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## Title: The Authenticity of the Commissioned Church

**Text: Acts 16:6-19:20**

*Speaker: Pastor Chad Bresson*

**Introduction** As we made our way into our church building this evening, noticeably absent, or maybe not so noticeably absent were the shrines to our ancestors. As we came in we did not pass through the gate separating kami from the common world. Look to the left and a buddha does not preside over the entranceway exuding the peace and tranquility that marks our path to enlightenment and ultimately nirvana. Look to the right, absent is our lotus shrine dedicated to Ganesh, encouraging us in our unity with all existence as we create our own destinies in accumulating Karma. Look around... missing are those vestiges of Norse Legend and Mythology that pervade our worldview and our worship. Not here are the carvings and the paintings noting our dependence on the Great Spirit who blesses us with earth, water, fire, and wind. Our chairs this evening are not supported by an expensive marble that would speak to the inspiration of our gathering, Zeus, king of the gods and all the myths, legends, and gods in orbit around his story. Look up, and we are not surrounded by icons of great figures in Christian history. Absent is our dome pointing to Christ's reign in the heavens. Behind me we're missing our altar and the wall that separates congregation from sacrifice as is true of an Eastern Orthodox sanctuary. Have we ever stopped to ask ourselves: What happened? Why is it that we are not Shinto? Why are we not submersed in Norse paganism? Why do we tell stories about Jesus at Christmas instead of Odin at the winter solstice? Why don't we have a dome? Why is our church building not in the form of an ark? Why does our worship not find its meaning and purpose in an altar and tempon incorporating icons in an, yes, idolatrous veneration of saints and Christ? What happened so that this Greek society in which we live is not dominated by Zeus and Diana and Apollo? Why *\*this\**? Why Christianity? Why *\*western\** Christianity?

In the passage we are considering tonight we have the answer to these questions. As Calvinists, we have a tendency to answer these questions by appealing to God's elective will, God's eternal design for our salvation and our placement in this church. God elected us. But the fact is that while God elected us to salvation thus sparing us from these counterfeit religions and their eventual doom, he has also been orchestrating salvation history in time and space to bring about our salvation. There is a human element in the *\*how\** Christ gathered us to himself. To ask "why" and consider "how" is a legitimate enterprise. There is an historical answer to these questions.

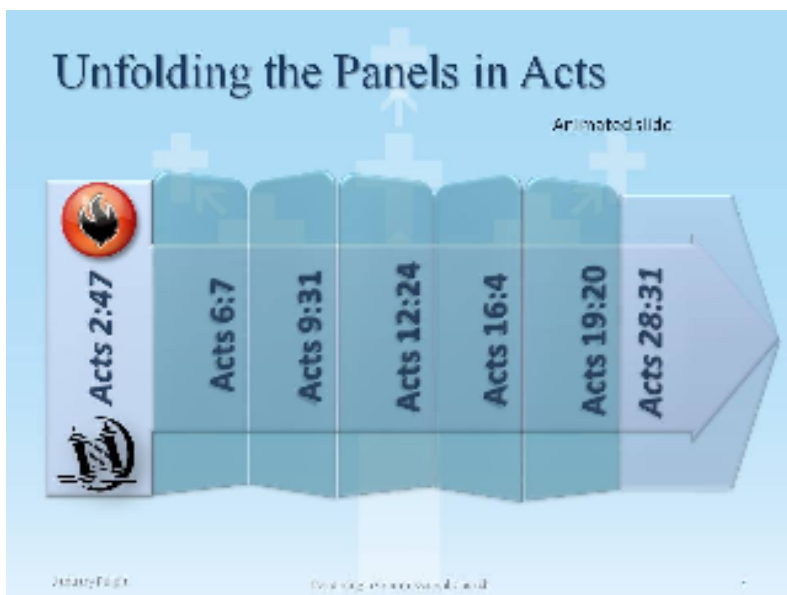
Tonight we consider the fifth panel or fifth book within this book of Acts. What happens in this panel for most of us, again, has been the stuff of Sunday school stories. But as we consider what takes place in this passage, I think we will find something much more significant is occur-

ring. You see, you and I, as participants on the stage we call redemptive history, are participants in a drama that has its very grounds in our passage this evening. So much so, it is possible to say that humanly speaking, if this panel in Acts doesn't occur, Clearcreek Chapel itself never comes into existence. And while we, on the one hand, can say this is true about everything we read in scripture and everything we read about redemptive history, if we are to give the drama of Scripture itself its due, we will understand the historical and redemptive significance of what is happening in this part of Acts in a way that is fundamental to our community life here at the chapel. What happens in this panel (Acts 16:6-19:20) leads specifically to our gathering here this evening.

## Review

Our panel begins in Acts 16:6, but before we take a survey of this panel, I want to spend the next few minutes not only reviewing how we got here, but also our purposes for this series in the book of Acts through the month of January. And I want to take some time to show you just how the purposes for the commissional community unfold in the pages of Acts.

This series on the church as a commissional community follows what have been called "literary markers" that form the structure for the book of Acts. You'll see these markers in this graphic showing how Acts is linked together:



Acts is a series of 6 books (or panels) that are marked off by 5 summary statements (there's a beginning statement, Acts 2:47, and an end summary of the statements, Acts 28:31); these summary statements themselves are repeated at various points and in various ways within the books as well... we will see this in a minute. These summary statements occur @ Acts 6:7, Acts 9:31, Acts 12:24, Acts 16:4, and Acts 19:20, the last of which we are looking at this evening.

These summary statements mark off the panels. I would encourage you to mark these off in your Bibles. These are the passages we have been preaching this month. They are hinge points, not only connecting and linking the various panels together, but linking together the common theme through the book of Acts.

If we follow these summary statements or literary markers in Acts, two things stand out: the increase of the Word and the increase of the church, both of which are intertwined with each other in Christ expanding His kingdom from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. The expansion of Christ's kingdom is the result of Christ increasing his word in the lives of churches that he is bringing to life through the preaching of the Word.

## Christ's Commission

The following then, is how all of this unfolds beginning with the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts... which are the passages where we began the series. In Luke 24 and Acts 1, Christ is wrapping up his ministry on earth shortly after the resurrection. He is soon to be the exalted Christ. In these last few moments with those closest to him, Christ gives them a commission that He himself will carry out; Christ, risen in glory is soon to ascend to glory, and in Luke 24 and Acts 1 we find Christ explaining precisely what it is the disciples will be doing:

"...repentance and forgiveness of sins should be **proclaimed** in his name to **all nations**, beginning from Jerusalem. You are **witnesses** of these things..." (Luke 24:47-48)

"...you will be my **witnesses** in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and **to the end of the earth.**" (Acts 1:8)

There will be proclamation of good news. They will be witnesses to Christ and his saving work. And they will take this good news from Jerusalem to all people groups wherever they are found to the end of the earth.

And in Acts, then, Luke begins to chronicle this monumental shift in salvation history. The good news of Jesus Christ is going to flood the streets of Jerusalem, scatter to the countryside and eventually envelope the earth.

But how will this happen? What is the means Christ has chosen by which this good news will circumnavigate the globe? Do not miss this because to do so is to make a fatal error increasing being made by those who call themselves followers of Jesus wanting to make the world a better place.

## Kingdom Proclamation

Christ's mechanism for expanding his kingdom is found in the opening statements of chapter 1 and throughout the book of Acts. Luke is going to highlight this mechanism again and again and again and again.

"In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and **teach...**" (Acts 1:1)

"...He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and **speaking** about **the kingdom of God.**" (Acts 1:3)

"...Being therefore **exalted** at the right hand of God..." (Acts 2:33)

"...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to **speak the word of God** with boldness." (Acts 4:31)

"...they did not cease teaching and **preaching Jesus as the Christ.**" (Acts 5:42)

"...those who were scattered went about **preaching the word.**" (Acts 8:4)

"...they believed Philip as he **preached good news** about **the kingdom of God** and the name of **Jesus Christ...**" (Acts 8:12)

"...they had **testified** and **spoken the word of the Lord...preaching** the gospel to **many** villages..." (Acts 8:25)

"...Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture, he **told** him the **good news about Jesus.**" (Acts 8:32)

"...(Paul) **proclaimed Jesus** in the synagogues, **saying**, "He is the Son of God." (Acts 9:20)

"...to us who had been chosen by God as **witnesses**, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead...he commanded us to **preach** to the people and to **testify** that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead." (Acts 10:41-42)

"...they **proclaimed the word of God** in the synagogues of the Jews (Acts 13:5)

"...they continued to **preach the gospel.**" (Acts 14:7)

"...Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and **preaching the word of the Lord**, with many others also." (Acts 15:35)

I have chosen merely a sampling... more than 60 times in the book of Acts reference is made to **proclamation** or **preaching** or **teaching**. Christ's chosen means of expanding his kingdom is through the proclamation of the Word by witnesses who have come face to face with the cross and resurrection. Christ commissioned the disciples as bearers of good news, bearers of his image that would spread from Jerusalem to the rest of the world.

## Kingdom expansion

It is through the proclamation of good news, the gospel, and the preaching of the Word then that Christ expands his kingdom. This proclamation fuels the kingdom expansion, a kingdom expansion of which Luke testifies... this proclamation becomes the vehicle carrying along the running theme coursing through the veins of the book of Luke: increase of the word, and the

multiplication of the church, two themes found strategically placed throughout the book. These themes occur over and over and over again in the context of this preaching and teaching, as Luke shows us the expansion of Christ's kingdom:

"...those who **received his word** were baptized, and there were **added** that day about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:41)

"...the Lord **added** to their number day by day those who were **being saved**." (Acts 2:47)

"...many of those who had **heard the word** believed, and **the number** of the men came to about five thousand." (Acts 4:4)

As the word is proclaimed by faithful witnesses in Jerusalem, Christ from his throne in the heavens continues to increase His Word and multiply his church:

"...more than ever believers were **added** to the Lord..." (Acts 5:14)

"...the **word** of God continued to **increase**, and the **number** of the disciples **multiplied** greatly in Jerusalem..." (Acts 6:7 – the end of panel #1)

"...the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being **built up**." (Acts 9:31 – the end of panel #2)

"...**many** believed in the Lord." (Acts 9:42)

"...a great **many people** were **added** to the Lord." (Acts 11:24)

"...the **word** of God **increased** and **multiplied**." (Acts 12:24 – the end of panel #3)

"...as **many** as were appointed to eternal life **believed**. And **the word** of the Lord **was spreading** throughout the whole region..." (Acts 13:48-49)

"...(Paul and Barnabas) entered together into the Jewish synagogue and **spoke** in such a way that a **great number** of both Jews and Greeks **believed**." (Acts 14:1)

"...they had **preached the gospel** to that city and had made **many disciples**..." (Acts 14:21)

"...the churches were **strengthened** in the faith, and they **increased in numbers** daily." (Acts 16:5 – the end of panel #4)

The increase of the word and the multiplication of the church is the recurring theme of the book of Acts. This theme manifests itself in the literary markers (which I have highlighted for you... these are the passages that have formed the context of our preaching this month) that tie everything together in the book of Acts. Not only do we have the literary markers, as you notice there are supporting statements occurring throughout the rest of the text. And it is all fueled by the proclamation of and the preaching of the gospel.

## Rhythm of Acts

This, then, is the rhythm of Acts... the Word is preached and Christ increases His Word and multiplies His church. The good news is proclaimed and Christ increases His Word and multiplies His church. The gospel is preached and Christ increases His Word and multiplies His church. Over and over and over again in the book of Acts this is the rhythm. Kingdom expansion occurs

as the gospel is faithfully proclaimed by Christ's witnesses and this expansion moves from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and Asia Minor... what we now know as Turkey (this is where Pastor Russ left off this morning). As the book of Acts unfolds so too Christ's work in redeeming for himself a people, and gathering to himself a church unfolds in history.

And that brings us to Acts 16:6 this evening. This particular panel is the fifth in Acts... it begins in Acts 16:6 and will carry us to Acts 19:20. And what is found within this passage (Acts 16:6-19:20) is to be understood in light of this redemptive-historical rhythm. We will see it here: the Word is preached, the gospel is proclaimed, Christ increases His Word and multiplies His church.

## **The Roman Empire**

As we consider our passage, we begin to see that salvation history is intersecting with Roman history. One must wonder what the disciples were thinking when Christ said that they, the disciples, would spread his name and his fame to all nations to the end of the earth. It must have occurred to them that at some point, that this witness, this proclamation of Christ's death and resurrection would eventually take place in Rome. Rome was the center of the universe. Rome ruled *the world*. Rome not only ruled the world, Rome ruthlessly ruled the world. Rome crucified the ring leader of this new movement. Rome did so because, as far as they were concerned and as far as they were told, this rebel dared assert himself as "King of the Jews". "There is no king but Caesar", or so Rome said, thought, and taught. Do we hear the ring of the crowd's chant before Pilate now here throughout the book of Acts? This view that the Roman Caesar ruled the world (or "to the end of the earth") wasn't merely a political power play, though it was primarily that. This thought, that Caesar was supreme over all -- so much so that various Caesars had declared their "godhood" with a worship necessary of such a god... Caesar being supreme over all permeated philosophical thought and public life. If you were in the Roman world, the idea that Caesar was "god" imposed itself on you. There was no mistaking the superiority of the Roman kingdom.

## **Rome's Problem**

But Rome has a problem, a problem on the one hand it knows nothing about, and on the other hand it is increasingly aware of. Christ *really* is King... it has happened in time and space AND the heavenlies (note Acts 1:1-11, the ascension, and Peter's interpretation of it in Acts 2). Christ has ascended into heaven and has taken his place at the right hand of the Father. He literally and truly reigns. That's a problem for Rome and its claim to exclusive superiority. Christ is King, not just King of the Jews, but King of the Universe, their universe. At the beginning of Acts Christ is exalted to his throne at the right hand of the father where he commences his rule and his reign over the church, and in doing so, asserts his authority over all things. Peter testifies to

this in Acts 2. And increasingly King and Kingdom are on the lips of the disciples. Christ uses the preaching of the Word to expand his territory; through the increase of the Word and the multiplication of His church, this rhythm occurring in Acts, Christ expands his kingdom and Christ asserts himself over against the claims of Rome. And while the Jews provide plenty of opposition in the pages of Acts, Rome itself increasingly is finding itself at odds with this message of Jesus and kingdom. These two thoughts, there is no king but Caesar/there is no leader but Moses vs. Christ has been exalted and now reigns, are in constant conflict in the storyline of Acts... the very real and genuine claim of Christ's kingship and His kingdom over against the false claims of a false religion. The Jewish religion has become obsolete. And in the case of the Romans, this Caesarian religion is a fraud; it is counterfeit.

## **The antagonists of Acts**

Throughout the previous panel, what Pastor Russ preached this morning, and this panel we're looking at this evening... two antagonists emerge, almost in tandem. The first are the Jews and Judaizers... these are they (and their supporters) who killed Christ, killed Stephen, and now follow Paul and Barnabas and Silas from town to town looking to cause trouble. The second is the Roman Empire, whose territory is increasingly being encroached by this new religion, the People of the Way, the Christ followers. Both represent kingdoms being displaced by the one true King and His Kingdom... the Jews the old kingdom, the old way, the old covenant, the old Israel; the Roman empire, the political realm, the philosophical environment, and the pagan religious system. Christ's kingdom and these kingdoms are mutually exclusive.

Yet here in this panel is another kingdom that opposes Christ. Further behind the backdrop of Rome's false religion and the Judaizers now obsolete religion is an unseen kingdom that has given rise to both of them. This kingdom is a doomed kingdom, it is the kingdom of the original counterfeiter. It isn't merely Caesar whose religious claims to godhood are taking a beating at the hands of the gospel. So too is Satan, that adversary who not only had his own false pretenses to kingdom ownership rebuffed by Christ, but found his claims to rulership of the universe forever defeated in the cross and resurrection.

What we find in our passage this evening is the proclamation of the good news and the increase of Word and the multiplication of Christ's church having in its sights inauthentic kingdoms that set themselves up in opposition to Christ and his rightful claims.

## **The spread of the gospel**

As this new kingdom expands from Jerusalem through Christ's witnesses, the gospel has begun to spread beyond Judea and Samaria through Asia and Asia minor (what we call Turkey). Increasingly it began to have a more westward trek. If Rome was the center of the universe or

the end of the earth it would seem that the gospel was destined to be proclaimed in its streets. Yet Rome really was another continent away. Not only is Paul revisiting churches from the first missionary journey (the panel Pastor Russ looked at this morning, Acts 12:25-16:5), there are still yet unreached people in Asia Minor. Verse 6:

And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. <sup>7</sup> And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. <sup>8</sup> So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.

Paul's plan was to go with Silas to revisit some of the churches he had help start with Barnabas previously. And he seemingly has his sights on continuing the spread of the gospel throughout Asia minor... in fact, he reaches what would be considered the western edge of Asia and has plans to go north, at the very least toward what we now know as northern Turkey, Bulgaria and the southern rim of the Black Sea. But this isn't what happens. Christ in the heavens on his throne has other plans. The Spirit, in some way or form, didn't allow them to go to Bithynia. Instead, they end up in Troas, a sea port.

## The divine messenger

What happens next can only be described as one of the most dramatic and sea-changing developments in the history of the gospel. In the course of salvation history, what happens in these next few verses, for us, as we place ourselves in the storyline of Acts in this text and indeed the storyline of redemptive history, is absolutely huge. Verse 9:

a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10</sup> And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. <sup>11</sup> So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, <sup>12</sup> and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony.

Do we understand what just happened here? Do we *\*really\** understand what just happened here? Paul stands at the edge of Asia and his plans, the church's plans, the plans of Antioch, are to permeate Asia with the gospel. Certainly not a wrong desire. Yet Christ continues to orchestrate the expansion of the kingdom from his throne in the heavens in real time and in real space. The Spirit, working on Christ's behalf, puts a pause button on these plans at an opportune time, right at the gateway leading out of Asia. And then, in a most divine encounter, heaven itself intervenes changing the course of history... a "man from Macedonia", a divine messenger whose message is in the form of a plea for salvation: Come over and *\*help us\**. "Come and help" is a plea for the salvation message. It's a plea that harkens back to Acts 1:8: "You will be my witnesses, taking my salvation story to the end of the earth." This is nothing other than a gospel call. Oh, don't you see... Paul is leaving Asia. This is the gateway to Europe. This in-



creasingly is Rome's neighborhood. This is an authentic messenger with an authentic messenger from the King himself.

Paul is going to step through a door that ultimately leads to Clearcreek Chapel. From this divine encounter Christ is going to expand his kingdom westward not just to Rome, but to Germany, to Wittenberg, to Switzerland, to London, to Plymouth Rock, to Springboro. Paul wants to continue in Asia, yet Christ through His Spirit can be heard... "I want Europe...you will be my witnesses to the end of the earth." And its through this expansion into Europe that the gospel comes to us. Europe needs the kind of help that only comes through the proclamation of the good news... repentance and the forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in his name to Europe.

### **Kingdom expansion in Acts 16:6-19:20**

And this is what happens... in the succeeding verses. Paul and his travelling companions visit Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth, introducing the gospel to the European continent, and continuing the pattern of his previous missionary journey. In these cities, Paul introduces the gospel and continues the pattern of going first to the synagogue, getting kicked out of the synagogue, and then finding Gentiles and planting churches. And as he does so, here in Europe, the pattern of Acts continues: the gospel is preached, the Word is increased, and Christ multiplies his churches... except for Athens, in which no church was founded... an interesting fact given Athens is trumpeted as a model for evangelizing and planting churches in the emergent movement. But I digress.

Just as we have seen happen in the preceding chapters in Asia, now too Christ is beginning to multiply churches in Europe. To repeat: it's interesting all of the same elements are here in these chapters as has been true of gospel proclamation and church planting in the previous chapters. Preaching in the synagogues. Preaching to the Gentiles. The proclamation of Christ's death and resurrection and his identity as the promised Messiah. The preaching of the kingdom. Jewish opposition. Gentiles' glad acceptance of the message. The imprisonment and beating of Christ's witnesses (although in an ironic twist of divine humor, this initial foray into Europe ends with the Jewish leader being beaten, not the Christians). Rome, throughout all of this, seemingly caught in the middle between the old Jewish sects and this new phenomenon called "The Way". Rome is constantly having to clean up the mess.

Luke is using all of these things to show us that what has been true of Asia continues to be true as the gospel is introduced to Europe. And if we understand Luke correctly, what he wants Theophilus and us to see, what he wants us to participate in, is that what has been true of Asia, and is true of Europe is ultimately true in the rest of the world. Christ is moving his gospel, his kingdom, from Jerusalem to the end of the earth. And this pattern is repeated and will be re-

peated until he returns as the disciples saw him go, over and over and over again. I hope that we see ourselves in our own “panel” perpetuating this same pattern. Christ is doing it again. We are part of His mission. Christ not only has done it in Asia (Acts 12:25-16:5), we are the children of what he has done in Europe, and hopefully, we find ourselves as part of the increase of the Word and the multiplication of His church through the proclamation of the good news.

This is, as Pastor Russ said this morning, “mission in motion”. This gospel will not be thwarted. They will be Christ’s witnesses. Christ’s kingdom knows no continental boundaries. Christ has multiplied his churches seamlessly across the Aegean Sea into new territory. The flow of the good news from Jerusalem to the end of the earth continues and it continues via the preaching of the gospel.

## Kingdom Proclamation (in this passage)

Notice how the pattern established early on in Acts... the expansion of Christ’s kingdom through the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ continues through this panel even as Paul makes his way from Philippi to Thessalonica to Berea to Athens and finally to Corinth:

“...Paul...**reasoned** with them from the Scriptures, **explaining** and **proving** that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I **proclaim** to you, is the Christ.” (Acts 17:2-3)

“...These men who have turned the world upside down...are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, **saying** that **there is another king, Jesus.**” (Acts 17:6-7)

“Many of them therefore believed...**the word of God was proclaimed** by Paul at Berea...” (Acts 17:13)

“...Paul was **occupied** with **the word**, **testifying** to the Jews that **the Christ was Jesus.**” (Acts 18:5)

“...(Paul)...spoke boldly, **reasoning** and **persuading** them about **the kingdom of God.**” (Acts 19:8)

Through the proclamation of the gospel, Christ’s kingdom continues its expansion from Jerusalem to the end of the earth. “There is another king, Jesus” begins reverberating throughout the Jewish and Roman worlds. Christ is trumping Moses and the old religion. Christ is trumping the claims of Caesar from his throne in the heavens. Not only is there no king but Jesus, there is no God but Jesus... the point of Paul’s speech to the philosophers on the Areopagus. Paul counters the claims of Rome that Caesar is king and Caesar is god. When all is said and done in the Areopagus, Paul has emphatically stated Caesar is \*neither\*, because the One who has risen from the dead is King; he is the Creator and is it He, Jesus, who is the “unknown God”. Christ is superior to Caesar in every way just as he is superior to Moses in every way, something that has already been established in the book of Acts (see Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7).

But not only is the gospel on a march to Rome through Europe, infringing on the Roman empire, it is asserting itself over against the system of thought that has been opposed to God from the very beginning. As the gospel continues its trek toward the end of the earth, to the center of the universe, increasingly Satan and his minions are beside themselves (it happens twice in this panel, Acts 16:6-19:20 and once in the panel previous, Acts 12:25-16:5).

This panel ends in chapter 19 verse 20, not in Europe, but back in Asia, in Ephesus where Greek and Roman idolatry so permeate society, even the region's economy is fueled by religious tourism and the cottage industry that developed around Diana's Temple. But this panel ends, not with opposition from the Greco-Roman pantheon of gods and goddesses... this will occur in the next panel (Acts 19:21-28:31)... this panel ends with opposition that is much older and opposition that lies underneath and gives rise to that pantheon of gods and goddesses. Acts 19:11:

And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. 13 Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." 14 Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. 15 But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" 16 And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and **overpowered** them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. 17 And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was **extolled**. 18 Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. 19 And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So **the word of the Lord** continued to **increase** and **prevail** mightily.

## An overpowering opposition

Once again we have a "Bar-jesus" situation like the one mentioned by Pastor Russ this morning (Acts 13:6). There are Jews who are hoping to take advantage of the new Christian phenomenon by using its name for their own gain. I'm not going to get into just what kinds of Jews these are and how they are or aren't good practicing Jews. What Luke wants us to see 1. The word "overpowered" in verse 16 (which we will get to in a moment) and 2. The last phrase of verse 17: fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled (notice this is the "Lord Jesus", not "the Jesus whom Paul proclaims"). 3. Repentance and faith in the crowd that watched it all, in verses 18 and 19.

From the very beginning, Satan had asserted himself over against the claims of the Creator, the King of the Universe. His goal was to sit on God's throne. He wants to be King, he wants to be God (sounds a lot like Caesar). When Christ begins his ministry, we see a rise in demonic activity... it's not merely because Satan is anticipating a nearing of the end... he knows full well that Genesis 3:15's time of fulfillment has arrived. There's also a rise of demonic activity and personal interaction between himself and the Anointed One precisely because when Christ shows up, Christ isn't merely preaching the kingdom of God, Christ is increasingly asserting his authority in the inauguration of the kingdom. Christ comes preaching and teaching the kingdom of God (Luke 4:43). Christ's kingdom is pinching off Satan's counterfeit rule and reign in very real terms and in "felt" ways (see the reaction of the demons in various interactions with Christ in his ministry). And finally Satan is defeated in the cross and resurrection.

So is it any wonder, when we get to the book of Acts that we find similar demonic activity? The parallels between what happens here and some of the incidents in Christ's ministry are remarkable. Unseen principalities and powers are feeling the extent of Christ's kingdom being expanded. They know full well, in their interaction with Christ and their interaction with the apostles, that there is very real authority that accompanies Christ and His salvation work. There is a very real kingdom that is transplanting their counterfeit kingdom. Satan no longer rules. He has been crushed at the cross. His kingdom has been rendered powerless and is diminishing, but he and his minions don't go down without a fight.

## **Christ extolled**

Yet in the face of the attack, Christ's kingdom will not be thwarted. The pattern being established in the book of Acts will continue. Christ's name is proclaimed... and here, not merely proclaimed... it is \*extolled\*. Again, through use of a subtle nuance on the proclamation of the gospel, Luke is able to convey the kingdom orientation of the proclamation. The proclamation takes on coronation and royalty language by use of the word "extolled". Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ has been exalted. Now Christ is to be "extolled" in the proclamation of the good news.

God has made him both Lord and Christ. He rules and he reigns from David's ultimate throne in the heavens. Whether Jew, Gentile, Caesar, or Satan, all must bow and extol the One to whom all honor and glory is due. And the result of that kind of proclamation, a proclamation of the gospel that extols the Christ who is preached, is repentance and faith. In the wake of extolling Christ's name, repentance and faith occur.

Whether it is Caesar or Satan, as Christ extends his kingdom, Christ is extolled at their ultimate and final expense. As the gospel is preached, Christ is extolled, changing and transforming

people through the work of the Spirit. As we see it here in the response of the crowd watching what unfolds between the kingdom of darkness and Christ the king, as Christ is extolled through the proclamation there is confession of what goes on in the inner heart and exposure of what is practiced behind closed doors lays bare all the thoughts and beliefs that are opposed to Christ. And as Christ's kingdom is expanded, its citizens who have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son will bring their belief systems, their anti-Christ philosophies, their inauthentic messages that used to motivate them and permeate their lives to the public square to lay it all on the fire where they will be burned. They understand that anything other than the Christ who is extolled is inauthentic. There is a dismantling of false worldview systems which have set themselves up in opposition to Christ, and this dismantling through the power of the gospel and the regenerating work of the Spirit results in repentance and submission to the One True King.

## **An authentic message**

This panel, Acts 16:6-19:20 see the introduction of the gospel to Europe where the pattern of kingdom expansion continues. But this panel also began with a divine messenger sent from Christ with an authentic message. And here at the end of the panel we find a bookend. This panel ends with the triumph of the gospel over false messengers (both Jewish and Satanic) and an inauthentic message. Christ's witnesses, his messengers, extol his kingship and proclaim an authentic message, and in doing so displace, usurp and destroy every false worldview and system of worship that asserts itself against Christ.

## **Kingdom Expansion**

And what continues to happen as a result? The kingdom is expanded and the mission moves forward, verse 20... here is the literary marker that summarizes and ends this panel: **"The word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily."** Christ's word is increased even as Christ is extolled in the wake of demonic activity. The word is increased and as even as the books are still hot on the fire, a new community comes into existence. The church is multiplied. The mission continues. What has been occurring in the proclamation of the gospel is that people repent and believe and are baptized. The church is multiplied and as a result, the Word itself is "increased"... the extent of the Word and its authority is being expanded. And it does so in the face of fierce opposition: from the Judaizers, from Rome, and from Satan's minions.

Remember how I said we would come back to verse 16? Verse 16 tells us that the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them. Here in verse 20's summary, Luke dispenses with the notion that the Word and its kingdom oriented expansion has been dented by such a display of momentary power. This overpowering of the false prophets is only

temporary. It is still *\*inauthentic\**. Luke shows that, even though it looks like the evil spirit has won the day, people repent and confess, and Christ's church is multiplied.

In the wake of this evil spirit's seeming triumph, no... the tables are turned. The only triumph is Christ's and His Word. Christ, the true King on his throne in the heavens is *\*extolled\**. New kingdom citizens repent and believe. And thus the summary: the Word continued to increase and *\*prevail\** mightily. Don't miss the word prevail! The Word prevail is being juxtaposed over against the overpowering of the evil spirit. The evil spirit may overpower, but in the end it is the Word that prevails. The evil spirit overpowers. Christ's name is extolled. The recipients of the proclamation lay it all on the fire. Regardless of what it looks like in the interim, Christ's kingdom will not be thwarted.

Whether it's the Jews, whether it's the Roman empire, whether it's Satan and his minions, the overcoming and overpowering is just temporary. The real power is with Christ and His gospel, a gospel that has been given to the commissional church: "You will receive *\*power\** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." This overpowering by the evil spirit is finite, it is limited, it is temporary. Christ's kingdom will continue its expansion because the gospel will always prevail. The Word *\*will\** increase. Oh, there might be setbacks and those setbacks might last a long time (see the "dark" ages of the medieval "church"). But the Word *\*will\** increase. The Word *\*does\** prevail. Churches *\*will\** multiply. Christ *\*will\** build his church, and the gates of hell will not *\*prevail\** against it.

We have a divine messenger sent from Christ beckoning Paul to thank for the kingdom's spread to Europe and eventually to us. Let us not be fooled into thinking that because we cannot see Christ in the heavens on his throne, that he has not been orchestrating human history for his own redemptive purposes, redemptive purposes that include us.

## **Conclusion**

We do not worship Zeus this evening, we have not come together to better practice the ways of Buddha, we are not steeped in Nordic mythology, we are not calling on the Great Spirit to give us prosperity...plug in any false religion that is part of the ancient historical backdrop of the West... we are not pagans because in the early days of the church Christ stands his messenger at the threshold of Europe who says to Paul and the early church "Come over and proclaim the only help that can save us". Christ reoriented the orientation of Paul and the early church toward the west... and the rest is redemptive history. We are the beneficiaries of Christ's call and Paul's obedience.

We must always be mindful that as long we live in this fallen world, that which was instrumental in the fall of humanity is still with us attempting to assert itself over against Christ. The anti-Christ world system, its me-first orientation, does not have the best interests of the kingdom in mind.. and in fact, if it had its way, it would once again rise up and attempt to kill Jesus Christ and his new way of thinking he imputes to those who are his. If it has its way, it would attempt to rise up and kill \*us\*. We will face opposition from this self-absorbed, anti-Christ way of thinking. And yes, even on a daily basis we will be tempted to succumb to it. The moment we are tempted to put ourselves first, the moment we are tempted to gain the advantage of someone else, we must remember that this kind of thinking is of another world that would kill us if it could. This system of thinking is always attempting to usurp Christ and His divine and human right to rule and reign. We must lay ourselves, indeed our selfish desires, on the fire to be burned, and extol our King in the Heavens. We must be reminded as Theophilus was, that so long as we extol our King in the heavens, His Word will increase and prevail mightily, and our lives and our church will be transformed into Christ's image.

And we must find ourselves constantly about the task of proclamation, no matter what area of ministry we've been given, no matter what walk of life in which we have a vocation. We are witnesses, we are ambassadors of the King who reigns from on high. We must be known as those who are constantly insisting, "There is no king but Jesus". "There is another king, and that king is Jesus". Pastor Russ mentioned it this morning... we are going to be tempted to change the message. But Acts is crystal clear that it is in the proclamation of Christ crucified, risen, and exalted \*only\* that proclamation that Christ's kingdom will be expanded through the multiplication of churches. If we want to see kingdom expansion here at Clearcreek Chapel, we will be aggressive and creative in our means, but always protective of the message of the gospel. As we do so, we will be authenticated as a commissioned community by the One who is expanding his kingdom in and through us. We must be about the business of extolling the King, extolling the One who has died, who has risen, and who has been exalted to His rightful place as King of all things. We must be extolling the Christ who not only calls us to Himself, but has gained and won salvation for us, authenticating His message and His commissioned church from His throne in the heavens.

If we are to prevail with the gospel and Christ proclaimed in it, if Christ's Word is to be increased, if the church is to be multiplied, we must understand that our prevailing is not in ourselves it is only in Christ and His gospel. The power to transform lives, the power that changes people, the power that produces repentance and faith and a bonfire of false worldview systems lies only in this message: Christ crucified, risen, and exalted. The gospel is what authenticates the commissioned community. Let us dedicate ourselves to the proclamation of the gospel.

As we close, let us finish by covenanting together over our mission statement: By God's Grace and through His Word we will cultivate in the hearts of God's people a passion for the supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ magnified in love for Him manifested in love for one another, and *multiplied by love for the lost.*