

Looking Back, Looking Forward

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[0 : 00] This month sees what is now Union Chapel at 211 years old. We are the oldest free church in the country.

That doesn't mean you don't pay to come in or pay to get out, depending on how we operate. But what it means is we're unencumbered by government structures or Episcopalian domination, which is like the national churches of Holland, the Enchia Kerk, or the Church of England.

And this church came out of a sort of reaction. We want to be free to do what God wants us to do. And it was interesting when I came here, because I am neither Baptist. I'm neither Presbyterian nor Congregational.

Theologically, I'm a Baptist. So when I came here, it was because I had a coffee with the man next door, Linda's husband. And the reason I had coffee with him, because I'd met him some 37, 40 years before, when I was pastoring in another church in another part of South Africa.

We had time to cross over, and somehow he just phoned me up and said, let's do coffee. And we met at Arnold's next door. Notice how well I'm dropping these little adverts. If anybody from Arnold's, just please tell them I like a free coffee.

[1 : 16] The reality of life is this. When I got here, this was a church floundering, and there were 13 members and about 30 attendees on a Sunday morning.

Our average age was in the late 60s to early 70s. And when I felt the Lord say to me, you're coming here, I thought, oh, gasp, shock, horror.

I'm moving from being the old guy in a young church to being the young guy in an old church. But thank you for coming, because now I'm back to being the old guy in a young church. It's really cool. And what I wanted to say to you is, we need to look back, and we need to look forward.

So, Trevor, is this on? It's not if I don't push the right button. There we go. All right. I want to look at life in four directions.

I know there's only three on that signboard, but it gets a bit kitsch when you go to northwest, southeast. But basically, our world is operating now at such a speed of change, such a breadth of change, and such a depth of change, that we're faced with a bewildering number of options any day.

[2 : 25] There's more information on our cellular devices that we carry in our pockets now than there was in all the libraries in the world 100 years ago. So, you can access virtually anything just by Dr. Google, or whichever is your preferred mechanism.

So, I want to look back, and I want to catch up with some of the simple things. There's many ways to preach. Our church tends to preach systematically or thematically, but you could, if you're growing particularly, preach exegetically and start telling us all about the Greek and the Hebrew. You can go through a book, which we're doing at the moment. You can choose a topic. You can even sort of speak into a very current event, which is what we would call a bit more prophetic. Today, I want to speak biographically. I want to take the life of John, the apostle, and I want to point out some of the lessons that all of us will go through in life. We'll all go through similar things. And I want to kind of do a little bit of what Sio was doing this morning, sharing his story with us. I want to share a little bit of John's life and pick out some things that we will all go through so we can learn how to respond and be aware that we're all in seasons of change.

[3 : 47] We're all standing between yesterday and tomorrow. All of us. There are, of course, times when those seasons changes are really big.

At the moment, I'm wrapping up ministry here. I leave the staff here at the end of this month. It's a big season change. So how we learn to adjust in times of massive change, depth of change, breadth of change is really important.

There are challenges to all of us in life. Just being one of God's people and walking through life doesn't make you immune from the pressures and pains of life. And I want to walk through with you this week. We're going to look at looking back, looking forward. We're going to be using the same text that Stephen was using last week. We'll start there. Next week, we'll look at looking up and looking out. And I want to look at the life of a man who's one of the most underrated New Testament apostles. Because he wrote large sections of the New Testament. [4 : 53] But somehow we, in our westernized, more Aristotelian logic phase, tend to like Paul. Personally, I found John to be a huge inspiration.

So this church was founded, just so you know where you come from. You might as well look back a little bit historically. Historically, this church was founded on Reformation theology. The five solos of the Reformation, for example.

We were founded on evangelical priorities. We were very, was a very missional church. In fact, the London Missionary Society and this church were the one and the same thing for quite a while. Well, that table on which the communion bread stands and the communion wine, that's a table from which David Livingston used to preach when he was in Cape Town. It didn't look like that, by the way.

It didn't, it got all churchified over the years. It was just a lovely oak dining room or kitchen table. Now it's really much more churchy. And I did once in a previous incarnation, turn it upside down and show people what I meant.

[5 : 57] But if you want to go and look, you can go and look after the service. And what I was doing by saying that is sometimes we need to peel back layers. If I took off the front and the side of that, you'd see what it really was like originally.

And I want to take the life of John and I want to peel back some of the church thinking we have and talk about some of the real things that we need to go through as Christians to move on in God. And not to be surprised when you find challenges coming our way. So I wonder if you'd pray with me before we read the text. Because this is not just theory. I'm not just going to load onto you another thing to load into your doctrinal framework.

I actually want to take and apply truth to our lives today. Please just pray with me. Lord, be so aware that when we look back, we look back upon a finished work on Calvary.

Lord, you said it is finished. But Lord, for us, our lives are still lying ahead of us. And we've got pasts as well. Things of our past have marked us, shaped us.

[7 : 03] Not all in a good way, some in a good way. But Lord, we want to bring you ourselves this morning and ask you to help us to walk this journey of faith through our lives in such a way to be fruitful, bring glory to your name, and find tremendous fulfillment in what you've called us to.

So we ask you to take your word this morning and make it real to us. Help us to grasp its practical applications and walk in the good of it. We ask that in Jesus' name.

Amen. Right. In the book of Acts, written by Luke, Luke is writing. He's taken an experience to happen. He's saying, this is what happened. After Jesus had been crucified, he was buried.

He rose again. And then he appeared for a period of time to his disciples. Then, just before he ascended to heaven, he met with them. And this story takes place at that meeting when he was meeting with his disciples.

The world commission was before them. The Lord Jesus was still with them in his resurrected form, but he's about to be taken up into heaven. They didn't know that at the start of this meeting.

[8 : 12] All they knew was something dramatic was going on. I don't know about you, but a lot of times, some of the deeper things of the faith, I mean, I remember reading a book, it was about 1,200 pages of dense theological inquiry on the fatherhood of God.

How God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit kind of work. By about page 200, I realized this was going to be a labor of love. And at the end, I realized, I still don't get it.

Did you get that? I still don't get it. I know it's true, but my mind can't grasp it. And what I want to do is I want you to understand the disciples were in that place.

They had expectations. Now they're with Jesus. But they were grappling with the realities of this call to the world. The fact that he died and risen, but I don't know what that means yet.

And then they had some questions. So let's read this text. In the first book, that was the Gospel of Luke, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach. Until the day when he

was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

[9 : 24] He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, you heard from me.

For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. So when they'd come together, they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

He said to them, It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up. And behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? Then this Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. This is the word of God. So at the moment we are standing there, one of the men standing in that group was John, the apostle.

[10 : 43] They were standing. We know the story because the book of Acts has been written so we can read, but it hadn't been written. In fact, none of the Gospels had been written. They were standing there wondering, what do we do now?

What do we need to expect? What that commission, if you read the end of the Gospels, you find that Jesus said, go into all the world and preach the Gospel. What do we do about that? So the first thing I want to do is, let's start where John started, and we'll end where John is.

And then we'll point forward to some of the things we'll also see ourselves. To know who this John was at Acts chapter 1, we need to know that he was a fisherman with Jewish messianic expectations.

He was just a fisherman fishing with his brother. He didn't know he was called to be an apostle on that morning.

He went fishing. That was his job. He was a fisherman. He ran a fishing company. But on that day, Jesus called him. Going on from there, he, Jesus just, by the way, in that text, he's just called Peter and Simon.

[11 : 56] Now John and James. Going on from there, Jesus saw the two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother, John, in the boat with Zebedee, their father, mending their nets.

And he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. See, there was a messianic expectation built into the Jewish culture that had come down over the centuries. A little bit like Moses would have gone to the Israelites in Egypt and he'd said the covenant that God made with Abram, your father, to bring you into the promised land, this is the time.

Now the Israelites were looking forward to the time when Messiah would come and their expectation was they would be the chief amongst the nations. All the nations would come to Jerusalem and worship and instead of being oppressed by Rome and Syria and whoever else had dominated them, they would be the pinnacle.

That was their expectation. When John woke up that morning, he had no idea that the Messiah was about to break into his life. He had no idea that their Jewish expectation was going to be fulfilled in Christ that he was going to be called to follow Jesus.

[13 : 11] That wasn't on his agenda. He'd probably heard about it. There's no description about him previously meeting Jesus. But when Jesus called, something happened.

Now I just want to say to those who are here, you may say, I've just come to church, man. Stop getting on my case. All right? I just want to say to you, if you've come into church and you're regular, but you've never come to that place where you've really heard the Lord say, come follow me.

You've never come to that place where you say, I'm following him. I just want to point out to you, you have to start somewhere. That's the place to start. Make that commitment.

If you're not sure you've done that, and it's not always as dramatic as this. I mean, he's with his father and his brother. They're mending their nets. They've been fishing.

Jesus says, follow me. They're out the boat, leaving dad with all the work, and they're off after Jesus. And his life was never the same. Some of us have had tremendously interesting conversions.

[14:20] I had to find the right adjective. Interesting conversions. Others, you grow into it because you come to church, you're brought up in church. The point isn't your conversion experience.

The point is, are you at that place where you trust in Jesus Christ for your salvation, and only him? See, my conversion experience doesn't guarantee my salvation.

What guarantees my salvation is that Jesus died for me on the cross. My experience of that will differ from yours. But our experience isn't what saves us.

His work saves us. And so when we can say, all of us have had different experiences, different circumstances that brought us to faith, the principles are the same.

He leads us to the place, and then one day we hear him say, come, follow me. And I just want you to be able to identify, I don't care how long you've been coming to this church. You need to get that day when you say, I know Jesus called me to come follow him, and I've made that commitment.

[15:23] You don't have to have a dramatic conversion. What you need to do is have a knowledge that he's called you to be with him. He hasn't called us all to be apostles, which is great, because they had a really hard time.

So John starts, just as a normal fisherman, on his boat with his dad, but Jesus comes and interrupts his life. I could find you an Old Testament example. Desperately thinking for one now.

Elisha, the prophet, just plowing with the oxen. And Elijah, the prophet, comes and calls him, and he follows Elijah, and becomes the next great prophet of Israel.

Just his normal life interrupted. Maybe you're just here, because it's a normal thing you do on a Sunday. And maybe you just missed that point. You need to make that commitment. Please make it. Start there.

He wasn't just a Jewish fisherman. He became a disciple. Now, the thing about being a disciple is, you make a commitment to Christ, you want to follow him, but you bring all your mess with you.

[16:27] Can I just say, when I became a Christian, the church I was with, how can I put this? It was difficult for them to understand how to deal with the crazy people that came and became Christians.

We weren't churchy people. We didn't have a Christian vocabulary. We didn't know when to be quiet and when to stay. You know, we didn't. We would call out from the pews.

I didn't understand that. Can you please repeat that? Yeah, no, we did. We really did, because we didn't understand that was not the thing to do. But we did do that, and they put up with us, which was remarkable.

So I wondered, what was John like when he began? What was this temperament? Because a lot of us think Jesus called them, subconsciously, he called them because they were amazing men.

No, they were amazing men. No, they were normal men. They were just like us. What made them amazing was God's grace upon them. In themselves.

[17:32] Look what Jesus says to him. He calls him the son of thunder, and let me tell you why. Mark, verse chapter three, it's a fascinating text. He went up on the mountain and called to him those who he desired, and they came to him.

And verse 17, James, the son of Zebedee, and John, the brother of James, to whom he gave the name Boagines, that is sons of thunder. And here's an illustration from Luke's gospel why he called them that.

The context of this next verse is they're on the way to Jerusalem. Jesus is now going to die in Jerusalem. He set his face towards Jerusalem. He gets to a Samaritan village. They say to him, yes, you're welcome here as long as you stay with us for a while.

And he says, no, I've got to go to Jerusalem. So they don't want him anymore. And so because the Samaritan village says, you either stay here with us or you're not welcome, this is what James and John say, the sons of thunder.

And when his disciples, James and John, saw it, that the Samaritan village didn't want them, they said, Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them? They were well on their pastoral heart, weren't they?

[18:40] Let's gently cajole. No, let's just burn them. Right? And these sons of thunder hadn't exactly got the most gentle pastoral tool in their toolbox yet.

They were all for you're in or you're out. Okay, Lord, they're not doing it your way. Let's just one flash, they're ash. Sorry, I was a Pentecostal. You, you know.

Right? And that's where he started, guys. The son of thunder and his brother came in to follow Jesus. They didn't suddenly become gentle, kind.

They were still sons of thunder. So if you think, you know what, there's so much of me still in me. How can I still be a Christian? Let me help you. You're not a Christian because you're good in the first place.

You're a Christian because you need to be saved. And so there's a lot of work to do to make us more like him in a process. You are declared not guilty because of Christ's work.

[19 : 42] And then begins the work of sanctification becoming more like him which will last till the end of your days and certainly till the end of mine. What else was he?

You see, he knew he was loved even though he was trying to want him to call down fire from heaven. He knew he was loved. In fact, in John's gospel which John wrote, he doesn't use his own name.

He talks about the beloved disciple. It's a descriptor he uses so as not to put himself in the place of a main character in the story.

Just hold that thought. He knew he was loved to the degree where, here we go, John 21 verse 17. End of John's gospel. The disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, it's the Lord.

The back story of this one is Jesus is risen but Peter's gone fishing with the disciples. Right where the Lord Jesus found them, they're back on the water. And they look up and there's somebody on the shore calling to them and John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, says to Peter, it's the Lord.

[20 : 50] And then, I've just got to introduce you to Peter. Peter's like a lot of us. Simon Peter heard there was a Lord. He put on his outer garment for your stripped work and threw himself into the sea.

He just went overboard for Jesus. Oh come on, that was a good joke. All right? And swam to shore. And if you continue in the story a little aside, when they get to the shore Jesus has got a fish braai going.

And they pull the fish up that they've caught and some administrative types counted how many they were. That's when you picture this.

Jesus, the resurrected Jesus, standing on the shore, Peter's jumped in the water and swam to shore and some guy says, I better count the fish. It's not wrong, it's just different gifting.

I wouldn't have thought of counting the fish. In fact, I probably would have thrown them back thinking there's fish already over there, let's go. Different people with different gifts and different temperaments come into the same kingdom.

[21 : 51] Little hint, if you join one of our city groups, you will meet with people who are very different to you. And they're not always the difference that you wanted.

Oh come on, be honest. There are some people you get on with easily and then there's us. Right? John 20, John 21 verse 20, Peter is now being restored by Jesus and Peter turns around, remember Peter denied Jesus three times, he's being restored by Jesus now, and he turns and he sees the disciple whom Jesus loved, John's way of describing himself, the son of thunder now knows he's loved by Jesus.

Can I just say this? The movement from father, he's working with his earthly father in the fishing business to following Jesus transpired because he knew he was loved by Jesus.

I just want to say to you guys, God loves this fallen world. Not it's fallenness, but he loves us and he wants to rescue us, but he won't compromise on his holiness.

So he makes a way for us broken people to come into his service and know his love through the work of the cross and then he imparts to us this wonderful message to give to other people.

[23 : 15] Start where you are, use what you've got, make a difference. That was quite profound, I hadn't planned that. Come on, that was profound. All right. Peter turns, man he's just been restored, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had also leaned back against Jesus during the last supper and said, Lord, who's going to betray you?

That was John. John was the guy who leant back on Jesus' chest and said to him, Lord, who is the one who's going to betray you at the last supper? He was that intimate, that close to Jesus.

And I want to point out to you a simple thing. This is the guy we're meeting in chapter one, the unfinished guy, the work still in progress.

He's also ambitious. Okay. He's loved. He's a son of thunder. He's loved by Jesus but he's still ambitious. Listen to this text. You will like this one.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus and said to him, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you. Sounds like some churches now say you can just claim what you want.

[24 : 24] Jesus, we want you to do whatever we ask of you. And Jesus said to them, what do you want me to do for you? And they said to him, grant us to sit one at your right hand side and one at your left in your glory.

I want to be the Prime Minister and he wants to be the Chancellor of the Exchequer. In the New Kingdom you sit up here in Jerusalem. Look how the other disciples looked at that.

And when the other ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. They weren't just indignant by the way because James and John were wanting positions and that was wrong.

Because James and John were wanting the positions and they hadn't thought of it.

Oh come on. Ambition is something that breaks things. Can I just say, be ambitious for God but don't be selfishly ambitious. There's so many things we've got to work through in our lives.

These guys were just very honest. We want to be somebody in your kingdom Lord. You've called us from our nets. Surely you've got a role for us. Why don't you just make it right and left?

[25 : 32] John, James. Of course they could have said Simon, Peter, and Andrew, his brother. But no, it must be John and James. I'm going to say to you, they were unfinished business.

When you're looking at John's life, Acts chapter 1, it's unfinished business. Then, Jesus takes these people of unfinished business, James, John, and he takes them up the Mount of Transfiguration.

Now, for those who are not aware of this, it came a day, well just read it. After six days, Matthew 17, Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John. The back story is this is, he said, there's some of you standing here who will see the kingdom of God before they die, and here they are.

They're going up the mountain. After six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John, his brother, led them up a high mountain by themselves, and he was transfigured before them, and what happened is, he begins to glow and shine with a great brightness.

And behold, they appeared to him, Moses and Elijah talking with him, and he was still speaking when behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them. You might want to catch up on Stephen's sermon about the cloud last week.

[26 : 48] He was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him. When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified, but Jesus came and touched them, saying, rise, have no fear.

Suddenly, they were overwhelmed because this Jesus with whom they had walked, who talked, who was doing miracles, who was teaching the most amazing things, who was demonstrating the love of God and the power of God, was transfigured.

And for a moment, it's almost as though God, for those three on the mountain, hidden in the cloud of God's glory, took back the curtains of heaven, and they could see Jesus in something of his resurrected glory and his eternal power.

And he's talking with Moses, the giver of the law, through whom God gave the law, and Elijah, the chief of the prophets. He's talking to the one who's now being revealed as the fulfillment of the law and the prophets, and they're overwhelmed.

Something dramatically changed in the way they were beginning to look at Jesus. A tremendous impact. They hadn't had time to work it through, but they were aware there was a lot more to learn than they knew.

[28 : 09] Welcome to the Christian life. When we know things, there will come times when you suddenly realize there's a lot more to know about God and his ways than we know. And then there's something which is wonderful.

It's a Mother's Day. Who is John? On the cross. When Jesus is hanging on the cross in immense pain, about to die on our behalf, he says this, but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

And when Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother.

And from that hour, the disciple took her home to his own home. John was given custody, as it were, not custody, that's the wrong term, care of Jesus' mother Mary. With growth comes responsibility. And can I just say on Mother's Day, I know we're not supposed to, and we don't worship Mary, and it's not Mary, you know, co-redemptics for those of a more theological bent.

[29 : 28] All right? What we have here is a picture of Jesus on the cross in his humanity loving his mother, saying to John, the disciple whom he loved, still the son of thunder, still the guy quite ambitious, saying, look after my mother.

He was dying for us. He still had time to think of his mum. In a world where the breakdown of the family unit is really one of the harsh things facing us, can I just encourage us to please learn to love and honour our mums, our dads, our spouses, and our siblings.

And I know it's difficult because a bit like those other Christians in our city groups that aren't the ones we'd always choose to be with, some of our siblings rub us up the wrong way as well. Have you got one? Okay, only me. All right? Actually, I happen to like my brothers. I'm just the white sheep of our family. That's their name for me.

Right? So he was the care of, so here we've got a number of things. He was a fisherman. He was a disciple. He was ambitious. He was beloved. He had seen something on the Mount of Transfiguration that took him, began to cause him to question his mindsets and the way he thought about things.

[30 : 52] He was given responsibility for Jesus' mother and he was the witness of the resurrection. Opportunities to grow.

On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early while it was still dark and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, they have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid him.

So Peter went out with the other disciple, that's John, and they were going towards the tomb. Both of them were running together but the other disciple, that's Peter, outran Peter. That's right, John outran Peter and reached the tomb first and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloth lying there. Jesus had risen. The cloth had collapsed like a cocoon with nothing inside now. And then the story goes on. John was a witness of the resurrection. Something happens when the penny drops in the life of a Christian that he has risen.

We say it every Easter. We sing it in many of our songs. We declare it in our statements of faith. And it's true. He really has risen.

[32 : 08] We serve a living saviour. There is somewhere in Israel an empty tomb. I don't know where it is. And don't believe all the people that tell you that's the tomb.

Right? Maybe they're right, maybe they're wrong. But the point is he's not there anymore. He's in heaven. Right? Now, so he's a fisherman.

Just an ordinary guy. But he responded to the call of God and became a disciple. He still was a beloved disciple, but he was still a son of thunder. He was ambitious.

He was changed on the mount. He was the care of mothers of Jesus' mom. And he was a witness of the empty grave and the resurrection, but he was also commissioned.

And one of the things the church has to understand in our day, we're not here to make us feel good. The church exists not for its members, but for the benefit of its currently non-members.

[33 : 13] Can I repeat that slowly? The church exists not primarily for the benefit of our members, but primarily for the benefit of our not-yet members, those who are not yet in Christ.

And why is that so? Because, in Matthew 28, now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

Because by this day Judas had gone off. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. This is after the resurrection and before the ascension. And Jesus came and said to them, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded and behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

Oh, what a promise. And there's a condition. If we'll be a going church, he will be with us. This church was founded 211 years ago by a group of people who'd been sent here mostly by colonial

powers, though mostly from a particular regiment and from the Calvinist society.

[34 : 27] They decided, we need a church here which is unencumbered by relationships with governing powers. It was founded upon strong principles.

And one of them I didn't mention earlier was a concern for social justice. In fact, one of the previous leaders of this nation in the old dispensation coming into power talked to the Enchia Kerk and said, please don't do a Philip.

Now many of you won't know but that plaque is the first congregational pastor of this church, Reverend Dr. John Philip. Also headed up the London Missionary Society together with his wife Janus Plax there.

Right? He was such a thorn in the flesh of the colonial powers that a hundred and something years later the new prime minister said, please church, don't be like him.

And I want to say the prime minister was wrong, please be like him. Can I repeat that? Okay, I'm going to repeat it slowly. Okay. The reason why he said don't pull a Philip is because he didn't want the kind of letters he was sending to say this is not just for the local people.

[35 : 49] This is not just. This is unjust. This is unfair. This is not right. This is not godly. He was an abolitionist. He was a friend with William Wilberforce. He was a contemporary, slightly younger than William Wilberforce.

In fact, John and Jane's, one of John and Jane's sons was also a pastor of this church and his plaques over there behind the thing. He was a, and he died young, but he was one of the ministers of this church as well.

And the reason I bring this up because we have to learn to look back in order to look forward. We do it every Sunday at communion. We look back to remember a finished work until he comes looking forward.

We look back to work until he comes. And I want to say to you, one of the things we can't afford to do in our country, coming up to election time, and I'm normally a lot more political than I am today, but I'm going to say it.

Please make your vote count. Decide what you want to do and go and do it. I'm not telling you who to vote for, but we need a greater degree of integrity and accountability in our nation than we've enjoyed ever so far.

[37 : 08] But the call of the church isn't for social justice only. It's an outworking of the gospel. The call of the church is to reach the nation with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There one day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess to the glory of God the Father.

Those of us who've bowed the knee in advance will gleefully and joyfully bow before Him.

Those who haven't will face a fearsome future for eternity without Him. We mustn't forget in all our strivings to be, to not unnecessarily antagonize people that the gospel itself is an offense to many. I can be your friend, it doesn't mean you're going to like me. Often those people who bring the truth aren't the people who are liked. We mustn't make ourselves offensive but some people who don't want to receive it will find it offensive and this church over 200 years has found it to be offensive.

In fact, you can't really find Dr. Phillips' works in our archives in this country anymore because they strangely disappeared. maybe somebody didn't like them and decided to do file them and file 13 somewhere where nobody will ever find them again.

[38 : 26] There is, however, this John in Acts chapter 1. He didn't stop there. Yes, he was still unfinished business. Yes, he'd been commissioned.

Yes, the world was still to be reached. Yes, in that experience Jesus was ascending and yes, they were told what to do. So I just want to run through some more things you must anticipate in your life as you serve Jesus Christ.

Here we go. One. Okay, I'm going to run through this. Next we go. You need to know that our work of reaching this nation isn't dependent on how clever we are.

We need the power of God's Spirit to carry the message of His love into a world that's desperate for it. They just don't know they're desperate for it. By the way, in tongues in the book of Acts chapter 2, is not about whether we babble off in tongues.

It's about the fact that everybody can understand the message. It's no good me speaking English if you speak Swahili. And tongues is God's way of helping us to make sure the message gets to the other side.

[39 : 31] It's just, it's a whole other story. Alright? We need to learn to proclaim the gospel message. Acts chapter 1, they get, Lord, is this a day you're going to restore Israel? No.

Wait. Go and reach the world. So they're going to reach the world. Chapter 2, the Holy Spirit falls, the next thing is they're proclaiming. The same guys who ran away and hid are now preaching. It's missional. 3,000 become Christians that day and are added to their number. It's a new Christian church. There's worship, there's proclamation, there's miracles in chapter 3.

By the way, it broke the Jewish way of worship as well. Opposition starts in chapter 4. Expect opposition, people. I would be a very unfaithful pastor to God if I didn't explain to you we're in a spiritual war.

Spiritual war isn't drawing maps of which spirits reside in which neighborhoods of which city. Spiritual warfare is on God's side bringing the gospel to a world that's in rebellion.

[40 : 39] You're going to have opposition. But let's not oppose each other. All right. Cost of discipleship and here's one I wanted to mention to you. I'm going to stop here for two minutes.

It's not long after John moving through seeing the resurrection having been up the Mount of Transfiguration being commissioned the Holy Spirit falls on them they see 3,000 saved he's one of the men who prays for a blind man who receives his legs miracles are happening thousands are being converted to Christ.

Opposition breaks out. John's own brother James is killed for his faith. He's beheaded. While Peter in a very similar circumstance at the same time is released angelically from prison.

Angels come and bring him out. Sometimes life doesn't make sense. Why Peter? Why not James? John had to work through the difficulties of losing his most loved beloved brother in the service of Christ.

[41 : 50] There will come things to face each other to face us in life that's going to cause you to go back and say what am I believing? These are the times to respond not in emotion.

You don't deny your emotions but you don't respond as though your emotions are telling you the truth. you respond knowing your emotions you feel your feelings you let God into your grief and you go back to why you believe what you believe.

And when you battle speak to somebody who's walked that path before you. Because what John went on to do he began the apostle of love the son of thunder calling down fire upon the Samaritans ends up writing one John the epistle of love.

And he goes on to being a father amongst the churches in 2nd and 3rd John. And next week we'll pick up in Revelation chapter 1 some other things that John did.

But I want to point out to you his walk began where he wasn't every day. He wasn't special so God chose him. God chose him and so he became specially used by God in the calling to which God had called him.

[43 : 03] You and I are not special because so God chose us. He chooses us and makes us specially equipped to what he's called us to do together as a congregation.

I when I came to this church X number of years ago I used to stand up here and say guys I didn't come to save the congregational church of Cape Town.

I came to save this church on the corner of Eton and Cloth and establish it for another 200 years of faithful service in God's kingdom.

And I want to say this to the elders to the leaders of the church thank you. I think we've got a platform we can work off now. My job is done end of this month I leave but if I can leave with you with this thought he began a good work in us it's plural in Philippians we'll bring it to completion and this good work involves being called working with our realities dealing with our stuff becoming the men and women of God he's called us to be so he can demonstrate he uses the weak things of the world confound the wise all we are as a church is a clay jar in which resides the grace of God and we are each trophies of his grace and as we come to the communion I want to say this I'm not going to bother with this sorry I say this please look back to the finished work of Calvary nothing else saves us it doesn't matter whether you

Pentecostal Presbyterian or Baptist or any other shade of Christianity follow Jesus Christ my life has never been the same there's lots of things I'm still working on there's lots of things in my life I wish I could get I become a better person at Henry has done a really good job at panel beating me into some sort of shape that's acceptable by polite society I never was particularly good at that I don't take myself seriously but oh boy do I take Jesus seriously the end of the day it's not about us

it's about him