

Acts Series Part 38

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[0 : 00] A pressing duty for us as a congregation, as Bon Accord, is to rise to the challenge of church planting.

At the last meeting of the Kirk Session, we established a church planting committee, although somehow I think it would have been better if we called it a church planting work party, because somehow a committee makes you wonder whether anything will ever come of it.

But I trust this committee will prove more fruitful than perhaps others have in the past, and I'm not thinking of any in particular when I make that comment.

So this committee has the remit of exploring where and how we might be involved in this particular adventure of planting a new church, a new congregation.

Now, no doubt, the work of those who form part of that group will be to explore the experience of others.

[1 : 08] And there is much that is said and written concerning different models of church planting. And it is right and proper to do the groundwork and the necessary research, and that will involve exploring and learning from contemporary models.

But it must also involve turning to the pages of the New Testament and learning from the original church planter par excellence, who is the Apostle Paul.

Paul's first missionary journey together with Barnabas was essentially a church planting tour. And today we are going to be considering the mission to Iconium in Galatia, in what is modern day Turkey.

Now, last week we had already followed Paul and Barnabas as they began their missionary endeavors in Asia Minor in Turkey.

And we were considering the time that they spent in Pisidian Antioch. Well, they had to leave Pisidian Antioch due to persecution, and they moved to this town, Iconium.

[2 : 31] And in chapter 14 of the book of Acts, we are given an account of their time there in the verses that we've read, verses 1 to 7 of that chapter.

And as we have read, we have noticed that Paul, as he went to Iconium, he didn't do the big-name evangelist thing of conduct a preaching campaign of a week or ten days and then move on to pastures new.

Nor did he spend six months or a year in pre-evangelism, just getting to know people before plucking up the courage to actually speak to them about Jesus.

No, what did he do? He planted a church. That is what he intended to do. That was his purpose for being there. And that was the end result.

Indeed, in this same chapter, we are given later on in the chapter an indication of how he was indeed successful, if we wish to use that word, in this endeavor.

[3 : 35] Remember there in verses 21 and following, this is after he had been in Iconium, had moved on to other localities, and he's really on his way back to Antioch.

And we read there that on his way back, in verse 21, they preached the good news in that city, won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and Antioch.

There the reference is to the city in Antioch that we were considering last week, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God, they said.

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church, and with prayer and fasting committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust. So it's very clear that here in Iconium, as indeed in the other places mentioned, a church was planted, and indeed leadership was identified, and Paul was able to return to his mother church with that satisfaction, that in Iconium,

and as I say in the other localities mentioned, a church had been established, elders were in place, the work was continuing.

This is what he was about on this missionary journey. And so it is entirely reasonable that we would expect to learn lessons for ourselves in this matter, as we consider this passage and these missionary journeys.

[5 : 12] Iconium then was a result. The gospel was preached, men and women believed, a church was planted. And what can we learn concerning the manner in which that was done?

Well, it is certainly true that in seven short verses, we are not going to find, nor would we expect to find, a full presentation of Paul's church planting strategy.

But we will be challenged and instructed in some aspects of this task. And what I want to do this evening as we consider these verses in chapter 14 of Acts, I want to consider the Iconium mission in the following way.

Notice, first of all, that the apostles spoke. The apostles spoke. But then also notice that the Lord enabled. And then finally notice that the people decided.

So the apostles spoke. The Lord enabled. And the people, that is those who were in the audience, they decided. First of all, the apostles spoke.

[6 : 23] Now in these short verses, there is a number of occasions where reference is made to the apostles speaking. And before we consider them in a little bit more detail, I'll simply make a general point that may seem blindingly obvious.

If the church, or if a church, was to be planted in Iconium, it was necessary that the good citizens of Iconium be presented with the gospel message.

This church plant would not involve a mini invasion of ready-made Christians who would start a congregation. No, if there were to be a church in Iconium, it was absolutely necessary that there be new believers.

If there were no believers, no new believers, then there would be no new church. It was as simple as that. The apostles had to speak.

They had to announce the message. They had to proclaim the good news to those who knew nothing of Jesus, who had never before been presented with the good news concerning Jesus Christ.

[7 : 41] The message had to be announced. It had to be proclaimed. It had to be made known to those who lived in this city. And though that is, as I suggested, a blindingly obvious thing to say, it is one that we would do well to remember and to ponder whether this is something we are doing, if it's something we are prepared to do.

Because any venture in seeking to plant a new church will undoubtedly stumble if this is something that we are unwilling to do, to announce, to proclaim, to make known, to speak to those who don't know Jesus.

And it probably is salutary and worthwhile, if somewhat uncomfortable, to ask ourselves the question, even this evening, is this something that we do?

In this week that has passed, have we spoken to somebody about Jesus? Now, the passage does allow us to explore this matter of speaking a little more.

And we can identify three characteristics of the speaking done by the apostles. And I'll mention what they are and then consider them each in turn.

[9 : 07] They spoke effectively, we are told. They spoke boldly. And they spoke continuously. So we're considering how the apostles spoke. And we notice, or we can notice in the passage, these three characteristics.

First of all then, they spoke effectively. We read in verse 1, At Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.

They spoke, we are told by Luke, They spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.

Now, we know that it is the case that our speaking alone will never persuade anyone in the absence of the Lord accompanying and using the words that we speak.

And we're going to notice that even in this passage in a moment. But while we recognize that to be true, That does not mean that it is a matter indifferent how we speak.

[10:20] It does not mean that we can speak carelessly or we can be unconcerned as to the manner in which we present the gospel, Because at the end of the day, it is all up to the Holy Spirit. Now, it's very clear in what we read here in verse 1 of the chapter, That Luke explicitly identifies the manner in which they spoke as being significant, As being indeed instrumental in the hearer's believing.

They spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believe. And it's entirely reasonable to take from that the implication that had they not spoken effectively, Then a great number would not have believed.

The connection is a very clear one that is being made. It is also worth noting that we're told that they spoke so effectively.

So the reference isn't only to Paul, but presumably to Paul and Barnabas. And that will be significant in a moment. But we'll just leave it for the present.

[11:33] But later on, we'll come back to that, Because it does have a small significant point there. But returning to the point we're stressing in a moment, That they spoke effectively.

Now, that does rather beg the question, Well, what does that mean? What is involved in speaking effectively? What was it about their presentation that allows it to be described in this way, As being effective, that they spoke so effectively?

And I recognize that perhaps in a measure of what I'm going to say now, Is somewhat, if not speculative, It's certainly drawing out what seems reasonable to draw out, Under the umbrella, as it were, Of this description that they spoke effectively, Of this adjective, if you wish.

I think it certainly must have involved this first element, That they had, and they enjoyed, A thorough knowledge of the matter that they were presenting. They were thoroughly well acquainted with what is described very beautifully, A little later on in the passage, As the message of His grace.

It's a wonderful way of describing the gospel message there, In verse 3. It speaks there of the Lord, Who confirmed the message of His grace. Well, this message of His grace, This message of the grace of God, The grace of God in the person of Jesus Christ, Was a message that Paul and Barnabas were thoroughly acquainted with.

[13:08] And so as they proclaimed it, As they announced it, They were able to do so very effectively. It's important for us to be knowledgeable concerning the truth.

It's important for us to study the scriptures. It's important for us to take opportunity, To become well acquainted with the message we are to proclaim, That we might do so effectively.

If we know very little, Then we will have very little to say. Now clearly, How much we will know, Will be a function of how long we have had the opportunity to learn.

And there is a greater responsibility, On those of us who have been Christians for longer. And if you are a new Christian, Then clearly, It would be unreasonable to expect you to have the depth of knowledge of those who have been longer in the faith.

But as I look around me this evening, I think I can safely say that the vast majority of us have had ample opportunity To acquaint ourselves with the message of His grace.

[14:16] And if we are to announce it, And to share it, And to proclaim it effectively, Then that is something that we must be sure is true of us. That we have a thorough knowledge.

By no means will we ever have an exhaustive knowledge, But a thorough and a growing knowledge of the message of His grace.

Let us not fall into the trap of being content with what we know. We know the basics. We've, in other times, Perhaps given more time and effort to reading, perhaps, Of theological literature, Of studying the Bible, Or perhaps when opportunities to learn presented themselves, We would take advantage of them.

But, well, that's in the past. We've reached a satisfactory knowledge. And so we are content with where we are. If that is our condition, Then we will struggle to effectively communicate, As was so, And as we are told Paul and Barnabas did.

But I think also we can say, And it goes together with a thorough knowledge, Is that Paul and Barnabas, I am sure, Displayed an ability to communicate the message coherently.

[15:37] You see, I think we're all conscious That sometimes we can perhaps have a great deal of knowledge, And yet we struggle to get across that knowledge coherently.

I wonder if you've ever had the experience Of maybe speaking to somebody about spiritual matters, Or about the Bible, About the Gospel, And maybe a question has been asked, And you've given an

answer as best you could.

And then when you went home, You're thinking, If only I'd said this. So it's not that you didn't know, But on the occasion or in the moment, You struggle, perhaps, To coherently get across What you wished to do so.

And I think that will always be so. And we certainly shouldn't be concerned, In the sense of not speaking, For fear of not being as coherent as we would like.

But I think it is relevant to stress, That though God in His grace, Grants gifts to His people, And some are more gifted than others, In communication, It is also true that all of us can improve.

[16:49] All of us can make use of opportunities, To be trained. And indeed, in this matter, As in so many others, Practice perhaps doesn't make perfect, But certainly helps a great deal.

The more we are engaged in speaking about Jesus, The more and the better we will be able To coherently get across a message. If you have one conversation, When you are conscious, That you didn't put the matter very clearly, And you have had that experience, You have thought about it, And you have come to the conclusion, I could have said it in this way, Well, when that opportunity presents itself again, I think we can reasonably say, That you will be better able, To communicate what you want to communicate.

But if those conversations are one that you have, Once every two or three years, Then that isn't going to help you a great deal, When a couple of years later, A similar opportunity presents itself. Paul and Barnabas spoke effectively, There was a thorough knowledge, Of the message of grace, There was an ability to present it, In a coherent way, And there was also, I am sure, A delivery that conveyed, The confidence and conviction, Of the speakers in their message.

Even in the manner, I am sure, That they presented the message, It was clear to their hearers, That these were men, Who thoroughly and fully, Believed what they were saying.

[18:20] There was an authority, And a confidence, A conviction, In the message that was being presented. And this, No doubt also, It comes under, The umbrella as it were, Of this description, That they spoke so effectively, That a great number of Jews, And Gentiles, Believed.

And so, Before we move on, To notice the second, Characteristic of their speaking, It is important, To endeavor to be effective, Speakers.

Now, As I've said previously, This truth, Truth should not, Allow us, To, Fear, That if we're not, Effective in our speaking, Then we shouldn't say anything.

I wouldn't want to, Have that negative effect, Of somebody saying, Well, If it's necessary, To be very effective, Well, I'm not very effective, So I'm going to be quiet. That would be, Very counterproductive, To what I am, Hoping, To encourage you all, To do.

But as we consider, Another characteristic, Of this speaking, Not only, Is it described, As effective, They spoke so effectively, We're also told, In verse 3, That they spoke boldly, We read there, So Paul and Barnabas, Spent considerable time there, Speaking boldly, For the Lord.

[19:44] Now this is in the context, Of being told, That persecution, Or in any case, Opposition, Was generated, By their presence, And by the message, That they were proclaiming, And perhaps particularly, By the impact, It was having, And there were those, Who were unhappy with this, And so they were, Stirring up, Opposition, And we're told, In verse 3, That even in the face, Of this opposition, They continued, There speaking, Boldly, For the Lord.

So not only, Effectively, But boldly, Speaking about, Jesus, As the promised Messiah, Was a dangerous business, For Paul and Barnabas.

Why were they, In Iconium at all? Well, As we've already commented, At the very beginning, They were there, Because they had had to flee, From Pisidian Antioch. They had been run out of Antioch, And in the light, Of that opposition, And the danger, That was present, They moved, To this new location, And yet, The first thing they do, As we are told, As we have read, The first thing they do, Is, As usual, They went to the Jewish synagogue, The very place, Where in the previous location, The opposition to them, Had been concentrated, The plans, Against them, Had been hatched, In the Jewish synagogue, And yet they come to Iconium, And they might say, Well, Let's steer clear of the synagogue, Because that's just trouble, But no, That is where they go, First of all, That in itself, Is evidence of their boldness, And of their courage, They speak boldly,

They don't hold back, They don't take what might be deemed, The prudent way, And this reference to them speaking boldly, Implies, Very evidently, A courage, But also a freedom, And an authority, In their delivery, And in the message that they bring, And of course, Here in Iconium, They are also opposed, But the Jews, There in verse 2, We read, But the Jews who refused to

believe, Stirred up the Gentiles, And poisoned their minds, Against the brothers, And many who have studied this passage, Are intrigued by what would appear to be, A non sequitur, A contradiction between verse 2, And verse 3, Because in verse 2, We're told of this opposition, Being stirred up against them, And then in verse 3, We see, So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, And people say, Well that seems to be contradictory, If there's all this opposition, That presumably would be a reason, Not to spend considerable time there, But this isn't in any way, Contradictory, Rather, What is being stressed, Is that in the face of this opposition, And perhaps in some measure, Because of this opposition, They saw it important to remain, That they might strengthen, The new believers, That they might encourage, The new believers, That they might be with them, In solidarity, In the face of these difficulties, That were arising, And so, Not surprisingly, They're described as speaking, Boldly for the Lord, It's also worth, Just noting, Noticing in the passing, The motivation, If we could describe it in that way, For such courageous speaking, We read, They spoke boldly for the Lord, They had a wonderful message, About a wonderful Savior, Jesus was their Lord, [23 : 33] And it was for them, A great privilege, To speak boldly, For him, I am sure that, Had their subject matter, Been any other, They would have not been, In the least prepared, To expose themselves, To opposition, And danger, And physical violence, But given, That they were speaking, For the Lord, And concerning the Lord, Than this, Presented their task, In an entirely, Different light, They spoke boldly, Well, As we fast forward, To our own time, What about us, Today?

It is, Certainly the case, And perhaps increasingly so, That it is, For us, No picnic, Speaking about, Jesus, And the question, For us is, Do we, Remain silent, Or do we shut up, At the slightest, Opposition, The slightest, Discomfort, The slightest, Hassle, That our testimony, Or our words, Generates, And do we say, Well, It is best, Just to remain quiet, It is best, Not to upset anybody, It is best, Not to, Cause discomfort, And so, I will simply remain, Silent, That was certainly not, The manner, In which Paul, And Barnabas, Acted, So they spoke, Effectively, They spoke boldly, And then thirdly, They continued, To speak, Then in verse 7, We read, This is at the, At the end of their time, In Iconium, The opposition is such, That they've had to move, Or they're, They have moved, To these other, Cities that are mentioned, And there we read, Where they continued, To preach, The good news, Now they had continued, To speak, In Iconium itself, Even in the face, Of opposition, But when it became clear, That the opposition, Would turn violent, It is then, That they move on, And there does seem, To be a pattern there, There seems to be, That the apostles, Not out of, Cowardice, But out of, Wisdom, They would measure, The level of opposition, While it was verbal, While they were being, Perhaps, Lied about, And folk were speaking, Ill of them, And it was at that level, They would say, Well this is something, We can continue, To accept, Or to put up with, As it were, But when it became clear, As the passage makes clear, There was, There in verse 5, A plot afoot, To ill treat them, And stone them, Then they say, Well it's time to move on, And again, Not because of fear, But simply, They knew they had a job to do, And that job would not be done, If they were to be stoned, And so they move on, But as we've already noticed, Just some short time later, They return, Clearly, Fear is not, Driving their agenda, But rather, Christian prudence, And wisdom, But they continue to speak, In the very place, Where they are being opposed, And then, As they have to move on, They continue to speak, They continue, To preach, The good news, Again, The question, Comes to us, Do we, Do we continue, To speak about Jesus, Have we, Perhaps even corporately, As the church of Jesus Christ, Have we been largely, Silenced, And are only vocal, In the safety of our ghettos, In a place like this, We can be very bold, In our announcement, But the moment we move outside, It's a different matter, Altogether, And so the words, That were addressed, To Paul himself, By the Lord, Just a little time later, In Corinth, Would seem relevant, To us, As a challenge, And an encouragement, Do not be afraid, Keep on speaking, Do not be silent, So they spoke, Effectively, Boldly, And continuously, Before we move on, To consider more briefly, How the Lord enabled, Just to quickly notice, Or respond to, A concern, That some might raise, An argument could be raised, In the following terms, Well I'm just an ordinary, Christian, And you're talking about, The apostle Paul, And you're arguing, That I should do the work, That he did, But that's not reasonable, That's not what I've been called to, The model you're giving, [28 : 13] The example you're giving, Isn't relevant to, Who I am, That's not my job, In response to anybody, Who maybe is thinking, Along these lines, I would highlight, A curious detail, In the

passage, That we find in verse 4, We read in verse 4, The people of the city, Were divided, Some sided with the Jews, Others with the apostles, And the curious detail, Is that it's in the plural, And in this message, I've been speaking about, The apostles in the plural, On the basis of, What we find there, And I say it's a curious detail, Because you might say, Well hang on, There's only one apostle here, In this missionary band, Paul is the only apostle, So why is it, That the passage, Makes reference to the apostles, In the plural, Well it's evident, It's I think very clear, That both Paul and Barnabas, Are considered, As responding, To that description, Of apostles,

What is the explanation, For that? Well it would seem, That on this occasion, The word apostle, Is being used, In it's more general sense, Of a messenger, Or ambassador, It's literal sense, And not in the technical sense, Of the twelve, Those who had seen, Jesus, Those who were clearly, Identified as, The apostles, But rather here, It is being used, In this more general sense, And so Barnabas, Was also, Able to be described, In this way, And I say that, Because it does remind us, That all Christians, Are apostles, In that general sense, We are all, Messengers of the cross, We are all, Ambassadors of Jesus Christ, With the duty, And the authority, To speak, And so, When we consider, What we have before us, We cannot, Hide behind, The protest, Well, This was the apostle Paul, And that's not me,

Mine is a different, Duty, No, We are all, Apostles, As I stress, In that more general sense, Of the word, So the apostles, The believers, The Christians spoke, But the Lord enabled, In the passage, On a number of occasions, We identify, The enabling of the Lord, And we can notice, This in three respects, Briefly, First of all, The Lord himself, Is enabling, The apostles, To speak, There is, An interesting, Alternative translation, To the phrase, That we've already, That we've already, Commented on, In verse three, Where we're told, That Paul and Barnabas, Were speaking, Boldly, For the Lord, And I say, There is an alternative, Translation, And it's purely, On the basis, That prepositions, Generally, In Greek, And in other languages, Allow for different, Meanings, A preposition, Can be quite, Flexible,

In its meaning, So for example, Just to focus, To focus very clearly, On this one phrase, Here, In verse three, Speaking boldly, For the Lord, The preposition, That we have there, Can legitimately, Be translated, Speaking boldly, By the Lord, And if indeed, That is, What is intended, Then, What is being told, Or what we are being told, Is not only, That they were speaking, About the Lord, But they were speaking, Enabled, By the Lord, Now both of these things, Are true, What is intended, On this occasion, Well we can, Argue about, But both are, Certainly true, They spoke, Enabled, By the Lord, And it's clear, From what Paul says, On other occasions, That he was very conscious, Of the need, For such enabling, If we look at, Only one example, To highlight that, In Ephesians, Chapter 6, And verse 19, At the close of his letter,

To the Ephesians, What does Paul request, Of the believers in Ephesus, Pray also for me, That whenever I open my mouth, Words may be given me, So that I will fearlessly, Make known, The mystery of the gospel, For which I am, An ambassador, In chains, He recognizes, That he has to carry on speaking, He recognizes, That he is tempted, By fear, Not to speak, And so he asks, That the Ephesians, Would pray for him, Now who are they going to pray to, Well they are going to pray to God, That God, Would hear their prayers, And in response, Enable Paul, To continue speaking, And so, The Lord enables us, To speak, Yes we must do so, In as much as we are able, Effectively, And boldly, And continuously, But we do so, As we are enabled, By the Lord, So in that sense, The Lord is enabling, But the Lord enabled, Also in the sense, That the message, That is announced, Here in Iconium, Is confirmed, Now on this occasion,

[33 : 20] By the accompanying testimony, Of miraculous signs, And wonders, We have the actual, Verb enabled there, Who confirmed, The message of his grace, By enabling them, To do miraculous, Signs, And wonders, How would we apply that, To our own situation, Would we expect, Or ought we to expect, A similar accompaniment, To the message proclaimed, Well I believe not, In the manner, Of these signs, And wonders, That are described, But it is certainly true, That the message we proclaim, Must be accompanied, By that which is visible, Those who believe, The gospel, Largely will do so, Not only on the basis, Of what they hear, But on the basis, Of what they see, And so, The challenge, Before us is, What do, Our hearers see, What will, Those who hear, The message see,

Will they see, A community, Where we love, One another, Do they see, Changed lives, Do they see, A practical concern, In us, To serve those, Who suffer, And to serve, Sacrificially, And perseveringly, Do they see, These signs, And wonders, That accompany, The message, That we

proclaim, So the Lord, Enabled, The speakers, To speak, He enabled, The message, To be confirmed, And he enabled, Some of the hearers, To believe, Now while this isn't, Explicitly stated, In the passage, We know, In the light, Of the overall, Teaching of scripture, That the matter, Of fact, Affirmation there, In verse 1, That a great number, Of Jews, And Gentiles believed, Is the product, Of the personal, Enabling, Of the Holy Spirit, In the lives, Of each and every one, That believed, And so the Lord, Is working, Perhaps silently, But working, Nonetheless, Enabling, Enabling, The speakers, To speak, Enabling, Enabling, The message, To be accompanied, And enabling, The hearers, To believe, And then finally, We find, That in response, The people, Decide, The apostles speak, The Lord enables, And the people, Decide, Then in verse 4, The people of the city, Were divided, Some, Sided with the Jews, Others, With the apostles, And it will always be so, That whatever the gospel, Is announced, Whatever the good news, Concerning Jesus, Is proclaimed, It must produce, A response, And it will, Divide people, Here the people, Of Iconium, Decide, And their decision, Produces division, The people of the city, Were told very clearly, Were divided, It could be, No other way, And as we, Explore just a little further, That reality, We ask the question, Into how many camps, Are they divided, And what are the camps, Well they're divided, Into two camps, Again that's very explicit, Some, Sided with the Jews, And here the reference, To the Jews, Is clearly to, Those Jews, Who were opposing, Paul and Barnabas, Not the Jews, In their totality, Some sided, With those who oppose, The message, And others, With the apostles, There is no reference, To a third group, Of the undecided, There is no neutral, Party, That are neither, With one, Nor the other, Maybe there were those, Who thought they were, In the middle, Maybe there were those, Who thought they were, Neutral in these matters, But for Luke, Who describes, What happened, He is very clear, There were only two parties, Only two camps, Those who sided, With the opposition, To Jesus Christ, And those who sided, With those who brought, The message, Concerning, Jesus Christ, And so, It remains, With the gospel message, With the claims, Of Jesus Christ, Upon your life, There can be no, Sitting on the fence, There can be no, Neutral ground, It was, Of course, Jesus himself, Who said, And continues to say, He who is not for me, Is against me, Two camps, Those who believe, And, Using the, Very language of the passage, Those who refused, To believe, A great number of Jews, And Gentiles believe, Verse two, But the Jews, Who refused, To believe, Stirred up, The Gentiles, Those who believe, They are in one camp, Those who believe, This message of his grace,

[38 : 25] Those who heard, The message, Concerning, Their own need, Their own sinful condition, Who heard the message, Concerning this promised, Messiah, Who had come, In the person of Jesus Christ, Those who heard, Of how Jesus had died, In the place of sinners, How Jesus had risen again, Triumphant from the grave, And they believed, The message, And they placed, Their trust, In this Jesus, As their Lord, And Savior, And they did so publicly, Siding with the apostles, They are those, In one camp, Those who believe, And it's not, Unreasonable, Even this evening, To ask you, Is that true of you?

Have you, Believed in this manner? Have you heard the message, And responded to it, Putting your trust in Jesus, And publicly, Siding with the Lord's people, They are those in one camp, But there is another camp, Of those who we are told, Refused to believe, And the language is very, Dramatic, It's very chilling, The way it's described, They refused to believe, We're not simply told, That they did not believe, But that they refused to believe, Indeed, The literal word, That is used, That is translated, Helpfully, And reasonably, In this manner, The actual word is, That they disobeyed, Not perhaps a word, We would have expected, Well some believe, And some don't believe, But no, We're told that those, Who don't believe, Are actually, In their unbelief, Disobeying, Of the message, That is presented to them, They refuse to believe, There is a, A moral culpability, In their not believing, Not believing, Is not morally, Or spiritually neutral, Sometimes we, We live under that illusion, Well I don't believe, Not my problem, It's not my fault, I don't believe, Well here we're told, That there is moral culpability, There is spiritual, Responsibility, Upon those, Who don't believe, They refuse to believe, They disobeyed, What was presented to them, Disbelief is presented to us, As disobedience, That is a solemn matter, But it is the manner, In which it is presented, To us here, In the scriptures, While it is true, That nobody is forced, To believe, It is also true, That we are commanded, To believe, We are commanded, To repent, And not to do so, Constitutes, Disobedience, To refuse to believe, To refuse to repent, To refuse to put, Your trust in Jesus, Constitutes an act, Of rebellion, Against God, And if,

You are mentally, Protesting, Well that's in character, Because that is what, Rebels do, Rebels protest, And so, As we close, I would leave you, With that question, What camp, Are you in, Are you among those, Who believe, Or among those, Who refuse, To believe, Let us pray, ■ a wound,