to Jesus. God put you there for that purpose.

I ended my week by asking this question. "What if Faith Bible Church was radically devoted to Christ, irrevocably committed to each other, and relentlessly committed to reaching those outside God's family?" If that were the case, we would be a church against which the gates of hell would not prevail.

I want read you a four-minute parable. I give you heads-up before I read. This was written in 1960 by the great Christian educator, Joe Bailey. Enjoy it as I read.

The blimp idea got started when this little cluster of friends from a conservative evangelical church were enjoying a barbecue in George and Ethel's backyard, and they began discussing with their

next-door neighbors. It was obvious that their neighbors were unsaved because they were drinking beer and playing cards. (Tom's aside: I grew up in that church.) Someone pointed out that they attend a liberal church, and this just a few times a year. As a plane went overhead, a fellow named Herm remarked, "If that aircraft had been carrying a message that said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved,' the lost neighbors would have received the witness since they also had glanced up in its direction."

45:02

One thing led to another, and the idea was birthed to buy a blimp to have it trail Scripture messages across the sky for citizens to read. They formed a non-profit, got themselves chartered, organized a board with officers, and made Herm, the fellow with the idea, its executive director. Soon Herm was able to resign his job and went full time with the International Gospel Blimps Incorporated.

Someone had the idea of tying Gospel tracts with colored cellophane tape and bombarding the neighborhoods with firebombs from heaven. A project like this naturally would require a great deal of money for maintenance, a hanger for a blimp, and salaries for the pilots and the executive. Fundraising quickly took a great deal of their time and energy from the organizers. Within weeks the board members began devoting all their spare hours to this project. In order to keep the blimp running, to tape the firebombs, and to raise the money, they missed their own children's Little League ballgames, had to turn down invitations from their friends to go out to pizza, gave up all their evenings at home. Soon they added a loudspeaker to the blimps so that Herm could preach short messages across the city while dropping firebombs and dragging Scripture *du jour* through the sky.

When the sermons began invading their homes, citizens rose up in protest. The police chief came close to arresting them for disturbing the peace but backed off when they agreed to dismantle the speakers.

Meanwhile, Herm, the Executive Director began devoting less and less time to the actual day-to-day running of the Gospel Blimp Ministry. He roamed far and wide to raise money and make public appearances. Gone from home so much his wife eventually filed for divorce, particularly when she learned the primary reason for his long absences. The board, however, decided that Herm was so valuable to the ministry that they could not dismiss him. After all it was only her word against his, so they went forward.

And what about the unsaved neighbors who were the impetus for all of this blimp-ness in the first place? A few times when they knocked on George and Ethel's door to see if they wanted to come over or accompany them on a little fishing trip, they found them away from home or too occupied with the blimp business. George and Ethel were the first couple to drop out of the Blimp Ministry, feeling that it had somehow gotten off course and was taking too much of their time with only miniscule results.

Some of the high-powered executives with whom Herm played golf, a lot of golf, talked him into added commercial messages to the blimp in order to increase its acceptance and generate more funds. Soon the blimp sports religious messages saying, "I am the way," and other messages saying, "The American Way is the best Way."

On the third anniversary of the original cookout where the blimp idea had surfaced, George and Ethel invited over their friends who were still heavily involved in the work of the Blimp Ministry. In their backyard they introduced their neighbors, the ones whose salvation had been the original impetus for the blimp business. They had come to know Christ, and George and Ethel thought that the blimp board needed to know how that happened. The board members were ecstatic. "Which fire bomb did God use to reach you? Was it one of the Scriptures we trailed? Was a one of Herms sermons?"

It was none of that. In fact they said that infernal blimp had nearly driven them batty. What had happened was that after George and Ethel had pulled out of the Blip Ministry, they had time to get to

know their neighbors. When the wife went into the hospital, Ethel would visit her, take flowers from the garden, sit with her. She would read to the woman, and they would talk about Jesus. The husband told the backyard group, “There’s something else. Any of you guys ever spend two weeks keeping house with the wife away?” His house had been filthy. “Ethyl came in the day before my wife came home, gave that house the going over of its life.”

The wife added, “Yes, and for a month after I got home, she wouldn’t let me do a stitch of washing or ironing. They took out our dirty clothes and did them for us.”

In the silence that followed this testimony, one of the board members ventured that, “Now that the neighbors were saved they would surely be interested in joining the Blimp Ministry.”

“Sorry,” the new believer said, “George and I are going bowling with the guy across the street.”

Paul went on to say, “I have made you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord. And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

Lord, don’t let us look across the fence and fail to see eternal souls. Don’t let us sit at our desk at school and fail to recognize our classmates and our teachers are people who are destined for either a forever haven or a forever hell. Don’t let us go to work and look at our work associates and forget the fact that someday they, too, must bow their knee before their Creator. Lord, give us wisdom, insight, stir our hearts to love others enough for the sake of the Gospel that we are willing to inconvenience ourselves, clean up our schedule, alter our lives in order that we might prove to them that they have a friend in us in order that we might have the privilege of introducing them to their friend in Jesus, we pray. Amen.