

Sermon Transcript from November 13th, 2016
The Exclusive Paul
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So, what we're going to do with just the time that we have here, if you've been doing The Year of Biblical Literacy, a whole bunch of you here at Reality San Francisco committed to reading through the Bible, you're almost there. You guys, it's like mid-November now and you've got like five weeks left. You've almost made it. So, if you're doing that, you're well into the letters of Paul now. So, what Dave and I talked about, what I wanted to do is just take these two Sundays to kind of help reset the default on your vision or understanding of who Paul is. Maybe you've never read Paul's letters at all before. Maybe you read them once and you were like, "Never again. I was too bothered."

Maybe it was a mixed bag for you. You were challenged, intellectually challenged. Other times you're like, "What is this person talking about?" You were sometimes mildly offended, sometimes really offended by some of this. So, maybe your vision of Paul is just bewilderment. Maybe all you know about Paul's letters is family members or other Christians that you've known who like to quote sayings of Paul and then use them to censure other people's behavior and so on. And whether that's right or wrong is not the point. The point is that's all you know about Paul.

So, what I wanted to do is just reset the default to help us get to the center of gravity for who Paul was, what he was about and what he accomplished and what Jesus accomplished through him, which was remarkable. What should come to our minds, the first thing we think of when we think about Paul the Apostle is his contribution to the earliest Jesus movement, which was to create a viral network of house-church communities in the largest and most strategic cities in the ancient Roman world. And, by definition and for the very purpose of making each one of these house-churches a multiethnic community that held together, in a common space, culturally diverse expressions of allegiance and love for Jesus.

That was the unique calling of Paul, and he did it. He actually pulled it off. And two of those churches – I mentioned this last week – the one in Corinth and the one in Ephesus, come to be some of the most influential churches in the centuries to follow. Paul passed away, executed largely unnoticed by the ancient world. But, within 200 years, the movement that he was a part of helping start actually gained the non-stop attention of the Roman emperor and the Roman empire. Because, the ancient world had simply never seen anything like this before. Despite socioeconomic differences, ethnic differences, gender difference, slave or free – that's a big category in the ancient world – all of these people would gather in these homes and, as one Roman governor said, "Sing hymns to this one they call Christ, as if to a God."

And the Romans had no idea what to do with this. And this was Paul's heartbeat. We looked at what Paul's introduction of himself was. If you were going to try to introduce Paul, how would you do it? Well, let's just let him do it. And I want to launch off of a passage that I showed you guys last week. It's Romans 1. It's Paul introducing himself to a group of people that he, for the most part, has not met. And how does he do it? We'll reread it just to get it fresh in our minds again. This is from the beginning of his letter to the Romans; the churches in Rome.

He says, **"Paul, a servant of the Messiah Jesus, called to be an apostle..."** – do you remember "apostle" is a Greek word spelling with English letters. Your translators just chose not to translate that one apparently. Do you remember what it means? "Official representative."

"Called to be an [official representative] and set apart for God's good news—which he promised long ago through his prophets in the sacred Scriptures."

This good news is about His Son, whose physical lineage was from the line of David; the line of Israel's ancient kings. And through the Holy Spirit, He was established as the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead. It's Jesus, the Messiah, our Lord. Amen? Amen. Through Him, I was graciously made His representative to call all of the nations to faithful obedience for the sake of His name. And that includes you who are in Rome, also called by Jesus the Messiah and loved by God.

Can we go back to the previous slide? So, I highlighted this key phrase right here. This is the heartbeat of Paul. He was called as a representative of Jesus, called by Jesus to do what? And there's two pieces here. To call all of the nations to faithful obedience. All nations; faithful obedience. It's this radically inclusive, all humanity call to a very exclusive

center; a focus. Faithful obedience to Jesus. And this is intuitive. Right? No matter how large and diverse a group of people that you are trying to unify, every call to unity has to have some exclusive focus on a center to which everybody unites. So, what our culture, as we continue to learn as if we didn't know it already, seems incapable of producing the kind of unity that Paul was able to produce on the scale of these networks of multi-ethnic, house-church communities. He actually did it.

And just to get a visual reminded of this, this is so radically innovative in the history of ancient religion, in the history of humanity. What happened in those first few decades was just remarkable. I just want it to sink into our memory how remarkable and significant this call was. I want to show you a picture of a church. My hunch is that most of you have not been to this church before. It's on the other side of the planet. It's a Catholic church in Nazareth in Israel. It's in the town that Jesus grew up in. It's called "The Church of the Annunciation." It's actually the largest Catholic church structure in all the Middle East. It's in Nazareth, which is a small city. It's like 100,000 people. It's this massive, massive building. And Nazareth is, you know, a small city now. It was not a big city in Jesus' day. Jesus grew up in the sticks. Right? In Podunk, hill-country town. That's what I call Nazareth.

The archaeologists who have reconstructed and dug up the earliest layers of Nazareth from Jesus' day tell us that no more than 500 people lived in Nazareth. So now, there's this city surrounding this Church of the Annunciation. The whole church is dedicated to retelling and commemorating the story of when Mary receives this message, this divine message that she's pregnant and going to give birth to Israel's Messiah.

Now, to understand what's happening in this church – I'll show you the inside of it in just a second – you have to know something about this next picture here, which is a classic, classic picture of the history of Western art. What's this picture called? Madonna and Child. Not the other Madonna. Right? But, you could probably see that already. So, this is an iconic, iconic fixture, image, in Catholic art history and Western art history. It's of Mary and the baby Jesus. They're both usually depicted with some kind of halo. They're pretty faint in this one. This representation of Jesus has been fixed in the minds and the memories of billions of human beings now throughout history. As we look at this right now, there's one thing that I hope just leaps off the picture right to you. What do you notice about the baby Jesus?

He's plump. Alright. He's blond. And He's white. And that's because His mom is blondish and white. Most – especially in Western art history. Most, almost all, to the T, depictions of Jesus and His family, they're all of white Europeans. There are many details, historical details, we don't know about Jesus of Nazareth and how He grew up and so on. But, one thing we know for sure: He did not look like that. Just not at all. He was an Eastern Jewish man. Almost certainly on the shorter side. Dark, olive skin. Thick black hair. He did not look like that.

So, here's what's remarkable about the Church of the Annunciation. The church was built just about 48 years ago and what the Catholic church did was commission dozens and dozens of artists who are Christians from around the world and asked them to create their own representation of the Madonna and Child, but they were commissioned to draw upon the traditional folk art imagery of their own heritage; their cultural heritage. You walk into this building and you are overwhelmed by representations of Jesus. And I just want to try and recreate a bit of the experience by walking it through. I took pictures of all of them. I'm just going to show you some of them. But, this will do something to you as you look at these images.

Singapore. Greece. Ecuador. Bolivia. Romania. Vietnam. Korea. China. Croatia. I love Croatia. You're going to Google all of these afterwards, right? And you should. Thailand. I love Thailand. Scotland. That's my home team. Scotland. Italy. And, my personal favorite, Ethiopia. So amazing. And Japan. Now, this pales in comparison, this virtual tour. But, just try all of them together. They're kind of blurry because they're far away from you. So, this is just a small sample. This church, for some people, it's a museum. But, it stands there in Nazareth today as a living symbol of one of the most remarkable facts of human history. You guys, there isn't another religious tradition in human history that can show you something like this. The history of the Jesus movement is the most culturally diverse religious movement in the history of the human race. Do you understand the gravity of what we're looking at right here?

When we see this – and there are dozens more in this building – it becomes so clear to you. And when you're sitting there in a sea of people looking at all these images and you're not hearing your own language anywhere and neither is anyone else, it becomes so clear that you and I are part of something so much more ancient than where we live right now. 240 years is the democrat experiment we're living within, and it just becomes so clear that Christianity is not a Western religion, that Jesus is not captive to any one nation, that He is not the

patron of any particular voting demographic, that He can never be coopted by any single ethnic group. The resurrected Jesus, as Paul said, is the King of all nations, and He is the one in whom every diverse expression of the human story finds its destiny and its fulfillment. There's nobody on the outside that Jesus does not represent in His humanity.

Because Jesus was Israel's Messiah, but He was so much more. What all of the apostles, the official representatives, see in the person of Jesus is the truly human one. They believed that when they were looking at Jesus, what they saw and what they experienced in Jesus of Nazareth was looking into the face of God. The one true God who is imaged in every single human being and all of this diversity. So, the singular Jesus is the only one in whom all of humanity can find their unity. That's a very bold claim to make in the first century or in the twenty-first century. But, that was Paul's absolute heartbeat.

And what we're looking at 2,000 years later is the fruition of Paul's dream. This is what Paul was about and this is what the history of the Jesus movement has always been about. It's the most inclusive movement in the history of the human race, because there is no human that doesn't come within the reach of the God-man, Jesus. Somebody say "amen" or something. I mean, this is absolutely remarkable, you guys. Yes.

So, let's come back to Romans 1 and, particularly, to just that highlighted phrase in Romans 1 on the slide. So, that's what Paul's heartbeat is, to call all nations to unity in giving allegiance to the one Jesus. Now, what ethnicity was Jesus again? Not white European. He's Jewish. So, somehow in this Jewish man, the God of all humanity finds its destiny. And that's a tension that's been at work in the Jesus movement always since the very beginning. See, here's how this played out. In Paul's day, him doing this, going out to all of the nations to call together a diverse people around King Jesus, this was really controversial. Really controversial.

If you did The Year of Biblical Literacy, you read the first three quarters of your Bible, which is called "The Hebrew Bible" or "the Old Testament." The Jewish Scriptures. And they're focused specifically on the story of one ethnic national people group who are the covenant people of God. It's the people of Israel; the Jewish people. And what happened with Jesus and with Paul and the circle of the apostles was absolute revolution and the fulfillment, they claimed, of the story of Israel. That through the Jewish Messiah, a new human family was being created under King Jesus. So, all of the boundary lines that used to mark the covenant people of God, they were these symbolic practices of Israel. Like, eating kosher, keeping Sabbath, circumcision for males, worship as a national people group that all centered around an actual building, like a temple, in Jerusalem.

All of that shifted in the Jesus movement and all of a sudden, Paul creates these communities in Rome and in Corinth and in Athens. And what he tells the Jewish followers of Jesus is, "Keep doing that. That's your heritage. That is your unique expression of giving honor to King Jesus, who is your Messiah."

But then, he had to iron out the differences between these followers of Jesus and these Greek followers of Jesus. For them, getting circumcised is just not on the table. Alright? For the men, at least. They're adults and this is all going to be very painful. So, that's first. And Jewish dietary restrictions and so on. So they're like, "No. We want to honor King Jesus through channeling our cultural expression."

Just like what those paintings were all about. And what Paul had to try and help them do was learn how to navigate and honor those real differences. Like, they just saw things in a very different way. Those differences remained important to them. Like, the church held a space for each of them to be different in that way. But, at the same time, it was a surrender of those unique identities to say this Jewish identity and this Greek identity, "It shapes part of who I am, but it doesn't define who I am. When I'm in this body together, all my particularities and my particular views and opinions about this or that, it all becomes second tier to the overriding unity that we share in King Jesus."

Amen? And that has been a paradox and a tension at the heart of the Jesus movement for the last two millennia. And every culture into which Christianity has gone, there have been different ways that those tensions align themselves. And in the last seven days, right, Christians in America find themselves in another configuration of those differences. But, here we are. Like, if I could take a picture of you all and get it up on here, we could add it to the wall in Nazareth. Couldn't we? Well, you're not baby Jesus. But, you get my point.

Like, here in the city and here all over America and all over Planet Earth, there are communities of Jesus full of people who are more different than we could possibly

imagine, and we all bring that unique heritage, but we also surrender it. Because, what defines us when we gather as one body is the love of King Jesus; that He loved me, that He gave Himself for me, that He was raised from the dead on my behalf and that His life is given as a gift to me and to my enemy. That Jesus' life is given to me and the people that I love and the people that I feel like I hate. And when we come together, when Jesus' people come together, all of that gets put on second tier. It's one of the most difficult things that Christians have found themselves trying to do over the last 2,000 years and it's the task that we find before ourselves today.

So, if these Jewish boundary markers through ethnic practices don't mark the family of Jesus' people after the movement launches, what does mark the family of Jesus' people? It's this phrase right here. What Paul calls "faithful obedience." So, all of the nations: inclusive Paul. Faithful obedience: exclusive Paul. So, what was it that marked the earliest followers of Jesus as noticeable? These are the things that define the identity of the people of God. It's not skin color, it's not socioeconomic class. So, what is it? And the two things are – again, as you read through Paul's letters – the things that he talks about the most: sex and idolatry.

I want to run away again right now, the conflict avoider in me. Sex and idolatry. A level of sexual integrity that was absolutely foreign to the ancient Roman world. That was one of the core boundary markers. We'll explore it for a minute. And idolatry. Withdrawing my participation in the worship of the Greek and Roman gods and giving my allegiance to King Jesus. And actually, of the two, idolatry was the way more scandalous, problem-causing one for the early Christians.

Sex. Look at how Paul's mind works here. This is a passage from 1 Corinthians 12.

He says, **"In the same way that a body is one thing, yet has many individual parts, all of its many parts form a single body."**

Is anybody learning anything right now? It's like, "Yeah. That's perfectly evident. I have many parts. One body. Thank you, Paul."

"That's how it is with the Messiah."

Oh, what does that mean?

"For we were all baptized by one Spirit and so we all form one body. Whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free."

So, you might read that and you think, "Yeah. Inclusive Paul. This is awesome. One body. Many members. We're all really different, but one body. What does that have to do with sex?"

Because, human beings, in Paul's mind, human beings aren't simply a ghost in the machine; souls trapped in bodies. This is completely foreign to the biblical view of humanity. The biblical view of humanity is human beings are earthlings. Literally made of the earth, right? We're earthlings. We are whole person, complex, interwoven, embodied creatures of mind, body, spirit, emotion, all of it packed together and none of it completely separable from each other. So, if through the Spirit and through my baptism I've been joined to this body, this is the Messiah's body right here. Many bodies. We're all bodies sitting here. Right? So, it's not just that you have a body, you are a body. And we have all of these bodies and we make up the Messiah's body. So, when Paul hears that there are some men in the church of Corinth who have continued the habit that they just grew up with in Roman culture of having recreational sex with the local prostitutes who work down at the Zeus temple down the street, look at his logic and how he addresses this problem. It's fascinating. Look at what he says. It's in the next slide.

He says, "Don't you know that your bodies are members of the Messiah? So then, should I take any body member of the Messiah and unite it with a prostitute? No way. Don't you know that he who unites himself with a prostitute becomes one with her in body?"

Isn't that what page 2 of the Bible says? He quotes from page 2 right here.

"The two become one flesh. But, the person who's united with the Lord is one with Him in spirit. Flee sexual immorality. You do not belong to yourself. You are bought at a price, therefore honor God with your body."

So, this is like a foreign language to Westerners, right? Because, one of our greatest convictions as a culture is the freedom and liberty and determination of the individual. If you love the inclusive Paul – we love the inclusive Paul. "Yay. Multi-ethnic." We love it, right? At least we say we do. But, for Paul, then, there's so many implications of that. If the people of Jesus are truly a unified, diverse, multi-ethnic body of the Messiah, then here's an implication of that: your body isn't yours and my body is not mine to do whatever I wanted with. My body is a member of this body and this body is Jesus' body.

That has huge implications with what we do with our bodies when it comes to sex. Do you see how Paul follows this here? This is Paul's moral argument. "You belong to the Church. So, don't sleep around."

That's his argument. Like, in a profound way, your individual body is a part of the representation of this body. And to unite your body in a way that goes against the teachings of Jesus with another body, do you see how the lines are getting crossed right there? It's a moment of insanity. You're forgetting your true identity. And where's Paul getting this? He's getting this from the teachings of Jesus and Jesus talked about sex and bodies on more than one occasion. Jesus had the ultimate high view of sex. The great irony in our culture is that Christianity is often accused of having a low view of sex like it's dirty and shameful and don't talk about it.

And if you actually read the teachings of Jesus, it's exactly the opposite. He has the highest view of sex and the sacredness of the body that you can possibly imagine. In fact, He thinks that sex and the human body and what happens when human beings have sex is so remarkable and so significant that it has the power to generate life or it has the power to destroy human beings. The same exact thing. So, in Jesus' teachings, you see a high view of sex and the body, that my body belongs to Jesus' body and He dedicated His body to a covenant of love and commitment to His people. And Jesus' followers, it's the sexual ethic of Jesus' followers right from His teachings is that our bodies, sexually, are to be dedicated to the purpose of a covenant marriage between a man and a woman.

Now, I'm already sweating and getting nervous, right? Because, I know that there are people in the room and you disagree. And I respect that. I totally respect that. But, if I put on my historian hat, it is in fact what Jesus said. And I have a choice before me of whether or not I want to join Jesus' body on His terms and discover the wisdom of what He was trying to guide people towards, towards a new vision. I mean, if the multi-ethnic, inclusive Paul is a new vision of humanity, what is this vision of sexuality? This is just like a completely new vision of being a sexual human. Full of wisdom. It's the highest view of the body and of sexuality that you can imagine. And for Paul, it absolutely follows if we are one body, what I do with my body matters.

Now, one thing you'll notice as you're reading through Paul's letters – it was true right here – almost all of Paul's talk about sexual ethics is aimed at men. And there's a reason. There's a historical reason for that, and I'll just quote a history nerd, because he'll illuminate this for us. It's a guy named "Larry Hurtado." We're selling his book in the back. I told him to get a bunch to sell to you and you should get this book. It's unbelievable.

"In the Roman era, there was a double standard in sexual practice. Women were generally held to a standard of strict, marital chastity. Men, however, were allowed considerably more freedom to have sex with many others. Although sex with other men's wives was not approved, all other kinds of sexual activity were openly tolerated and actually encouraged. As Demosthenes..." – say it 10 times twice. Demosthenes, Demosthenes – "...the fourth century orator put it, we Romans have prostitutes for pleasure, slaves for our daily desires, male and female, and wives to give us legitimate children and to guard our households."

"In this setting," – pay attention – "Paul's exhortations to sexual integrity, given mostly to men, project a radically different standard among Christians. He makes the unusual move of holding men to the same standards of holiness and honor expected of women, thereby challenging the dominant double standard in the time."

Do you get what he's saying right there? So, here's a historical irony for you. What, in our day, is considered an oppressive, institutional, ancient, conservative view of sex, in Paul's day was a radically innovative move towards equality between sexual integrity standards expected the same between men and women. Do you get it? Once you see it in Paul's letters, you can't unsee it. Every time he's getting in men's faces about sex, he is at the same time honoring and elevating the status of the women in these communities by telling these men to behave in the same way and to move right towards the double standard. This is

remarkable. He's not even a theologian, you guys. He's just a historian. And he's telling you how Paul's ethic would have been perceived in his day.

Sex was a huge way that the early Christians were marked as a unique kind of family apart from their Greek and Roman neighbors. But, it actually wasn't the most provocative one. Sex and idolatry. And this follows from being members of Jesus' body. Idolatry is the next one. Let's just read another passage. How are you guys doing? Are you with me? Let's do one more. Let's do one more.

This is in 1 Corinthians 10. **"Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry."**

Paul only says in his letters even to flee from two things: sex with somebody that's not your spouse and idolatry.

"Isn't the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of the Messiah? And isn't the bread that we break a participation in the body of the Messiah? Because there is one loaf, and we who are many are one body, for we all share one loaf."

So, I read this last week. So, at the core of the early Christian gatherings and all the way through is the Eucharist or Communion; taking the bread and the cup together. And we are eating the symbols, we're eating the story of Jesus' self-giving life and love, His death for us and His resurrection for us. And it doesn't matter, slave or free, whatever your skin color, whatever your economic status, we all share at the same table and eat together in the worship of Jesus. It's one of the most radical statements of the inclusive Paul ever. But, look what He says what follows. We're part of the Messiah's body, and when we eat from the one bread and the cup, it's another symbol of our unity as His body.

So, my name's Sergius – my name's Tim, but let's just pretend my name's Sergius – and I'm a new follower of Jesus. So, whatever, I grew up in Corinth and there's this Zeus temple down the street – and we already talked about the prostitutes that Sergius would have grown up sleeping with there, encouraged by his father.

Also what goes on there is meals of honor to the god, Zeus. Temples were the butcher shops in ancient Roman cities, because there's constantly a cycle of animal sacrifices coming through these ancient temples. So, the butcher industry was located around these temples. So, let's say I get invited by my friends. I'm a new Christian. I get invited by my friends.

"Hey, you know, our friend, Cercius, he's offering an honorary sacrifice. He wants a really good wheat harvest this year. He's going to give an offering to Zeus, the god of thunder and weather and rain and so on. So, come on. Join us. Join us, Sergius."

And what do you do? What do you do? Look at the counsel Paul gives here. He says, "Do I mean that food sacrificed to an idol is anything? Am I saying that an idol is anything? No, no, no. The sacrifices of pagans are offered to..." – and I'm tricking you right here – "...daimonion."

Say it with me. It's a Greek word. Daimonion.

"Not to God. And listen, I don't want you to be participants with daimonion."

Because, if you're a Christian, you're a participant with who? With the Messiah. So, don't be a participant with a daimonion. It's bad news.

"Listen, you can't come in here and drink the cup of the Lord and have the cup of daimonion too. You can't have part in both the Lord's table and the table of daimonion."

And the million-dollar question that you're asking is, "What on earth is a daimonion?"

A daimonion. So, you can guess because the English word that translates this in your translations is very close. It sounds very similar to daimonion. What's the English word? Demons. In our culture, we're so awash in the later European, medieval mythology of the little reptilian creatures that sit on your shoulder and whisper and entice you to say mean things to your neighbor or something like that. Right? Are you with me? Like, that's the caricature, and that's ridiculous. Let's all acknowledge how silly and ridiculous that is. Right? There's

nothing like that in the Bible.

Daimonion. It's the Greek word for "demigod," for spiritual beings who are not the all-powerful creator God, but are in rebellion against the one true creator God or who are meant to serve in God's host and they do so no longer. Daimonion. Rebel gods. Rebel beings. In the Bible's view of the world, there's rebel humans and then there's rebel daimonion; spiritual beings. In other words, what Paul's saying is for Sergius to go down to that Zeus temple and to participate in a sacrificial meal offered to a daimonion, like, you're messing with fire there.

And then Paul says, "Listen, is the idol statue, is that anything? No, that's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is there's real spiritual evil at work in the world and it inspires all kinds of things that lead humans to destruction. You don't want to mess with that. Your allegiance is to King Jesus and King Jesus alone."

Let me show you a picture of one of the most important daimonion in the ancient Roman world. It's the next slide. It's a goddess. "Dea" means "goddess" in Latin. "Dea." What's the name of the goddess? "Roma." Here on a Roman coin, you can see the face of an emperor. And by Paul's day and in the centuries to follow, there was a strong, strong move after an emperor died and then while they were still alive to declare them to be sons of god; to declare them to be gods. So, on one side of the coin, you have the emperor; the son of god. And then on the flipside of the coin, you have the goddess, Roma.

Now, how do you worship the goddess, Roma? You sing songs? No. You go offer a sacrifice in gratefulness that the powers of the Roman empire have graced you with peace for another year. See, in the ancient world, idolatry is about power and worship is about allegiance. It's the worship of power. And when I'm going down to the Zeus temple, what am I doing? All of these gods – Zeus and Aphrodite and Apollos and so on – were deifications of powers that humans want to harness for me and the benefit of my tribe. Sex, war, music, archery, weather, military power. It's military power turned into a god. And at every corner and in every Roman city, you could go offer your allegiance. In fact, you were called to by the emperor to give allegiance to Roma and to the emperor himself as the son of god.

Do you see why this is certainly the more provocative of the two boundary markers here? So, look at what the history nerd has to say right here. Larry Hurtado. We'll land the plane right here.

"Early Christianity lacked any of the things typically that comprised religion in the Roman world. There were no shrines, there was no temple. Therefore, no statues of the deity. There was no alter and there were no sacrifices and no priesthood. This was totally bizarre in a culture saturated with temples and gods. To deny the gods their worship was effectively to deny their reality."

You actually really offend your friends if you don't go down and worship Zeus with them.

"In the withdrawal of the newly converted Christians from the ubiquitous veneration of the gods in public and family environments was seen as abrupt, arbitrary, unjustified and deeply worrying to the Romans. All of these gods governed various arenas of human life and one's family and city and national gods were guardians against plague and fire and disaster. Refusal to participate in their worship would have been taken as disloyalty to one's family and one's city and is disregard for the welfare of one's neighbors."

Do you get what he's saying right here? To honor Jesus as Lord was an act fraught with what we would call "political significance." And I would argue that nothing has changed as we sit in the 21st century. If saying "Jesus is Lord" doesn't have political significance, then we simply have no idea what Jesus and the apostles were actually trying to talk about. Idolatry is about the worship of power. It's about exalting whatever power's at work in the world. One of them is national security. Exalting it to the place of a god so that it gets my ultimate allegiance. It's where I find my identity. It's where I find my hope. It's where my mind goes when the world is chaotic. It's the place where my hopes become focused. And then you know that this god was your hope, of course, when the whole thing comes shattering down and you think the world is over.

And the early Christians were absolutely stubborn in this refusal to acknowledge anything as god other than King Jesus. And I think there's a wisdom – there's so much wisdom. Let me land the plane.

The Christian movement is this paradox of radical inclusivity with an exclusive focus on faithful obedience to Jesus. And those boundary markers in the first century – and I would argue those two same boundary markers I think are probably the most potent

ones in our culture today. Sex and idolatry. And what does it look like for you guys? As we come to take the bread and the cup, as we come together as one body in the allegiance of King Jesus, what does it actually look like for us to walk out of here? Because, following Jesus isn't relegated to what we do when we gather. This is like the charge up time. Right?

What does it mean for you to live in this paradox, for you to give your life to serve others, to serve the wellbeing of the city, to honor whatever powers are governing the place where we live and at the same time acknowledge that they are not God and they are not truly King? Jesus is King. And in the name of that King, we give out our lives in acts of service and love just like our King did for us. Amen?

So, I don't know how these two themes speak to you. That's not my job. That's the Holy Spirit's job. But, as we come to take the bread and the cup, I just would ask you: when it comes to sex, when it comes to idolizing power and where we place our hopes, is there any repenting that we need to do as we come to worship Jesus today? Is there any misplaced hopes that we need to come and lay before King Jesus? Is there a neighbor with whom we need to reconcile in the name of Jesus because we've constructed a boundary line where Jesus says one does not exist in this room? I don't know what that means for you. But, I'm going to close in prayer. We're going to worship and take the bread and the cup and I just trust the Spirit will guide us as His people.

Let me close in a word of prayer.

Jesus, we're grateful for the wisdom of our brother and leader, Paul the apostle. Jesus, we thank You for the way that he points us to You. Jesus, You are the one in whom all of our hopes are truly found. You are the one whose rule is the only rule that can bring true life and unity and hope to our world. So, Jesus, we want to put our lives in the service of Your Kingdom. Would You please empower us, by Your Spirit, as we repent and renew our devotion to You? Please empower us to love You and love our neighbor as ourselves. We pray in Your powerful name, King Jesus. Amen? Yeah. Amen.