

## 0729 (1).MP3

Alright. I got to bed last night at about 2 AM, you guys. 2 AM because I went to a 3rd Eye Blind concert in Atlanta. Any 3rd Eye Blind people in the house this morning? No? Okay. Yeah. There you go. Thank you. But listen, y'all. It's one of those moments where it's the beginning of the concert, which it's been a minute since your boy's been to a concert that lasted that long. But at the beginning, 7,000 people are there, and the guy, the lead singer, has a real unique voice. I love the band, and he goes, hey, guys. I just want you to turn to your friends beside you, and even if you don't know them, I just want you to say good morning because this is a Third Eye Blind concert, man, and it's all love here. And everybody turns and they shake each other's hands and they say hello, and I will never forget this because the lady sitting beside me who had had about 12 too many margaritas, said to me, this is like church. Not really. However, there was something nice about that, and so just take a second, turn to the people beside you, and just say good morning. Tell people you're glad they are here this morning. Yeah. Yeah. I'm I'm glad you're here this morning, and if you're with us for the first time, we are wrapping up 15 week series that we've done on the, book of acts, where we've been talking about how to be the church in a post Christian world. And so we finish our time together, this morning by taking communion at the end of the service. And so I'll talk more about that in a little bit. But we're gonna begin by reading from Acts chapter 20. And so Acts 20, we're gonna read verses 17 through 24 this morning. And this is Paul's journey as he's now making his way finally to Rome, where the story's gonna end, but we're gonna pick it up as he's leaving, Ephesus, a place that he really loved, and he's meeting some friends just down the coast before he makes his way to Jerusalem. And so, let's hear now from the story of God and God's people. Acts chapter 20 verses 17 24. From Melitus, Paul sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And they came to You know very well, he began, how I behaved with with you all the time since the first day I arrived in Asia. I've served the Lord with all humility, with the tears and torments that came upon me because of the plots of the Jews. You you know that I kept not kept back nothing that would have been helpful to you, preaching to you and teaching

you both in public and from house to house. I bore witness both to Jews and Greeks about repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus. And now, look, I'm going to Jerusalem bound there by the spirit. I have no idea what's going to happen to me, but only that the spirit holy spirit testifies to me in city after city that captivity and trouble are in store for me. But I don't reckon my life at any value so long as I can finish my course in the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus to bear witness to the gospel of God's grace. So Sarah and I, my wife Sarah, we have a rhythm in our house, something that we do, almost every single week. It is a religious ritual in our house. We sit down and we go through the calendars. Anybody else love calendaring in in in this place? Right? Sarah and I are we are meticulous about our calendaring, and she's really the driver behind it, and she's not here, so I can talk about it openly. I'm gonna have to modify a bit in the 11 o'clock service. But we sit down, and she'll be like, okay, well, pull out your calendar, and mine's on my computer, so I get my calendar ready. And she goes, let's talk about December. And I'm like, we talked about December last week, but we're gonna talk about December again because who knows? And we make our way from December back to now. We finally get to August. And we get to the week that is coming up, and we talk about the week, and then she goes, okay. You think we're done, but now we're gonna talk about the day. And we begin to talk about each day in the 1st week of August, and then after that, we're gonna actually break down the hour by hour forecast of how our rhythms are gonna work. Does anybody else do this, or am I just crazy? I don't. Okay. Okay. Okay. There we go. Well well well, here's why I think and you might not be as intense as we are, but ultimately, I think the reason that we get caught up in calendaring, and even if you don't do it as intense as we do, I know you have some some semblance of it in your life. Here's why, at least in my house, we do it. Because we like to believe that we are in control of our lives. We like to think that if we plan enough, if we order enough, if we think far enough in advance, we can be in control of our lives. That is how we are geared to think about the rhythms and routines that we inhabit, and so we we think we are in control of our lives. And so what I wanna talk about today is how if we follow the example of Paul, and if we follow what he what he teaches, and more importantly, how he lives as he journeys through, the the book of acts, what

we are gonna find is that maybe, just maybe, we have followed, and and bought into a false bill of goods when we think that we can actually control every single area of our lives. We we get to this point in acts chapter 20. And what we've seen is that Paul, going all the way back to Acts chapter 9 when Paul has this encounter with Jesus, he becomes what is really the dominant character in the whole of the book of Acts, and Paul has this encounter with Jesus, his life is transformed. Paul was one of those guys, type a personality. He knew everything he was gonna do at the time he was gonna do it. I think he probably calendared much like we do. And then he met Jesus, and his life is flipped upside down, and he begins this journey. And as you read through the book of Acts, which if you have not done that, I encourage you go and read it. It's narrative, so it's really compelling and engaging reading, and you can dig into it, and you will find that Paul ends up going from city to city. And while oftentimes he has a plan, what happens more times than not is that his plan is absolutely thrown into disarray, and things do not go the way that he planned or thought that they would. And yet, if we find if we actually pay attention to what is happening in the book of acts, what we see is that Paul is not deterred, that Paul just continues to go from place to place. And where we get in Acts chapter 20 right now is Paul has spent the longest amount of time that he has spent anywhere. Our journey with him has been for years now. And where we are is that he has spent about a year and a half in Ephesus. Can you imagine the longest amount of time you ever spend anywhere is in one city, Ephesus, a year and a half? And yet that is where he found himself, and and he felt the spirit of God calling him. Now it is time to go somewhere else. And so what we encounter in the passage that we read is basically Paul's farewell speech. And if you go and read it for yourself, what you'll find is that it's a speech that is just filled with emotion because Paul loves these people that he spent time with. He he he cries, in fact, in this story. And he says, hey, I just want you to know that you're probably never going to see me again because God is calling me to go somewhere else. Paul says, basically, what I have done with you for the past year and a half, it has been valuable. I've told you the truth. I've preached about Jesus in public. I've taught you about Jesus in the privacy of your own homes. What Paul says is I have done this with humility. I I have taught you about Jesus with humility. There's a

sermon somewhere in there. Right? I think for most of us, what we need to recognize is that one of the key traits of someone who follows Jesus well in this world is that they are humble. Far too often, we go into churches, and we encounter Christians who are arrogant, and they're prideful, and they think they have all the answers figured out. But what you need to know is that a genuine mark of someone who is committed to the way of Jesus is that they are deeply, deeply humble. And I've taught you with humility, and I've taught you with grace, and I promise I've told you the truth, but now God is calling me, he says, to go to Jerusalem. God's calling me to go to Jerusalem, and so Paul has this idea of where he is going to go. And if you read forward in the book, what you find you guys is that Paul does in fact go to Jerusalem, but it takes him significantly longer than he ever thought that it would have. And eventually, Paul gets to Rome where he wanted to go, but it takes significantly longer than it would have seen. And so we find this space in in the book of acts where Paul says, I'm leaving and I'm going to Jerusalem, but there's one sentence one sentence that I want us to fixate on, that I want us to talk about for a little bit this morning, because it runs in direct contradiction with the way we are taught that we can plan our lives, and that we can know exactly what is gonna happen, when it's gonna happen, how it's gonna happen. Because Paul says, I'm going to go to Jerusalem, and he says, but I have no idea what is going to happen to me when I am there. All I know is God is calling me to go in this direction, and I don't know what is gonna happen when I get there. But I've got this sneaking suspicion that it's not gonna be pretty, and I'm gonna suffer for the cause of Jesus. But I don't know, he says, and this is what I wanna talk about this morning. I don't know what is going to happen to me when I get there. And if we can just sit on that sentence for just a few moments, I think what it can do is it can open our eyes to what it looks like for us to follow Jesus in a post Christian world. Because we inhabit a culture that says you can know everything about every minute and every hour, and you can plan your life to the t. But Paul says, I I I know I think I'm gonna get to Jerusalem. I don't know what's gonna happen when I get there. And if you take that sentence seriously, if you follow the overall trajectory of his life where things don't go the way that he planned, and things don't pan out in the way he ever imagined that they would. Here's the takeaway that I want us

to sit on for a while this morning. That following Jesus, following Jesus, yes, in a Christian world, but more importantly, in a post Christian world, collectively as a church, but also for you as an individual. Following Jesus ultimately means for us living into the unknown, living into situations where we aren't going to be sure of what happens. Following Jesus means a willingness to live into the unknown. And I wanna sit with that for just a few minutes because, guys, that I think is one of the most counter cultural things that we can do as followers of Jesus. We can trust that God is actually in charge of things Because the way that we inhabit our our day to day rhythms. Right? I went to Barnes and Noble. Does anybody still go to regular bookstores? Anybody? I love going to bookstores. Amazon, you can have an I don't even have an Amazon account, right, because I am over Amazon. If I wanna book, I'm gonna go to Barnes and Noble, and if they don't have it, then I'll get Brooke to order it off Amazon for me, but I'm not gonna order it myself. Right? And so I go into, Barnes and Noble the other day, and it is immediate. The first thing you see when you walk in is the self help section. And when you walk through the self help section, and it's all about positivity, and it's all about how you can live your best life now, and and there were books after book after book, Top 10 on the New York Times bestseller list on how you with a few minor modifications in your life can set yourself up for exactly the purpose of what you want. If you can just minimize the amount of clutter in your life, then you can, firmly establish your schedule. If you can only save a certain amount of money, then you can be prepared for retirement, and you can know what you're gonna have when you're done. And I could go on and on down the list, but when you walk through the bookstore, or when you get on the New York Times bestseller list, it is no mistake that we tend to think that we are actually in control, that we are actually If you want to get back to it, last week I talked about idolatry. It's this great idea that we are in fact God, and we can control every single area of our lives, and we can, we can make sure that things go the way we want them to and the way we plan them to. And so we look at our retirement accounts. I'm a 40 I'll be 41 years old on Tuesday. And so I have begun to be really really concerned with the state of my 401 k, you guys. And I get online and I look at it because I wanna be certain that I've got enough money, so that when I retire, I can go do all of the things that I dreamed of doing. Does

anybody else know what I'm talking about right now? Because this is the world where we are living. You can plan, and you can control your marriage. And you can plan, and you can control your finances. And you can plan, and you can control the outcome of your children. If you have ever needed a lesson in humility, no matter how well you parent your child, right, they are gonna turn out wildly different than you ever imagined that they would. And yet we are told, if you follow these techniques, and if you do these things the right way, then you can control the outcomes. And that is what we are taught in Barnes and Noble. But what I would also tell you is that increasingly, that's what we are taught in the church. That's what we're taught in the church. Right? I mean, one of the one of the verses that you'll see if you get on social media and you start doom scrolling on so on TikTok or on Instagram, and you see all these people who have fabulous lives and they're followers of Jesus, and you look down at the hashtags, what you will see is that again and again people put Jeremiah 29/11. Y'all know that one? For I know the plans for you, declares the Lord. Plans for you to prosper. Plans plans for you to have a great life. Now let's take a step back and remember that Jeremiah was writing this to a people who were in captivity in Babylon. And their life was a train wreck when he writes this. Right? But what we have done is we've hijacked this idea of Jeremiah 21. I know the plans that God has for you, plans for you to prosper. And we've taken that concept, and we've imported it wholesale into the church, and we've said that if you just plan enough, then you will prosper. If you just plan enough, ultimately, you can be God. But if you're paying attention, Jeremiah 29/11 says, I know the plans for you declares the Lord. And what that means y'all is that God knows your plans for your life, but necessarily you're not God. And God knows, I don't. Jesus goes as far as to say, you don't even know the number of hairs on your head. All you need to do is live for the kingdom today, and everything else will take care of itself. And what I want for us as we move into a post Christian world, both collectively and as individuals, is for us to be freed from the anxiety of believing that we can ultimately control every area of our lives. Yes, God knows what's gonna happen, but we don't. And the good news is we don't have to. If you go through the stories of scripture, and you begin all the way back in the beginning, right, there was this guy Abraham, you remember him? Father Abraham had many sons

and many sons had father Abraham. And I'm one of them and so are you. So I could make y'all do that again, but I'm not going to. And what you find, you guys, if you're not familiar with that story, it's one of the first call stories in the Bible where God calls someone to do something out of the ordinary, something outside of the rhythms of their lives. And Abraham was living in this place called Ur of the Chaldeans, and he was successful and he was happy and his life was good. And one day God shows up and God says, Abraham, I want you to get up and I want you to leave, and I want you to take your family, and I'm gonna take you somewhere else. And Abraham says, where where am I going? And God says, don't worry about it. I don't don't worry about it. Just pick up your stuff and leave. And Abraham does it with no idea of what is in store ahead of him. Abraham has no idea where he is going, but he knows the call is to be faithful because God knows even if he doesn't. Fast forward into the new testament where Jesus comes onto the scene, and I want you to imagine. Right? We see Jesus as the crucified and resurrected son of God. But those 1st century followers, they initially just saw him as a rabbi the first time they met him. They didn't know who he was. They just knew he was this compelling teacher who came around. And in that first interaction that Jesus has with Matthew and with Mark, he walks down by the sea of Galilee, and he says to them, come and follow me, and I'll make you fishers of men. Come and follow me. He doesn't say first we're gonna go to Capernaum, and then we're gonna go to Tyre and Sidon. No. No. He says, just pick up your stuff and follow me. And those young teenage boys, because that's what they would that's what they would have been in the 1st century. They dropped their stuff, and with no questions asked, they simply followed the one who they believed which show them the way, the truth, and the life. See, God knew, but they didn't. And they understood that they didn't have to because they were entrusting themselves to someone who was bigger and better and more beautiful than anything they could ever imagine. And it isn't just a call to the disciples, you guys, but what I want us to hear this morning is that it is a call to each and every single one of us. Where where Jesus is talking to his disciples and he is sharing with them the store. He is sharing with them how he is gonna do this incredible thing in the world, and Jesus comes to his disciples and he says, who do people say that I am? Right? We're halfway through the

gospel of Matthew now. Who do people say that I am? And there's this moment in the gospels where Peter, one of the earliest followers of Jesus says, you are the Messiah, the son of the risen God. And Jesus looks at Matthew or Jesus looks at Peter, and he says, you're right. Peter, on this rock, I will build my church and the gates of hell won't stand against it. And Peter, here's what I want you to do. I want you to follow me. And so pick up your cross and follow. I'm not telling you where we're going. I'm not telling you what's gonna happen. But here's what I'm telling you. Pick up your cross and follow me. And in the exact same way that Jesus said that to Peter in the beginning, Jesus says that to each and every one of us. The call is not to know every detail of your life, but the call is simply to pick up your cross and follow Jesus. And you guys, if we can hear that, right, if we can hear that, it's gonna have direct implications for our lives. It's gonna have direct implications for our lives as individuals, and I wanna talk about that for just a minute, and it's also gonna have direct implications for our lives as a community. Pick up your cross and follow me. You don't have to know where you are going exactly. Just trust that I'm gonna lead you. And if we can hear Jesus say that as individuals, can I tell you something? It will free you from anxiety. It will free you from anxiety. If you can trust that you don't have to know every single step of your way. Right? I cannot believe how often I will hear people come up, you know, kids are about to go to college, and they'll say to these college freshmen, what do you wanna be when you grow up? I have no idea. Like, I still wanted to be a rocket scientist when I was in going into college. Right? You have no idea what you wanna be, but we are we are consumed and obsessed with knowing all the details. Pick up your cross and follow me. We think everybody's gotta have it all planned out, and everything's got to be pigeonholed and buttoned up and tied with a bow and a string on top. But if we can understand, our call is not to know all the details, but it's simply to follow him. It'll free you from anxiety. It'll free you from worry. I'm telling you. I was talking to a friend of mine last week or a couple weeks ago actually, and he's a friend that's going into ministry, and he's really struggling with it right now. Right? He's got he's had a job for a while, but can I tell you something? He's not here. He's not gonna watch online, and he's not really that good at it. He's just not really that good at it. Okay? And as I'm talking to him, and I'm counseling him, and I'm sharing how I



think God is calling him to live in this world, Y'all, it was amazing to me because over and over again, here's the refrain that he used. God called me to be this thing. God called me to be a pastor. Over and over again, that's what he said. God called me to be a pastor. And there was a moment where I had to get real with him, and I said, buddy, God didn't call you to be a pastor. God called you to follow Jesus and everything else is optional. God doesn't call you to a particular profession, and it defines your life forever and ever. Amen. You don't have to know that level of detail. And everything else you can figure out as you go along. One of my friends, one of my mentors once told me, it's a phrase that I love, and I've carried it with me as I've gone throughout my days. And here's what it is, that that you guys, we don't always know where we're going. We don't always know where we're going, but we know who we're following. We don't have to know every single step of our journey. You don't need to know that at 25, you're gonna start putting money in your 401 k. And you don't need to know that at 30, you're gonna have your first kid. And at 35, you're gonna have a house with 2 dogs and a white picket fence. Because inevitably, things aren't gonna work out that way. You don't have to know all of that. See, sometimes y'all, we don't know where we're going, but we know who we're following. And Jesus says, pick up your cross and follow me. Seek first the kingdom of God and everything else will take care of itself. See, if we understand as Paul did, I I don't know what's gonna happen to me, but I know this is the direction that I need to be. Then it frees you up from the anxiety of a culture that says you've got to have it all figured. Morning and you've been living with this existential anxiety that says, I don't have everything planned out, and all my friends on social media do. I don't have everything exactly buttoned up the way that I do, and all my friends, they've got it figured out. Can I tell you something? No, they don't. And you don't have to either. We don't know where we're going, but we know who we are following. And if you can live in that light, then you will be freed from worry, follow Jesus and follow him well. It's true for us as individuals, but the other thing I would say is it is true for us as a church. For 15 weeks in this series, what I've been talking about is how the church is in decline. Right? Yay. Yippee. Good news. The church is in decline. 15 weeks. That's what I've said. That we are on the brink even in Augusta, already happening in New York, in Atlanta, in any city on the West Coast

or even big cities on the East Coast. We are on the brink of post Christian culture. And you can look at the statistics and you know that it is true. By 2050, we are gonna be a minority religion in the United States. That that 40% of people 40 and under have walked away from the church with no intention of coming back. And I can quote these statistics to you, and many of you at this point can quote them yourselves. And we have to prepare for what it looks like to live in a culture where Christendom is no longer the dominant way of being. I read a report the other day from Lifeway that said 4,000 churches a year in the United States are gonna be closing. 4000 churches a year. And at some level, you guys, it is right, and it's okay to be heartbroken about that. But but if we hear those stats and we don't we don't hear them properly, it will lead to anxiety because some we got to do something or else it's all gonna collapse. No, y'all. It's gonna collapse. But that's okay. It's gonna collapse. But the church is going to collapse. But It's gonna collapse. But the church is always going to be moving forward. And yes, we are moving into a post Christian culture, but I think it actually gives us an opportunity to be the church that God has called us and created us to be. To live into the freedom that says there's no longer cultural expectation to be a Christian, but you can be free from anxiety and dread that you're gonna be the newest, coolest, hippest place because guess what? You're not. And you can simply be followers of Jesus. See, for me, you guys, I go back to that passage that I quoted a little bit earlier where Jesus is talking to Peter and Peter says, you're the Messiah. You're the one. You're the one. And Jesus looks to Peter and he says, that thing you just said, that I am the Messiah, Peter, you're right. And on that rock, I'm going to build my church and the gates of hell the gates of hell will not stand against it. Nothing will overcome it. If Jesus promises us that the church will overcome even death and hell itself, then we can rest assured you guys that post Christian culture will not kill the church because Jesus is still active and moving in us. And Jesus is still leading us into a future that is better than anything we could ever ask or imagine. And so if hell will not overcome the church then we can live with freedom, And we can live free from anxiety because God will still work in us and through us. See, that's what I want us to understand as we come to the end of this series that y'all we have an opportunity to be a new sort of church by being an ancient one. We have an opportunity to be a new sort of

church that says, let Christendom collapse because we are gonna represent Jesus even when it's in the minority. That's who I want us to be, and that's what we're going to do. And we can do it without fear, and we can do it without anxiety. Do you know why? Because Jesus is faithful. We can do it without fear, and we can do it with anxiety because we know that his promise is to be with us always. And so as we come to the end of this series, what I want us to do really is pretty simple. I want us to take communion together. I want us to take his body that is broken and his blood that is poured out because it is a reminder that you don't have to have it all figured out because he's done it all for us. You don't have to have all the answers for yourself or for the church because he's the one who's taking care of all the details. And so that's how I want us to end this series, together taking communion. And if you're here in this space today and you're a follower of Jesus, if you're here and you've given your life to Christ, you are welcome at this table regardless of your tradition. And here's the thing that I want us to understand as we move into a post Christian world. Don't ever forget that he is faithful. That we can trust in his goodness. So we come to the table today sure and certain that he is with us. He is with us as a church and he is with you as an individual. You don't have to know all the details. You don't have to have it all figured out because the good news of the gospel is that he is faithful and he has done it all. So let's pray and then I'm gonna invite everyone to come down and, take their place. We'll take communion. So join me as we pray together. Opportunity to come into this space. And Lord, as we come to the end of our series, help us to know that you are faithful, that you are with us, God, that you can be counted on to to guide our steps. Lord, some of us are here this morning, and we live with this crushing anxiety believing that we have to have everything figured out, that every moment in our calendar must be full, and all of the things that we desire have to be put properly into place. Lord, free us from that today. Help us to know that Paul says a word we can hear and trust, this morning that you are with us. But Lord, we know who we're following. Lord, this is our prayer and we ask it in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.