

The Failure of Persecution and Confidence of Christ

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[0 : 00] Today's reading is taken from Acts chapter 5, verses 12 to 26. Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles,¹ And they were all together in Solomon's portico.

None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. And more than ever, believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on some of them.

The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed. But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him, that is, the party of the Sadducees, and filled with jealousy, they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.

But during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, Go and stand in the temple, and speak to the people all the words of this life.

And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

[1 : 34] But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported. We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside.

Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. And someone came and told them, Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.

Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council.

And the high priest questioned them, saying, We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

But Peter and the apostles answered, We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.

[2 : 47] God exalted him at his right hand as leader and savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.

When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while.

And he said to them, Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. For before these days, Theodos rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about 400, joined him.

He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him.

He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone. For if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail.

[4 : 01] But if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God. So they took his advice, and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go.

Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

This is the word of the Lord. Thank you so much, Trish and Celeste. Good morning, everybody. It's great to be with you again this morning. If you are new to Watermark, you don't know me.

My name is Kevin, and great to have you with us. Please do come and say hi afterwards. I would love to meet you and greet you, but great to have you with us. Why don't I pray for us briefly as we come to this passage and look at it together.

Lord Jesus, we do gather this morning in your name, but we must confess, God, with heavy hearts. When we see what's happening in our world, when we are aware of the wars and the conflict, the chaos, the uncertainty, the volatility.

[5 : 17] Lord, it's very, very uncertain times, and our hearts are grieving. Our hearts are grieving for the loss of life that is happening all around the world. God, our hearts are grieving for broken families, broken relationships.

As we come to your word, God, once you remind us of some things that are absolutely true, remind us of the most important things in life. There's so much that we don't know, but help us to see what we can know and to anchor our lives in you.

God, let your word speak to us. We pray, God, that what I say, Lord, I pray may it only be of you, God. If there's anything that's not of you or your will, let it fall on deaf ears. God, we want to hear you speak to us today.

Spirit of God, come and have your way, we pray in your great name. Amen. Amen. As rational and intelligent beings, we humans, and I know that may be questionable, whether we are always rational or intelligent, but largely as rational and intelligent beings, as humans, we love to know what the future holds, don't we?

Life would be so much easier. Our choices would be so much simpler. Our decisions would have so much less drama, less anxiety. Less fear.

[6 : 29] If only we could know the outcome of the trials that we face and the difficulties that we're going through. Just think of your career. Wouldn't you love to know where your career is going to be in five years or 10 years or 15 years time?

Or maybe the work that you engaged in, maybe that job interview you've just gone through, or a trial that you're working on, or some deal that you're working on.

What's the outcome going to be? Where's this thing going to end up? Or just think about what it would mean for our investments. How many of us wouldn't love to know what the markets are going to do in 12 or 24 or 36 months time?

Take a lot of anxiety out of a lot of homes, I'm sure, or businesses. Or think about our children. Wouldn't we love to know what career path our children are going to choose?

Right? I mean, all the myriad of activities and extracurricular things we do all weekends and afternoons. If we just knew, hey, they're going to go down this path. You can leave all those other ones aside.

[7 : 28] How much simpler parenting would be? Or what about the trials that we face? How much easier would those trials be if we knew the outcome? In our family, we recently had the agonizing experience of having to wait for some potentially serious medical results that were coming back.

And as a loved one, it was uncertain. And you're in this time of waiting. What happens if the results come back serious? As the doctors say, there's a possibility.

What will that mean for our loved one? One of the great challenges in life is that we all need to make decisions, sometimes very, very important decisions, without really knowing.

Indeed, we cannot know what so much of the future holds. How do we handle this? Friends, what happens if there are some things we could know? What if there are some of the most important things in life that we can have some measure of certainty on?

What if there are some things that will influence the choices that we make, and the way we go about things, knowing for certain, some measure of clarity. How would that change the way that we live?

[8 : 39] We are working through the book of Acts, as Celeste and Trish read to us. And we're in Acts chapter 5 today, and this passage is very similar to the one we looked at two weeks ago. You remember two weeks ago, Peter and John are on the way to the temple.

A man gets healed. They say, a crippled man, rise up and walk. An amazing miracle. And Peter and John are then arrested. They're put in jail overnight. The next day, they come before the authorities.

They're put on trial. They're interrogated. They are threatened. And eventually, they are released, upon which they go back and rejoice at the great experience that they just had. Well, here again, our passage today is very, very similar.

Here, the apostles are arrested, put in jail overnight. Here, they are released from jail miraculously, but they are re-arrested the next day, brought before the authorities, put on trial, threatened.

Here, they are actually beaten, and then threatened some more, and released, upon which they go and rejoice at the great experience that they've had. So, two very, very similar experiences.

[9 : 42] But in this passage that we're looking at today, Luke wants us to see, that the most important thing about life, the most important thing about the future, is actually not that uncertain.

It's not as uncertain as we imagine. And that we really can have some measure of certainty and confidence, about who God is, about the great big things in life, and about the choices and the decisions we need to make, in light of that.

And so, in this passage today, I've got three very simple things, for us to look at. One, absolute certainty. Two, competing choices. Three quick implications.

Okay? I hope you like what I did with that. Very simple to remember. Okay? One, absolute certainty. Two, competing choices. Three quick implications. So, let's dive in, and look at this.

One, absolute certainty. When we read the Bible, one of the things that I've been learning, the last few months, actually, is, when we read the Bible, one of the very important questions to ask ourselves, is not just, what are the words saying, but what is the feeling of the passage?

[10 : 48] What is the tone? Sometimes the biblical writers, want us to get their message, just by telling us, this is what I'm trying to say to you. So, for instance, John, at the end of his gospel says, I've written these things, that you may know Jesus is the Christ, and by believing in him, have life in his name.

This is why I've written my gospel. But very often, the biblical writers don't tell us, this is what I'm trying to say. They want us to pick it up. They want us to get the feel of the passage, the tone of the passage, more than, more than just studying and analyzing the words.

When we read this passage that was read to us this morning, what is God trying to say to us? Well, notice how remarkably positive, and encouraging, and uplifting these passages.

Look at how it starts off. Verse 12 says, Now many signs and wonders were regularly done amongst the people, by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together. Verse 14, And more than ever, believers were added to their number, multitudes of men and women.

And then he goes on to tell about the amazing miracles that take place. People bring their loved ones, their nets on the floor, that if possible, Peter's shadow might just fall on them, and maybe even get healed.

[11 : 59] This is a story of amazing miracles, and God's favor, and God's blessing is on the people. And what an amazing experience this church is going through. This is the closest thing to revival.

And look at how the passage ends. Look at the very last verse that Celeste read to us. It says, Verse 42, This passage both begins and ends with this remarkably encouraging and favorable summation of the church.

God's blessing is all upon them. But, as we said a few weeks ago, it's not all roses and butterflies, because this passage also has some real challenges. There's some real opposition, some real hostility that these apostles face, right?

Some pretty serious challenges. Yes, they're great miracles and signs and wonders, but there's some significant challenges, even hostility. They are arrested twice. They are interrogated.

They come close to being put to death. Verse 33, They say, Let's kill these guys. And then when that doesn't happen, they are threatened, threatened, they are beaten, which probably means being beaten 39 times with a cane.

[13 : 12] And eventually they are threatened further before being released. And yet, look what Luke wants us to take from this. Luke wants us to see that despite all the hostility, all the challenges, all the opposition, the final outcome is the undisputed reign of Jesus and the advancement of the church and the success of the gospel.

At the end of the story of this chapter, what's happened? The disciples, despite everything they've gone through, despite the threats, everything the authorities have tried to do to stop them, to hinder them, to stamp out their authority, to intimidate them, the final ending, the final reality is the apostles succeed and the gospel goes forward.

Jesus is on the throne and nothing, nothing can stop them. Look again at the final verse. After everything they've done, they've threatened to kill them, they say, and every day, in the temple, from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching at the Christ of Jesus.

And in fact, that's how the book of Acts actually ends. If you go to the very last verse of the book of Acts, it says this, Paul lived in two whole years and under house arrest in Rome and he welcomed all who came to him proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus with all boldness and without hindrance.

The story of Acts is, despite all the opposition, everything that the authorities and the rulers and the governors and everything tries to throw at them, the gospel advances, the kingdom goes forward, and the apostles are not stopped.

[14:54] And look at the way that our passage makes this point. Look at all the ironies in our passage here. The apostles are arrested, but they find themselves released. The authorities want to kill them, but one of their own members convinces them to set them free.

They call them in to try and silence the apostles, but what happens? They go out rejoicing, preaching and teaching. They seek to threaten and intimidate them, but the authorities are actually the ones that are most threatened, most intimidated, most afraid.

And I love in verse 25, here are some leaders that are very sophisticated, very smart. In fact, the temple police are involved in arresting these guys.

Their job is to know everything that's going on, and yet what's happening? They're all scratching their heads, saying, where have those guys been arrested? We thought they were in jail. Does anybody know where they are?

Verse 25 says, an unnamed somebody, doesn't even know who they are, somebody says, guys, those people you're looking at, they're back in the temple where they were yesterday, doing the same thing that they were doing yesterday.

[16:00] Do you want me to go get them for you? Yeah, all the authorities, they're perplexed, they're baffled, they don't know what's going on. And here somebody says, oh, they're exactly where they were yesterday. And in fact, Luke wants us to see that although the authorities are very serious, and their threats are very serious, he wants us to see almost the silliness, the juvenile nature of their behavior.

Look at verse 17, it says, they're described as being jealous. Verse 24, they are greatly perplexed, that means they're baffled, they're confused, what's going on? Look at verse 26, they are deeply afraid.

And verse 33 says, they are enraged. It's like they're losing control of their emotions. Luke wants us to tell, here are the authorities, and they're almost juvenile.

Look at how immature their behavior is. And Luke is painting a picture for us here. He's saying here, this hostility, yes, it's very real. Yes, they can impose some real pain on these guys, but ultimately, it's no threat at all.

Yes, they can throw them in jail, they can threaten them with death, they can try and intimidate them, but ultimately, at the end of the day, no matter what they threaten them with, no matter what they throw at them, no matter what they do at them, their threat is inconsequential.

[17:17] These men and the gospel will go forward. The ultimate reality, the final verdict, the absolute certainty is that Jesus is on the throne and his gospel will persevere.

Though the nations rage, kingdoms rise and fall, there is still one king reigning over all. None above him, none before him, all of time in his hands.

For his throne, it shall remain, and it shall never stand. And look at Peter's speech here. They say to him, we strictly charge you not to teach in his name, that here you are filled Jerusalem with your teaching.

And Peter says, the God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed. You put him on the cross. How much more do you want to try and stop this guy? There's nothing more that you can do than kill him, take his life.

You killed him. And yet God raised him. God exalted him at his right hand. He's now leader, the ruler, the savior of all. Here are the messages Luke is telling us that despite everything that is thrown their way, nothing, nothing can hinder or thought or stop the message of the gospel in advance of God's kingdom.

[18 : 31] And we see this most clearly in Gamaliel's speech. I love his speech here that Celeste read to us. Look at how he says this in verse 35. He says, men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men.

For before these days, Theodos rose up claiming to be someone special and a number of men, about 400, joined him. But he was killed. And all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.

And after him, Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census, drew away some of the people after him. He too perished and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and leave them alone.

For if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail. But if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them.

You may even be found to be opposing God. Friends, this is exactly what Luke wants us to see. I don't think Gamaliel had any idea just how true his words were.

[19 : 32] I think he didn't realize how absolutely pinpoint he was. That the message of Jesus that these men proclaimed was not of man. It was of God. And so no matter what they throw at them, no matter what they try and do, nothing, nothing in all the world, in all of history, not the religious leaders, not the power of Rome, no political party, nothing will be able to stop the message that these men proclaim, which is that Jesus is Lord, he's on the throne, and he rules and reigns.

None above him, none before him, all of time in his hands, for his throne shall ever stay, ever remain, and ever stand. And here in this passage, I love how Gamaliel says, he talks about three people.

He says, there's Theodos, he died, and this thing came to an end. There's Judas, he died, and his thing came to an end. And Peter says, there's another man, Jesus, he died. You try to kill him, but it couldn't put an end to his followers.

It couldn't put an end to the church. It couldn't put an end to his gospel message, that Jesus rules and reigns, he's on the throne. I don't know if you know the story of Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, one of my favorite stories in church history.

I'm sure I've told you this story many times, so I'm sorry if you've heard this for the 20th time already. But 16th of October, 1555, so 500 years ago, two bishops in England are tied up, taken to the stake in central Oxford in England, and are burnt alive.

[20 : 58] Why? Because they're preaching the gospel of Jesus against Queen Mary, Bloody Mary, as she is known. She's known as Bloody Mary because she killed so many people in 1555 in England.

They are preaching against her, saying, Jesus Christ is Lord, the monarch is not Lord, and Jesus is King. And so these two bishops, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, are tied up, taken to the stake, and put around them are grass, dry grass, and the authorities are bringing torches of lit flames to set the grass alight and so they will burn to death.

And while the people are approaching them, Hugh Latimer, the older of the two, says to Nicholas Ridley, who's tied behind him, this is what he says. Sorry, these words always get me.

Be of good cheer, Master Ridley. Be courageous. We shall this day light such a flame that by God's grace in England, I trust, shall never be put out.

Friends, here's a man that as the flames are starting to lick the grass around them and their clothes are starting to catch a light, here's a man who says, be of good cheer. Be courageous.

[22 : 15] This message that we proclaim won't end without death. It will go on. And he was right. Three years later, Queen Mary died. She passed the throne on to her cousin, Queen Elizabeth I, and England became a Protestant nation and hundreds of years later, the gospel still advances.

Friends, how is it that as the flames are starting to lick these men's clothes, how is it that they can call out, be of good cheer, be courageous? Because they knew, they knew that the message doesn't die when the people die.

Christ is on the throne. Well, think of the words of Tertullian. Tertullian was an early Christian preacher and teacher around the year of 200 AD, 150 years after the book of Acts is written.

And this is what he writes. He says, you can kill us, you can torture us, condemn us, grind us into the dust. The more you mow us down, the more we will grow.

For the blood of Christians is the seed of the gospel. Friends, there is a absolute certainty. There is a definitive outcome. This is how the story of the world ends.

[23 : 18] That when all is said and done, when kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall, at the end of the story, Jesus Christ will be King and Lord forever and ever and ever and his gospel will stand.

And we can look at Luke chapter 5 and think that the message of Acts 5 is, sorry, Acts 5, we can think the message is be courageous like these men. That's not what Luke wants to say.

The question Luke wants to ask us is do we know what they know? Do we have the conviction and the certainty that these men had? Here are not five lessons how to be bold and courageous in your life.

The lesson here is do you know what they know? That Jesus is on the throne seated at the right hand of God the Father as ruler and savior of the world. That's what Luke wants us to see here.

Yes, the disciples face incredible opposition, arrest, threats, trials, beatings, threats of death and yet they come out rejoicing, more committed than ever. Why? Because the words of Gamaliel are right.

[24 : 17] If this is of God it cannot be stopped. So, one, absolute certainty. Two, competing choices. Now that leaves us with some choices to make.

What are we going to do with this message? And one of the things that Luke wants us to see in the book of Acts is that because Luke is so certain that the story of Jesus is real, we've got to make a choice.

So what are we going to do with that? Are we going to surrender and bow down or are we going to resist him? And here in Luke in Acts chapter 5 we see something of the binary nature, we see with clarity the binary nature of following Jesus.

Luke wants us to see that following Jesus is not, it's not a wishy-washy, it's not kind of like one foot in each camp. There's something of a binary decision that needs to be made.

And we see this clearly in Peter's speech in verse 29. In verse 27 it says, when they brought them in they set them before the council, the high priest questioned them saying, we strictly charge you not to teach in his name.

[25 : 22] Yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching. But Peter and the apostles answered, we must obey God rather than man. Peter's very clear.

He's saying either we are for Christ or we are for you. Either we are with Christ or we are against Christ. Either our foot is in the kingdom of God or our foot is in the kingdom of man.

But we cannot straddle these two fences. And Peter's making it very clear that there's something of a binary choice here. Who are you for? Are you for Christ or are you for the things of this world? And in many ways the authorities, what they're asking them to do is, they're not saying deny Jesus completely, they're just saying pipe down a little bit, just calm down.

Take all your stuff about the resurrection and repentance and just keep that to your side. You know, in the first century, the Pharisees didn't mind kind of other groups and sects like there's the Qumran group and the other kind of groups.

They didn't mind them so much as long as they weren't disruptive, as long as they weren't too radical, too strong. And the Pharisees are kind of saying here, listen, don't go tell everyone about Jesus, just keep it to yourself. You can have your small group in your home, that's okay.

[26 : 29] And Peter's saying, if you're asking us to toe the line, what you're actually doing is asking us to deny Jesus as Lord. And that we cannot do. Either we obey God or we obey man, but we cannot do them both.

And remember how just a few, maybe months or years before, Peter had tried to toe the line. Remember one day, Peter, he wants to follow Jesus, but he's also worried about his own safety.

And so someone comes to him and says, hey, are you one of those followers of Jesus? He says, no, no, I don't know what you're talking about. Hey, I did not see you following Jesus. He says, no, no, I do not know the man. And how did that end?

It ended with Peter denying Jesus and going out and weeping bitterly. And Peter here, the spirit has got a hold of him. God has got a hold of him. And he says, actually, we've got to make a choice.

Are we going to follow God or follow man? And Peter here is echoing the words of Jesus in Matthew 12. Jesus says this, whoever is not with me is against me. Whoever does not gather with me scatters.

[27 : 27] Now, it's true that all Christians are on a spiritual journey, right? Our journey of faith is not always as black and white than that. We are learning to grow in faith and obedience and trust in God.

And none of us are the perfect specimen. All of us are learning to apply the gospel to our lives and learn to love and trust Jesus more. But here we see something of the radical nature, the binary nature.

Where is our decision line? Who are we following? I was thinking this week, you know, the Sermon on the Mount is very, very popular. Everybody loves, the Sermon on the Mount. Why? Even Mahatma Gandhi, who is not a Christian, loved the Sermon on the Mount.

He called it a profound source of moral and spiritual wisdom. And we all love the Sermon on the Mount because of Jesus' very wonderful words. Like, for instance, in Matthew 7, he says, why do you see the speck of dust in your brother's eye but miss the log in your own eye?

First take the log out of your eye and then you'll see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Or Jesus says, you've heard that it was said, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, but I say, if someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other cheek also.

[28 : 37] Or Jesus says, you know, you've heard that it was said, love your neighbor, hate your enemy, but I say, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you. So everybody loves the Sermon on the Mount, but do you know how the Sermon ends?

How does the Sermon on the Mount end? It ends with Jesus issuing a very binary choice. He says, you've got two choices. Are you going to be with me or are you against me? Jesus tells about two pathways.

He says this in Matthew 7, He says, enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide, the way is easy, the path is easy, it leads to destruction, and many, many enter it, but the gate is narrow, the way is hard, that leads to life, and few find it.

Jesus says, you've got a choice. Jesus talks about two trees. He says, there's a good tree and a bad tree, and the bad tree cannot bear good fruit, and the good tree cannot bear bad fruit. Which tree are you? Are you with me or are you against me?

Jesus talks about two houses, or a house that builds on two foundations. He says, those who hear my words and follow me and trust me, they're like someone who builds their house on a rock, and the wind comes and the storm comes and the floods come and it will stand firm.

[29 : 43] But if you reject me, it's like building your house on sand, and the floods will come and the wind will come and the rains will come and that house will crash. Jesus says, there are like two types of religion, those who pretend to know him and those who really know him.

He says in Matthew 7, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom, but the one who does the will of my father. Many will say, Jesus, didn't we prophesy on your name and cast out demons and do many mighty works?

And I will say to them, I never knew you, depart from me. So yes, Jesus' sermon on the mountain is very wonderful, but it ends, he says, you've heard my teaching, you've heard my words, where do you stand? Are you with me or are you for me?

Are you gathering or are you scattering? And Peter here says to the Pharisees, the religious leaders, if you're asking us to toe the line, just to pipe down, just to accommodate a bit of Jesus and a bit of you, we cannot do it.

We must obey God rather than man. And why is it? Well, Peter says in verse 30, the God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.

[30 : 51] You cursed him, God raised him. You killed him, God exalted him. God exalted him to his right hand now as ruler and savior of all and we are witnesses of these things.

You know, the speech of Gamaliel, or Gamaliel, he talks about these two guys, right? Theodos and Judas who gathered a following and then they died and they dispersed.

Friends, in every generation, there are ideas that are going to ask you to follow them. And these days, those ideas are maybe on our phone. You don't even need to meet the person face to face.

They're in our IG, they're in our news feed. They're ideas that say, follow me, follow me. And one day they will die and then what will happen? They'll probably say to you, listen, you can follow Jesus but also follow us.

You don't need to deny Jesus, just tow the line. And Peter here is saying, where does our allegiance lie? Friends, here we see that we cannot follow Jesus and follow those that are opposed to him.

[31 : 51] We cannot obey Christ and obey those that are opposed to him. Many people will be happy if we tolerate him. But Peter urges us to say, no, set your hope on Jesus. So what about us?

If we look at the decisions that we make, the things we prioritize, the things we spend our time and money on, where's our allegiance? Who are we following? Two binary choices. Three quick implications.

So let's look at what does this mean for us? Well, as we come to a conclusion, I want us to think about this in three ways. Personally, corporately, communally for us as a church and then globally.

Okay? So firstly, individually. Individually, let's give ourselves wholeheartedly to the person of Jesus. That's what Luke, I think, has been wanting to say to us here. The gospel will go forward.

Christ's kingdom will advance. At the end of the ages, Jesus will reign and rule forever and ever. Individually, friends, let's be those of us that give ourselves to Jesus. Friends, let's not play it safe.

[32 : 48] Let's not have one foot in the things of God and one foot in the things of this world. Friends, let's refuse to be lukewarm and mediocre. Let's refuse to live in the mushy middle of kind of like mediocrity.

Friends, let's know that the ultimate outcome, the definitive, absolute certainty is that Jesus rules and reigns. Let's live our lives in light of that. Let's make clear, decisive decisions to embrace the narrow road that hard as it may be will lead to life.

Friends, haven't we all tried to play it safe? I know I have. Haven't we all tried to just, you know, live in that mushy middle of mediocrity and subtly, quietly, silently, denying Jesus and living with compromise.

And Peter here has some good news for us. Look at verse 31. He says, God exalted him to his right hand as ruler and savior to give repentance to God's people and forgiveness of sins.

Friends, Jesus Christ, ever gracious, ever merciful, ever welcoming, ever forgiving, is exalted at the right hand of God the Father where he sits in glory. And what's he doing?

[34 : 00] He's offering forgiveness and repentance to people like me, maybe people like you, people like us, people that have tried to live one foot and one foot. Jesus calls us and he says, I'm not here to condemn you.

I'm not here to tell you to sort yourself out and pick up your game and clean up your act. I'm here to welcome you and say, come and follow me. Come, I will give you grace. I will help you.

Jesus' arms are wide open and calling us, saying, come and live for me. Individually, let's embrace Jesus and live for him. Communally, how did I put it there?

Let's keep Jesus at the center of watermark. Many of you will know in roughly eight weeks time, maybe nine, maybe 10, we will be moving to Wong Chukung, right?

Somewhere in the month of August, we will be moving to Wong Chukung. And I can assure you that our new venue at Viva Place is going to be much nicer than Ebenezer.

[34 : 56] It's going to be far more comfortable. The chairs are going to be more comfortable. The air conditioning is going to be more comfortable. The classrooms are going to be much nicer for the kids. The parking lot is so much more easier and you don't have to put your name on a waiting list on Saturday morning.

The MTR station is two minutes walk. It is going to be a much nicer and better place. And hopefully, when we move there, a lot of the challenges and the inconveniences are going to be removed.

That's a wonderful thing. But it's also a dangerous thing. Because what is comfortable and convenient and easy for us is also bad for our souls. There is often a tendency between comfort and spiritual maturity.

And as we move to an area, to a building, which has a lot going for it, one of the dangers that we as a church can move into the mushy middle of mediocrity.

And so friends, let's make a choice that whether we're worshipping a nice air-conditioned building in Wong Chow Kang, or whether we are standing trial before governors and authorities and kings and rulers, whether our kids have wonderful classrooms that are nicely colored and glass and all that, or whether we're worshipping under a tree in the savannah, that we will be those who make sure that Jesus is at the center, that have absolute certainty that Christ is on the throne, that he rules and reigns, and that we will obey God and not man, not even the comforts of our own heart.

[36 : 22] Let's keep Jesus at the center of watermark. And then thirdly, globally, let's remember how the story ends. Friends, have any of you lived in a more uncertain, more unpredictable, more volatile time in the world?

Maybe some of you have. I can't remember a more uncertain time. I woke up this morning, actually on the way to church, my one brother messaged me and just said, have you seen the news? What's going on in the Middle East? America bombed Iran a couple of hours ago.

Friends, this is the most uncertain, the most volatile time I can ever remember of my lifetime. But friends, it's uncertain for us, but it's not uncertain for him. The story is not uncertain.

And let's remember how the story ends. There is a definitive outcome. There is absolute certainty that at the end of the story of this world, those that know Christ, those that are gathered with him, those who love him, will be gathered around the throne, worshipping and adoring Jesus.

And everything that is wrong, and everything that's broken, and everything that's sad, and everything that's unjust, and everything that is difficult and harsh, and anxiety producing in this world, will be done away with.

[37 : 34] And we will worship our king forever and ever and ever. Friends, there's a lot that's uncertain about this world. None of us know what the future holds. None of us can be certain what's going to happen in the global economy, or in politically, today or tomorrow.

But we can have absolute certainty, absolute confidence, conviction, that Jesus has overcome the grave, has been exalted to the right hand of the Father, where he sits as ruler and savior of all, and that his kingdom will never end.

So let's live in light of that. Let me pray for us. Father God, as we come to you now, we are, our hearts are heavy with the uncertainty of this world. Our hearts are very sad, God, by all that's going on.

And Lord, as we look at the headlines, we see these things. But God, even in our own life, many of us here are faced with uncertainty, faced with not knowing how things will end, faced God with decisions and challenges.

Lord Jesus, I pray by your spirit, come and open our eyes and lift our sights to see you, to live with confidence in the unshakable certainty that God, you rule and reign, you are good, you are gracious, and we can trust you.

[38 : 49] God, help us to live in light of that. Lord, we don't know what tomorrow holds, but you do. God, what we do know is that you will be on your throne and nobody and nothing can stop that.

Nobody can kill you, nobody can dethrone you, nobody can end your rule and reign, and God, help us to live in light of that, we pray. In your great name, we pray.

Amen. Amen.