

FIGURE IT OUT FASTER

Pastor: Josh McPherson

The Opening: The church needs to figure it out faster

Title: *Figure it out faster.*

Key Emphasis

- The Spirit of God would say to His church:
 - You need to figure it out faster.
- In obeying Jesus.
- In following Jesus.
- In being the church.
- In the middle of very quickly shifting cultural tides and trends.

Reason for the sermon

- There are many pastors talking.
- There are many pastors not talking.
- There are questions:
 - What are you talking about?
 - Why are you not talking about certain things?
- The goal is to think biblically about what it means to live faithfully in these days.

The book of Acts is a roadmap for these days

Scripture

- Acts 20



Key Emphasis

- The goal is:
 - learn the lesson
 - let it go deep into our bones
 - receive what God has for how we should live

Big Idea

- There is a missiological map in this book for how to live in these days.
- Many churches are missing it.

Understanding the cultural moment: three worlds of evangelicalism

Big Idea

If the church does not figure out where it is, it will use the wrong tactics for the world it is actually living in.

Positive world: 1950 to 1994

Definition

- “Positive world”
- Evangelicalism broadly carried social and political capital.
- Christianity was seen as a social good.

Examples

- “Under God” added to the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Prayer in government schools.
- Prayer before class.
- Prayer at commencement.
- Prayer at football games.



- Public displays of Christianity:
 - Ten Commandments
 - courthouses
 - schools
 - public spaces
- Entertainment largely aligned with Christian values.

Illustrations

- Leave It to Beaver
- Dick Van Dyke
- Andy Griffith

Key Emphasis

- Family values were embodied, encouraged, and celebrated by and large.
- To step outside those values culturally brought cost.

Missiological strategy in positive world

- Culture war
- Seeker-sensitive

Supporting argument

- Protestant church attendance was at historic highs.
- Churches assumed:
 - everyone is seeking
 - everyone has similar cultural reference points
 - most people know the Bible stories
- So the strategy became:
 - make church easier
 - make church more comfortable
 - be sensitive to the seeker



Key Emphasis

- Even through the sexual revolution and hippie era, by and large, being a Christian still came with social capital.
- You could not really run for office without identifying with a Protestant church or very conservative Catholic church.

Neutral world: 1994 to 2014

Definition

- “Neutral world”
- Moved from *under God* to *no God*.
- Not aggressively anti-God.
- Just neutral, at least officially.

Defining marks

- Removal of public vestiges of Christianity.
- Ten Commandments removed.
- Prayer in schools removed.
- Public square increasingly stripped of explicit Christian markers.
- Rise of postmodern thought:
 - no absolutes
 - no objective truth outside the self
 - subjective reality
 - modern self

Entertainment shift

- Entertainment no longer aligning with Christian values.
- Entertainment now mocking Christian values.

Illustrations

- Friends



- Will & Grace

Supporting argument

- Entertainment normalized:
 - sex outside marriage
 - pornography
 - homosexual behavior
 - moral chaos without consequences
- Entertainment, philosophy, and art run out ahead of politics.
- What gets normalized culturally gets codified legally later.

Legal/cultural note in flow

- The normalization in entertainment was followed by codification in law.

Missiological strategy in neutral world

- Cultural engagement
- Go out into culture
- Work inside institutions
- Work for the good of the city
- Turn it around from the inside out

Result

- That strategy brought us to the next phase:

Negative world: 2014 onward

Definition

- “Negative world”
- Christianity no longer just ignored.



- Christianity increasingly viewed as socially harmful.

Events and markers

- 2014:
 - Ferguson
 - race riots
 - cultural upheaval
- Obergefell ruling
- Increasing cost for following Jesus publicly

Defining marks

- Unprecedented social cost for following Jesus.
- Pressure at work.
- Pressure in corporations.
- Pressure to be quiet about Christianity.
- Pressure to swallow the new religion of the culture.

Examples mentioned

- DEI culture
- irreconcilable definitions of justice
- rise of social justice as a replacement moral framework
- cancel culture
- #MeToo culture
- endless horizontal apology without vertical reconciliation before God

Key Emphasis

- The modern church increasingly redefines justice as horizontal reconciliation without first dealing with reconciliation between God and man.

Big argument

When churches go woke, they die.



Why?

- They stop emphasizing repentance before God.
- They start emphasizing repentance between man and man.
- The subtle message becomes:
 - you do not need God
- If you do not need God:
 - you do not need church
- Then church becomes seen as:
 - the problem
 - an oppressive authority structure
 - a place of abuse and control

Key Emphasis

- Woke churches die because they remove God and repentance from the center.

Further defining marks of negative world

- Conflicting definitions of: truth, goodness, and beauty
- Evil celebrated as good.
- Good is considered evil.
- Corruption, evil, and perversion normalized.
- No expectation that politicians be honest.
- No expectation that entertainment be moral.

Key Emphasis

- Everything is upside down.

The church has not yet developed a strategy for negative world

Key Emphasis



- The observation:
 - the church has no missiological strategy for this age yet
- They have not figured out what to do.
- They are just getting their butts kicked.

Therefore... We all need to **figure it out faster.**

Acts was written for a church moving from neutral world into negative world

Question

- Was the book of Acts written to a church in: positive, neutral, or negative world?

Answer

- **The church was born in something like neutral world.**
- Judaism was functioning under Rome.
- Synagogues were allowed.
- Worship was allowed.
- They were not yet being actively hated or persecuted at the level to come.

Then what happened?

- The church exploded.
- The church blew up both:
 - Roman culture
 - Jewish religious moralism
- That moved the church into negative world.

Key Emphasis

- By the end of Acts, Paul does not make it out alive... that qualifies as negative world.



Important distinction

- Our negative world is not yet at the stage of full imprisonment and widespread martyrdom, But there are stages to negative world.

How negative world develops

- starts sociologically
- starts in arts
- starts in entertainment
- then moves into academia
- then into business
- then into politics
- then into law
- then into government power

Entertainment first, Then academia, Then business/culture, Then politics and law

Key Emphasis

- We are on the road toward a more fully negative world, unless there is reformation in the church and the nation.

What happens when the church uses outdated tactics

Big Idea

If the church does not know where it is, it will use:

- positive world tactics or neutral world tactics inside a **negative world** reality.

Key Emphasis

- Many pastors were mentored by men:
 - raised in positive world and who ministered in neutral world
- Those tactics do not necessarily translate into negative world.



Key Emphasis

- This is not an attack on older mentors.
- It is simply saying:
 - the world they grew up in is radically different from the one we are ministering in now

The cycle of negative world pressure

Big Idea

If you are not thinking biblically about negative world, pressure will push you into the flesh.

The cycle

- Disbelief → Frustration → Anger

Disbelief

- Why are they blogging about me?
- Why are they complaining to HR?
- Why are they not inviting me?
- I am the good guy.
- I am the family values guy.
- Why would they not like me?

Frustration

- This is not fair.
- Why is this happening?
- Why am I being pressured to act outside my values?

Anger

- Who do you think you are?

Now is the Decision point



Two exits from anger

The flesh exit

- despair
- anxiety
- fear
- cowardice
- silence

Or the opposite extreme:

- pride
- vigilante spirit

The Spirit exit

- Pause
- pray
- put head and heart into the Word of God
- draw courage and hope
- get clear on truth
- stand courageously
- speak boldly
- maintain righteousness
- refuse to cower
- refuse to go quietly into the night
- contend for truth
- do not become contentious
- remain godly
- remain humble
- remain unmoving
- remain unwavering

The missiological plan in negative world: contend and contextualize

Scripture



- Acts 20:20–21

Big Idea

In negative world, the church must both:

- contend
- contextualize

Clarification

- These are not opposites.
- They are both anchored in the **truth**.

Key Emphasis

- We contextualize truth so that we can contend for it. **The goal is to make truth intelligible. Not palatable**

Strong distinction

- If your goal is to make truth palatable, you will change it.
- If your goal is to make truth intelligible, you will clarify it.

Key Emphasis

- Clarifying truth about race, abuse, sexuality, gender, marriage, and all the hot-button issues will get you:
 - shot at
 - maligned
 - smeared
 - lied about
 - canceled
 - fired

Pastoral warning

- Some pastors use contextualization as cover for cowardice.



- They say:
 - we need to be careful
 - we do not want to offend
 - we do not want to lose a hearing

- But the problem is that people walked away from Jesus too.

Key Emphasis

- People walked away from Jesus not because they misunderstood Him.
- They walked away because they understood Him exactly.

What they understood

- He is holy.
- They are sinful.
- They must repent or be judged.

Paul's Acts 20 model

- **Jews and Greeks**
- different races
- different cultures
- different idolatries
- different traditions
- different languages

Yet one clear message:

- turn to God in repentance
- have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

Big takeaway

- Paul approached complex mission fields with one clear non-woke message:
 - repent to God
 - be made right with God



- then begin working out earthly relationships from there

Contend and contextualize in the rest of Acts

Contend

- **Jude**
 - contend for the faith once handed down to the saints

Contextualize

- **1 Corinthians 9**
 - became all things to all men that by all means he might win some

Acts 2

- Peter before the crowd:
 - you murdered Jesus
 - repent
 - believe
 - be baptized
- Result:
 - 3,000 saved

Acts 17

- Paul at the Areopagus:
 - quoting poets
 - dialoguing
 - sophisticated
 - contextualized
- Result:
 - hardly any saved
 - only a few interested in more discussion



Interpretation given

- Paul likely learned from the contrast.
- Comparing missiological strategies:
 - Peter was simple and direct
 - Paul was sophisticated and contextual in Athens
- By the time we get later in Paul's ministry, he changes his tune a bit.

So what is the missiological plan in Negative world?

Big Idea

Apostolic boldness. The church must raise its missiological IQ and act decisively.

Five closing commitments

1. Set forth the truth plainly

Key Emphasis

- Paul preached to Jews and Greeks:
 - repent to God
 - believe in Jesus

Application

- Stop trying to be so sophisticated.
- Be more simple.
- Stop complicating what God has made plain.

Plain message

- repent
- believe in Jesus
- be baptized

2. Demonstrate the Spirit's power



Key Emphasis

- Preach the Word of God
- Worship
- Prayer
- Community
- Changed lives

Key Emphasis

- The inarguable apologetic for Jesus Christ is a changed life.
- You cannot argue with a changed life.

3. Boldly proclaim the truth

Key Emphasis

- Reverse the spiral of silence.
- Curb the social cost.

Explanation of the Spiral of silence

- As the cost of speaking truth rises:
 - fewer people speak
 - As fewer people speak:
 - the cost rises more
 - That keeps going until only a few speak up.
- Reverse effect**
- The more people who speak up, the more the social cost is curbed.

Illustration

The Oreo and \$10,000 video

- A five-year-old is offered:
 - \$10,000 cash
 - or two Oreos
- The child takes the Oreos.
- Caption: “This is why kids should not be allowed to choose their gender.”



Key Emphasis

- More people speaking up boldly changes the social cost.
- To be silent in the face of lies is:
 - permissive toward the lie
 - participation in the lie
 - and fuel for its growth

4. Model a compelling vision of truth, goodness, and beauty

Key Emphasis

- Build something beautiful enough that people can come and see:
 - Truth, goodness, and beauty on display in the lives of changed and redeemed people.

5. Leave corrupt institutions and build kingdom gardens as alternatives

Big Idea

- This may be the most controversial point but it's biblical

Key Emphasis

- Many institutions are gone.
- The church must figure that out faster.

Argument from Acts

- In Acts, Jesus does not send His people into corrupt systems to take them over from positions of power.
- He calls people out.
- Then they build something more beautiful and compelling.



Illustration

Matthew the tax collector

- Matthew got saved.
- Then he stopped collecting taxes for Rome.

Key Emphasis

- The Roman government eventually fell not because Christians took it over from inside.
- But because Jesus called people out and they built something more beautiful.

Application to education

- Government schools as example.
- Christians went along with state-funded government schools.
- A jurisdictional line was blurred:
 - what belonged to the family got handed to the state
- It was tolerated because it happened in positive world conditions.
- But once the structure was built, it was taken over from the top and weaponized.

Illustration

Disney analogy

- A conservative family-oriented man built Disney.
- Progressives did not build it.
- They latched on, took over, and used the whole structure for evil ends.

Same thing happened with government schools.

Key Emphasis

- Christians built the system.
- Then the system was taken over and used against children, families, and Christian values.



Application

- Hence: Build better, more beautiful kingdom gardens.

Final resolve

- These are exciting days to be alive.
- God does His best work in the darkest times.

Preacher's Summary

Big Idea

The church must figure out faster where it is, what time it is, and how to live in negative world reality with biblical courage, clarity, and conviction.

Main movements

1. The church is out of step with the Spirit
2. Acts is the roadmap
3. Positive world
4. Neutral world
5. Negative world
6. The church has no current strategy for negative world
7. Pressure creates a decision point: flesh or Spirit
8. The church must both contend and contextualize truth
9. Paul's message stayed constant: repent and believe in Jesus
10. The church must:



- set forth the truth plainly
- demonstrate Spirit power
- boldly proclaim truth
- model truth, goodness, and beauty
- leave corrupt institutions and build kingdom gardens

