

Acts Series Part 37

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[0 : 00] The gospel, that is, the good news concerning Jesus Christ, who He is and what He has done for us, this gospel, this good news must be offered to sinners, must be offered to men and women, the likes of you and me, all sinners together.

It must be made known. Our catechism, the shorter catechism, speaks of Christ Himself being freely offered to us in the gospel. And I want to consider this evening that offer, that gospel offer. I don't want to do so as a theological lecture. If that were the nature of what we were about this evening, we would draw on the biblical material on the subject matter from different parts of the Bible and hopefully pull together a coherent presentation. That's not what I'm going to do this evening, but what I do hope to do is consider the gospel offer by means of considering one occasion on which that offer was made. And very particularly in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch. We have read the account, we've read the sermon or summary of it in any case, and it concludes with what we might call a gospel offer. And we will home in, focus in on that particular part of Paul's presentation this evening.

Now, we are, as I've already commented when we read the chapter in question, we are continuing through the book of Acts, and we rejoin Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Now, before we do consider the offer that Paul makes to the gathered congregation there in the synagogue, let's just very briefly follow their steps from where we left them on the last occasion. They were in Paphos, in Cyprus, on the west coast of Cyprus. Those of you who were here will remember that we considered the encounter that there was with Sergius Paulus, the proconsul, and with Elemas, the sorcerer or magician. Well, that has passed, and now they continue their journey, and they cross the Mediterranean or part of the Mediterranean and land in Asia Minor, in what today is part of Turkey. They arrive, as we're told in the passage, at a town called Perga. There in verse 13, from Paphos on Cyprus, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia. And there we're told, just in the passing, that John left them to return to Jerusalem. Again, as we've been following the account, we'll remember that John joined them, joined Paul and Barnabas on this missionary journey as their helper. And yet, now we're told that he leaves them at a very early point in the journey. We're not told the reason why he left them, but it is interesting to notice how Paul subsequently makes reference to what he considered to be really an abandoning of this missionary venture. In chapter 15 and verse 37, Paul reminds us or informs us what his attitude was to John's desertion, as it were. Then in verse 37, we read, Barnabas wanted to take John. This is on a subsequent journey, also called Mark with them. But Paul did not think it wise to take him because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. And here Paul is referring to this occasion. When having crossed from Cyprus to Turkey, John decides, I've had enough. I'm heading back to Jerusalem. Well, we're not going to delve into the possible reasons for this. It is, though, a reminder and perhaps even an encouragement to us that we ought not to be surprised when there are difficulties in the work of the gospel. Things don't always go smoothly. Things don't always progress as we would imagine or as we plan. There are discouragements, there are obstacles in the way.

[5 : 04] So it was for Paul and Barnabas. Their helper decides to go home at such an early stage of the journey. Well, in any case, they continue. They continue having arrived on the coast of Turkey, of Pamphylia.

They continue on to the location that we're concerned with, which is described as Pisidian Antioch. There in verse 14 from Perga, they went on to Pisidian Antioch. Now, this Antioch is not to be confused with the Antioch from whence they had been sent. Again, those who have been following the account will remember that it was from Antioch that they were sent on this missionary journey.

There at the beginning of the chapter in the church at Antioch, there were prophets and teachers. And from Antioch, they are sent. They head over to Cyprus. Now they head to Turkey. And lo and behold, they're in Antioch again. But this is a different Antioch. It is, in fact, all very confusing. And I won't bore you with all the gory details, but there was a man named Seleucus. He was a general of Alexander the Great who went on to found his own empire. And in honor of his father, Antiochus, he named 16 different towns by this name Antioch. So two is confusing enough. But there were 16 of these Antiochs scattered around Asia Minor and beyond. And so here is one of them. There's actually even further confusion as regards the name, but I'll draw a veil over that. Suffice it to say that they arrived in this town of Pisidian, Antioch. And what did they do? Well, following the pattern that has already been established, if indeed one occasion constitutes a pattern. But certainly on Cyprus, the first place that they went to was the synagogue. And here they do the same. On, presumably, the first Sabbath, there in verse 14, on the Sabbath, they entered the synagogue and sat down. And they are given opportunity. Paul, in particular, is given opportunity to address the congregation. It would seem that the pattern at the synagogue was that there would be readings, a reading from the Pentateuch, from the first five books of the Bible, a reading from the prophets. And then somebody would be invited to address the congregation, to preach, we might say. And on this occasion, the newcomer, Paul, is given this opportunity. Again, it rather leads to a question as to why this unknown man would have been given such an opportunity. Had there been some prior conversation with the rulers of the synagogue? We don't know. Might it be that Paul, even in the manner in which he dressed, it was clear that he was a rabbi, and so he was given this opportunity? Well, we don't know. The point is that the opportunity is given. And of course, Paul jumps at the opportunity and preaches the sermon that basically forms the bulk of the reading that we have already read this evening. Now, the sermon, though I imagine what we have before us isn't its entirety. It's, I would presume, a summary of it. But even the summary is quite extensive. And this evening, it would be impossible to do justice to all the sermons. So what we're going to do, as I've already hinted at, or more than hinted at, as I've already stated, we're going to home in on the very final part of the sermon, what we might call the gospel invitation, the gospel offer that is made. There is a sermon that presents the truth, and then Paul homes in on this invitation, this offer to his audience. And this is what we read from verse 38, very particularly verses 38 and 39.

[9 : 20] And we can read these two verses again. Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus, the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Essentially, what he is saying is proclaimed and hence is offered to you, is made available to you, forgiveness of sins, through him, through this man, through Jesus. Everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. So again, the offer is laid on the table as it were. Here I offer to you forgiveness of sins. Here I offer to you the opportunity to be justified before God. On the basis of all that I have said, here is an offer that I make to you.

Now, there are several aspects of this offer that I want to consider this evening. And we'll look at them each in turn. The first thing that I think is worth highlighting is that this offer is an offer that needs to be communicated. Now, that may seem a very obvious thing to say, but I think it merits at least a mention. Even in the manner in which Paul addresses them, he, as it were, stresses this. We read that in verse 38, therefore, my brothers, I want you to know. I want you to know. It is important for me that you know this information. It is important for me to communicate this wonderful truth, this good news concerning the promised Messiah. It is necessary. It is important for me. I want you to know. I need to communicate to you this truth. This is a matter of importance. This is a matter of great urgency.

It would have been criminal for Paul to keep it under wraps. It would have been almost, if we can use the word unforgivable, for him to have received this good news, to know the good news, and to keep quiet about it. And so he comes to these fellow Jews in this place that he has never been to before. He's never met them before. But he says, I want you to know. I want you to understand. I want you to consider this truth concerning Jesus. This offer of the gospel, this offer of forgiveness, is something that needs to be communicated. And I think the application is so evident that it perhaps doesn't merit us pondering for very long. But I do pose the question. I pose it to myself, and I pose it to you, Christian friend.

Do you, do we share that sense of urgency? Do we want others to know the good news of the gospel? Do we? And perhaps if some of you in your own minds are able to answer sincerely, well, yes, that is something I do want people to know. Perhaps I could be a little mischievous and retort.

Prove it.

[12 : 48] Prove that that is so. What evidence could you give? Were evidence to be required? Were somebody to say, well, you say that you want other people to know about Jesus? You say that this is something you want people to hear about and to discover and have the opportunity to respond to? Well, prove to me that that is so. What evidence can you offer that would demonstrate that that is indeed the case?

It clearly was the case for Paul. I want you to know, brothers, he addresses these fellow Jews as his brothers. No doubt the primary reason for that was their shared ethnicity. But also there is that word that speaks of familiarity. It speaks of affection. He is concerned for them. He wants the very best for them. And there is nothing better that he can do for them, his brothers whom he loves dearly, than to make known to them the good news concerning Jesus Christ. So this offer, this gospel offer, is an offer that needs to be communicated. But the second thing I want you to notice is that this offer is a grounded offer. By that, I mean that it is an offer built on a firm foundation.

That is clear also in the manner in which Paul speaks in the very first word he uses in this part of the sermon there in verse 38, therefore, my brothers. This therefore would direct our attention to all that he has said thus far. What Paul is saying is I have presented to you a foundation. I have presented to you truths. And upon these truths, on the basis of these truths, on the basis of all that I have explained to you, therefore, I am now able to offer to you forgiveness of sins. On the basis of all that I have said, I am able to offer to you the opportunity of being justified before God. The offer is a grounded offer.

What are the grounds of the gospel offer made by Paul? Well, here we must simply very fleetingly make reference to them. In the sermon, we notice that in the first place, the gospel offer is grounded in God's purposes revealed in history. From verse 16, the very beginning of the sermon, standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said. And at the beginning of the sermon, basically what Paul does is, we've read the passage already, he very briefly summarizes a history of the people of Israel, of the nation of Israel.

And perhaps, while we're not going to go into all the details, we can notice this one characteristic of this history. And it is the way in which God is very much the subject. And I use that word in its grammatical sense. Even in these few verses, when he speaks of the history of Israel, it's all about God. It's all about what God has done. There in verse 17, the God of the people of Israel chose our fathers. He did this and he did that. He cared for them. He endured them. He gave them prophets. He gave them kings and so on and so forth. The whole thing is about what God has done for them. God stands at the very center of their history.

[16 : 29] And this gospel offer is grounded in that history of God's dealings with his people and indeed, in those dealings, the promises that he has given to them concerning a coming Messiah.

So the offer of the gospel is grounded in history and it's grounded in prophecy. Again, it's not the occasion to look into each and every one of the prophetic references, and there are many that Paul makes in the sermon. But we find that he is constantly giving foundation, giving as his arguments for what he is saying. He is saying the prophecies that are found in the Old Testament scriptures concerning a coming Messiah. And of course, that all brings him to the culmination of his presentation, which is to speak of Jesus and to speak very particularly of the death and resurrection of Jesus. And he presents Jesus in terms of his identity as King David's greater son, that King that was promised, that eternal everlasting King.

And he presents then the person of Jesus, the work of Jesus, his death, his resurrection. And he does so not only have to say that he is. But he is not going to go beyond that. But simply to make the point that here Paul is not simply launching out into some hopeful offer that, well, this is something I've come to discover, or this is something that I reckon is worth telling you about forgiveness. No, it is grounded in history and in prophecy. But there's a third element that I also would ask you to notice in the chapter and in this part of the sermon, the offer that he makes to the congregation gathered there in the synagogue. And it is this, that the offer is a universal offer. In verse 39, Paul says, through him, that is through Jesus, everyone who believes is justified. Everyone who believes.

Paul is addressing a Jewish audience in the synagogue. Among his audience, there would have been the presumption of the Lord who believes in the gospel of the Lord. And there was indeed a Messiah who had come. And if they could be persuaded that this Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Well, yes, this was good news, but it was good news for them. It was good

news for the Jews, not for everyone. And Paul very deliberately and very explicitly and very carefully makes it clear that that this good news that this good news is for everyone. Through him, through Jesus, everyone who believes is justified. Be they Jew or be they Gentile. Paul is most definitely not stating that all are ultimately saved.

That would not be a universal offer. That would be universalism. This idea that in the end, all are saved. That is not what Paul is saying. But what he is saying is that everyone is to be presented with this good news.

[20 : 13] And everyone who believes, whoever they are, whatever their nationality, whatever their background, whatever their life history, whatever horrendous or heinous sins they may have committed, or however respectable their lives may have been for that matter.

Everyone is able to receive the offer, respond to the offer, and to enjoy what is offered in the gospel. Forgiveness of sins being justified by and before God. This offer is a universal offer. And so we must be very persuaded of that ourselves. And so we must be very persuaded of that ourselves, and it must be reflected, that intellectual persuasion perhaps must be reflected in our actions, in what we do, in the manner in which we would make known this good news to all, to everyone, without distinction. The offer is a universal offer. But the fourth thing I want to say, if we just quickly recap, an offer that needs to be communicated, an offer that is grounded in God's dealings in history, grounded in prophecy. A universal offer, an offer that is made known and is available to all. But also, it is a Jesus-centered offer. Now what do I mean by that? In a moment, we'll consider the content of the offer.

Now, necessarily, we've been making, passing references to what the content is. In a moment, we'll just develop that a little further.

[21 : 56] But in making this point, that this offer is a Jesus-centered offer, we are simply wanting to stress that all the manifold blessings of the gospel are possible only through Jesus. And this is again a stress that is found even in the brief words that Paul uses to make the offer known to the congregation.

We read there in verse 38, Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus, the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through Jesus. Then in verse 39, Through him, through this man, through Jesus, everyone who believes is justified.

Jesus is at the very heart of this offer. What does it mean when Paul says that it is through Jesus that forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, is available to you?

What does that mean, through Jesus? Well, I think we can understand it in two ways, and they're, I think, complementary. Perhaps the fundamental way is that it refers to who Jesus is and what he has done, very particularly in his death in the sinner's stead, and his victory over death in the resurrection. Matters that were very clearly stressed in the preceding sermon.

It is through Jesus, through Jesus, through what he has done, through his redeeming work, that forgiveness of sins is offered. This is the means by which this offer of forgiveness can be made.

The work of Jesus, his death, his resurrection, through Jesus.

[23 : 46] But I think there is also a secondary sense. Again, I would suggest complementary. It is through him, it is through Jesus also, in the sense that our enjoyment of the blessings of the gospel are dependent on the relationship that we have with him.

In that sense also, it is through Jesus. There needs to be a connection with Jesus for us to be able to benefit from the blessings of the gospel in order for us to enjoy and experience forgiveness of sins.

We do so through Jesus as we are connected to him, and we'll notice in a moment what that involves. But before we move on, simply to stress this truth that the offer of the gospel is Jesus-centered.

It is through Jesus. No Jesus, no gospel. No Jesus, no forgiveness. No Jesus, no possibility of justification. It is a Jesus-centered offer.

The next thing I want you to notice is that it is a generous and sufficient offer. The offer of the gospel. There are two words, and here we're really homing in on the content of the offer.

[25 : 06] What is it, in actual fact, that is offered to the sinner? What is available to the sinner in the gospel offer? Now, we have actually already said what these things are on many occasions already this evening, but now we want to home end.

There are two words that Paul uses that we could describe as the content of the offer. And as we consider them, we will see that it is a generous offer.

It is a sufficient offer, sufficient for a sinner's needs. What are they? Well, two words. First of all, forgiveness. I want you to know that through Jesus, the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. And then secondly, in the following verse, through him, everyone who believes is justifying. So we have forgiveness of sins. This is part of what is offered to sinners, what is offered to you. And there is justification. Justifying from everything. Well, let's think of each in turn. Forgiveness of sins. We are sinners.

[26 : 10] All of us. We are all sinners. The Bible makes it clear that the wages of sin is death. Given that that is so, and if we accept that that is so, then forgiveness of sins is our urgent need.

It is your urgent need. You maybe think you have many urgent needs, but believe me, your most urgent need is that your sins be forgiven, for you are a sinner as I am.

And that sin has consequences. It has eternal consequences. It is of the utmost importance that our sins be forgiven. And in the gospel, there is this offer of forgiveness of sins.

As we consider how central this is, it reminds us that there can be no meaningful gospel presentation that soft-pedals sin. Sin is a huge problem, yes, but the gospel provides a huge answer, a sufficient answer to this huge problem.

And that answer is forgiveness. Forgiveness through Jesus. Through Jesus. Because of what He has done, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, is offered to you.

[27 : 27] That's the first benefit, if you wish, that is offered to the sinner. But Paul also uses another word.

There in the following verse, we've already noticed, he speaks of being justified. Through Him, through Jesus, everyone who believes is justified. Now, in Peter's sermons in Acts, and we've considered a number of them as we've been going through the preceding chapters, from the sermon there on the day of Pentecost to subsequent occasions, a recurring theme, an ever-present theme, was the forgiveness of sins.

This was at the heart of Peter's message. Repentance and forgiveness of sins. But it is Paul who here on this occasion introduces for the first time in the preaching of the New Testament church, in any case, as it is recorded for us, a related concept.

The concept of justification. It is not a different concept. I think it's fair to describe it as a related concept. Indeed, justification, as we'll notice in a moment, includes within it the idea of forgiveness, but it goes beyond simply forgiveness.

If we can speak of forgiveness as simply forgiveness. What then can we say of this benefit that there is in the gospel of being justified, as Paul describes it here as he speaks to the congregation there in Antioch?

[29 : 07] Well, to justify means literally to declare righteous. And in so doing, the concept speaks of going beyond a cleansing from sin and guilt to the granting of a new legal status before God.

If we can put it this way, to be justified is not simply to be declared not guilty. Forgiveness would allow us to be not guilty. Our sins have been cleansed, they've been forgiven, we are not guilty. But to speak of a sinner being justified takes it a step further. It says not only are we not guilty, but we are in the sight of God positively innocent.

In this matter, we can maybe do no better than to notice how our catechism briefly and concisely helps to explain this concept of justification.

And I'll limit myself simply to reading what it says concerning this matter. The question, what is justification? And listen to what the catechism, grounded we believe in the Scriptures, answers to that question.

[30 : 20] Justification is an act of God's free grace wherein He pardons all our sins, the forgiveness of sins that we've been speaking of, but it goes on, and accepts us as righteous in His sight, in God's sight, only, that is, on the basis of, only on the basis of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, or given to us, provided for us, and received by faith alone.

So you notice there are this, there's these two elements. There is the pardoning of sins that is already clear from what Paul has said concerning forgiveness, but to be justified goes beyond that. It involves, as I say, this new legal status, positively innocent. The picture language that is used in the Scriptures very helpfully is of us now being clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

So not only have the filthy rags of our sinfulness been removed, but they have been replaced by this cloak of righteousness that Jesus gives to us.

This dual aspect, if we can describe it in that way, that is involved in justification is developed in the light of eternity by a former minister of this congregation, Douglas Macmillan.

[31 : 43] He says as follows in an article he wrote on the subject, when the sinner is justified, that which Paul is speaking of here, his justification must provide not merely for deliverance from hell, but for his entry into heaven.

And justification comprises not only pardon, but entitlement to heaven. So this offer is a generous offer.

It is a sufficient offer for the needs of a sinner. The need to be forgiven. The need to be granted a new status before God so that when God looks upon us, he sees one he is pleased with because we are in his Son, Jesus Christ.

We are clothed in the righteousness of his Son, Jesus Christ. And note, before we move on, as we must to draw things to a close, note that this forgiveness that Paul speaks of as he addresses the congregation there in Turkey, this justification that he speaks of is we are assured from everything. Through him, everyone who believes is justified from everything. You could not be justified from by the law of Moses. Everything is covered. Every sin is dealt with.

[33 : 12] Sins in our ignorance. Sins in our enlightenment. Sins that we have committed shamefully and knowingly. Sins past. Sins present.

Sins future. All are covered by God's work on our behalf in his Son, Jesus Christ. So the offer of the gospel is a generous offer.

It is a sufficient offer for your needs as a sinner. But we can move on and notice also that it is an offer that requires a response of faith.

Paul says there in verse 39, through him, through Jesus, everyone who believes is justified.

Everyone who believes is justified.

The offer is made to everyone. It is available to everyone. But it is necessary if you are to benefit from this offer, if you are to enjoy this forgiveness, if you are to experience what it is to be justified by God, it is necessary for you to believe.

[34 : 23] Justification, as we have seen in the catechism, is rightly presented as an act of God's free grace. It is all of God's sovereign, gracious initiative.

But in order for us to enjoy it and to experience it, faith is required. We are justified by faith. We must believe.

You must believe in Jesus as the eternal Son of God, as the one who died on Calvary Street for your sins, as the one who rose triumphant from the grave, as the one who offers to you lovingly and graciously His perfect righteousness that you might be clothed in it.

You must believe these things and you must embrace Jesus Christ as you are enabled to do so. It is an offer. It is a generous offer.

It is a sufficient offer for your needs, but it is necessary for you to believe. The response of faith is required. And I would just mention two more things concerning this offer as we draw things to a close.

[35 : 43] The following point that I think it is necessary and right to highlight is that this offer is what we might call a spirit-accompanied offer.

What I mean by that is that the offer for it to be effective must be accompanied, must be owned by the Holy Spirit of God. Now in the passage that we've read in the account before us, there is only at the very end an explicit reference to the work of the Holy Spirit there in verse 52.

At the very conclusion, persecution is broken out. Paul and Barnabas are forced to leave the city, but there are disciples who have become Christians who remain and we're told that these disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

But though the Spirit is only explicitly mentioned at this point, it is very clear in what is presented to us that his activity was constant as this offer is being made.

there is much evidence in the passage of the work of the Holy Spirit, the invisible work of the Holy Spirit as it were.

[36 : 57] Not something that can be seen, but the effects can be seen. What is the evidence? Well, there is on this occasion the genuine conversions.

There are those who do indeed embrace Jesus Christ. There are indeed those who believe in Jesus and so enjoy forgiveness of sins and are justified before God. They are addressed by Paul and Barnabas then in verse 43. They are urged by Paul and Barnabas to continue in the grace of God. They have experienced the grace of God. They have believed the message. They have experienced forgiveness of sins and so they are urged to continue in the grace of God. And why have they done these things? Because the Spirit of God has opened their eyes, has enabled them to see that what is being presented to them is true, has enabled them to see their own condition and need of a Savior, and has enabled them to embrace Jesus as their perfect and sufficient Savior. There is the evidence of those who were brought to faith. There is the evidence of the extraordinary response to the gospel message. We're told that following the first occasion when Paul preached in the synagogue, an arrangement is made for him to preach on a subsequent occasion, the following week.

[38 : 13] And then we're told, Paul tells us in verse 44, on the next Sabbath, almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. Now this is not ordinary. Imagine if almost the whole city were to come and to hear the gospel preached in this place or wherever it be preached in this city.

But that doesn't happen. It's not happening. But it did happen in this place. And that is clear evidence of the Holy Spirit of God doing a special and a remarkable work in this place as he sovereignly chose to do.

But then we also have an explicit recognition of the Holy Spirit's work in drawing men and women to himself in the manner in which those who are converted are described.

In verse 48, we read, when the Gentiles heard this, that this good news was to be offered freely and fully to them and not only to the Jews, when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

All who were appointed for eternal life believed. Very clearly, very explicitly, though for some an unpalatable truth, nonetheless, a very clear truth that God had a people, an elect people appointed to be saved and by the work of the Holy Spirit, owning the message that is proclaimed, these men and women are brought to faith, are enabled to exercise faith in Jesus and to be saved, to be forgiven of their sins, to be justified by God.

[39 : 55] And this is a work of the Spirit of God. This offer, if it is to be effective, must necessarily know and enjoy the Spirit's accompanying work and power.

And may we, as those who recognize that to be so, cry out to God that He would accompany His word proclaimed, the gospel offer presented with His Spirit's work.

But finally, as we close, this offer that is made by Paul, as it was made by Paul on this occasion to this congregation there in Pisidian Antioch, and this aspect, as indeed the others also, remains true today.

This offer can finally be described as a sobering offer. And I say it is a sobering offer because immediately having presented the offer, which essentially is what we have in verses 38 and 39.

The next thing Paul says, and it's the final thing he says in this sermon, is, or constitutes, a warning to his audience. In verse 40 he says, take care.

[41 : 13] Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you. Look, you scoffers, wander and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe even if someone told you.

Now, time doesn't allow us to go into the reference which is another Old Testament reference.

There's a context and no doubt much could be gained from exploring that.

But we're not going to do so. Simply to notice that Paul concludes his sermon, he follows on from his offer of forgiveness, the offer of the gospel with a warning.

And really what he is saying is, be very careful that having heard this good news, you do not reject it, you are not careless with it, you do not postpone your response to it.

Take care. Do not do what so many have done in the past. They have been presented with the privilege of hearing God's invitation.

[42 : 16] They have been granted the privilege of discovering what God would do for them. Here, very explicitly, forgiveness of sins offered to them, offered to you, the opportunity to stand righteous, justified before God.

Be careful not to push that message to one side. Be careful not to postpone your response to it. Take care not to be careless in what you do with the offer that is made to you. And so, for that reason, this offer, a glorious offer, a generous offer, is also a sobering offer. And we pray and God grant that it would be so that all of us gathered here this evening would carefully and wisely hear and respond appropriately to the offer of the gospel as it is made to us. Let us pray. Thank you.