

The Free Prisoner and The Slave Jailer

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, all. Let me just attend to a very natural function. Right, now let's, just before we start, I just, I felt it laid on my heart this morning just to say something to us by way of an advert that we're all interested in.

And when I saw Shanti's name on the board there this morning, I thought, you know, let's just remember this man and remember Lily.

I remember that the Macedonian churches that Paul planted, they were dirt poor. You could not have exaggerated their poverty.

But he says that out of their extreme poverty, generosity welled up. And they begged Paul, they pleaded with him for the privilege of giving to help relieve the suffering of the saints in Judea.

So that's quite a beautiful moment. And he says that they gave as they were able and beyond their ability. Now, how do we feel in modern Western culture about people who exceed their ability to give?

[1 : 1 7] We tend to be a bit disparaging of that, don't we? But Jesus saw a widow in the temple put her might into the treasury. And she put in, says Jesus, all that she had to live on.

So that basically meant she wasn't able to look after herself from that point on. But that was the extent of her generosity. Brothers and sisters, let's not forget Shanti and Lily. They need every bit of help that we can give them.

And so that's the advert. Just wanted to say that and let's move on now. Okay. So this morning we're in Acts chapter 24.

Paul is under house arrest in Caesarea. You'll remember that... Give me a sec.

This technology is a funny thing sometimes. Weird. Okay.

[2 : 1 9] That's us now. He's under house arrest in Caesarea. He had been arrested by the religious authorities in Jerusalem when he had gone up to the temple.

And they trumped up charges against him to the effect that he was desecrating the temple. That he had brought Greeks into the temple. And all sorts of stuff that was just total nonsense.

And it could not be substantiated. But nonetheless, they raised these charges against him. And stirred up the crowd. And the crowd was just about to tear Paul apart when the Romans intervened.

And they took Paul off to the barracks. And after it was discovered by a relative of Paul's that there was a plot to assassinate Paul before he could come to trial, the Roman tribune decided to take him up to the garrison in Caesarea and hold him there under protective custody, essentially.

So that's where Paul is right now. He's already met the governor, Felix. Felix is not a chap you would have bought a used car from. So there's not likely to be much justice there.

[3 : 40] We'll look at more of that in a moment. But we're at verse 24 this morning. Felix has already had a sort of initial hearing. And then a few days later, it says here at verse 24, Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish.

And he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he, that's Paul, as Paul reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, go away for the present.

When I get an opportunity, I will summon you. At the same time, he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him.

When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

Now, three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul.

[4 : 54] And they urged him, asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem. Because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way. Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly.

So, said he, let the men of authority among you go down with me. And if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him. After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea.

And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many serious charges against him that they could not prove.

Paul argued in his defense, Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense. But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?

But Paul said, I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well.

[6 : 19] If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, Excuse me.

No one can give me up to them. I am going to have to. Excuse me. Sorry. That is better.

But if there is nothing to their charges against me, No one, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.

Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, Answered, To Caesar you have appealed. To Caesar you shall go. May God help us to receive the blessing that he intends from his word this morning.

In Jesus name. Well folks, We could ask ourselves a simple question. What is Paul actually doing right now?

[7 : 31] Well, For Paul it's always business as usual. I don't know if you've read 2 Timothy lately. But 2 Timothy is very probably the last thing Paul ever wrote.

It's his letter to Timothy on the eve of his execution. Now we don't know how soon after writing he was executed, But we do know that Paul knew by this point.

He said, I have fought the fight. I have finished the race. But then he said an astonishing thing. He said, And now is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, Which God the righteous judge will give me on that day.

And not only to me, But to all who have longed for his appearing. In other words, As far as Paul was concerned, Even his condemned cell Had a different value from any other condemned cell.

This was not just a place to await execution. This was not just a place in which to wallow in self-pity, And look forward with horror, To the headsman's axe.

[8 : 38] No, This condemned cell of Paul's, Basically was just his latest office. It was where he would conduct business as normal.

And so he would write to Timothy, And give Timothy the advice, That he felt the young man would need, To pick up the torch and carry it forward. And he would advise Timothy of what needed to be done, To protect the true faith in the churches.

So here's Paul. And not only that, But he sees his cell almost as though it were, The robing room for his coronation. Now he's laid up for me a crown of righteousness. There's not a hint of self-pity, In that last thing that he wrote to Timothy.

I do recommend that you pick it up when you go home, It's only a few chapters long. But it's inspiring, To see a man on death row, Writing like he's just conducting the business of the Lord, And it's business as usual.

And it is here, Here in Caesarea, Right in front of the Roman governor, That's all that Paul's doing. He's preaching the faith, He once tried to destroy.

[9 : 48] That's what he said to the Galatian church. He was preaching the faith, That he once tried to destroy. Now you need to understand, That actually gives color and flavor, To what's happening to Paul right now, And why he's in trouble.

The reason he's in trouble, Is because, The people who hate him now, Used to be his employers. They were the ones, Who sought to destroy the faith, Of Jesus Christ.

They were the ones, Who hated, The sect of the Nazarenes, As they called it. They hated these people. They wanted, The whole thing to be eradicated, To be just gone.

Why? Because the very existence, Of the church, Was an indictment, Of the religious establishment, In Jerusalem. They were the ones, Who had conspired, To have Jesus, Put to death, At the hands of the Romans.

They wanted to see him, Put to death. And the very fact, That he, Had not only risen, From the dead, Which of course, Vindicated him, And condemned his accusers.

[11 : 05] But not only, Had he risen from the dead, But he had, Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Planted himself, Into the hearts, Of believers. And these believers, Were everywhere, Teaching that Jesus Christ, Had risen from the dead.

They were teaching, The resurrection. Paul had actually said, Up in Jerusalem, When he was, When he was first standing, Before the tribunal there, And all his accusers, In Jerusalem.

He said, The reason, I'm on trial here today, Is on account of our hope, In the resurrection. And, And in doing that, He divided, His accusers, Into two camps, Because, There was a camp, That was essentially secular, And more or less humanist, And they didn't believe, In resurrection, Didn't believe in miracles, Or angels, Or any of those things.

But the Pharisees, Who were, Paul's own, Sect, As it were, They all, They believed in all of those things. And so, Paul says, I'm on trial here, For, For the sake of a hope, That I share with you guys, Who are accusing me.

I'm telling you, That Jesus Christ, Came back from the dead, And this is what you are supposed to believe, And now you're condemning me, For saying, That the very thing that you believe in, Has happened.

[12 : 19] It was all there, In, In Jewish, Prophecy, Long before Jesus, Was born on earth. Daniel had preached about resurrection, He had talked about the, The dead of, Of the world, The dead, Who would rise from the dust of the earth.

Job had said, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last, I shall see him. So the hope of the resurrection is there, It's in, It's in the Hebrew scriptures.

It didn't, That wasn't a hope that came along, With the church, Or with the New Testament, Or with the day of Pentecost, That hope had already been there. And Paul's just saying, I'm just being faithful to the faith.

You guys who are accusing me, Are the ones, Who ought to be standing with me, Here in the dock. So anyway, Here's Caesar, Is at Caesarea, In the Roman garrison.

He's being well treated, For the time being. He's under, Effectively, House arrest, And Felix, Has given orders, That he's to be given, A measure of freedom, His friends are to be allowed, To attend to his needs.

[13 : 32] I would, I would hazard a guess, That this is round about, The time when Luke, Must have written, A lot of his material, For his gospel, And for his, And for the book of Acts.

Because, Paul was here for, Over two years, In under house arrest. And Luke was able to come and go, And talk to Paul, And get the facts that he needed, For his work.

But after some days, Felix comes along, With his wife Drusilla. Now, I think you would have to say, Of each of them, For different reasons, They were a piece of work.

Felix had been a slave, With his brother. They had been slaves, In the household, Of, The mother, Of, Prince Claudius.

Claudius, The one who was going to be, Eventually, The emperor of Rome. But the mother, Had set the two brothers free. She had given them the freedom.

[14 : 38] From their slavery. Felix's brother, Persuaded, Claudius, When he became emperor, To give Felix, A plum job, In the civil service.

And sent him up to, What they called Palestine. The Romans called it Palestine, As a calculated insult, To the Jews. Because it was named after, The old ancient Philistines, Who were the Jews enemies.

That's where the name, Palestine came from. So, Felix was sent up to Palestine, To work in the civil service, And he was working, For the new governor there.

But, Typical of Felix. This, This was the, If you like, This was Felix, Beginning to show, The kind of person, He would be in future. Under that governor, He started a conspiracy, An intrigue, That had the governor, Deposed.

And guess who, Took over his job? But Felix. So, Felix became governor, By scheming, And intrigue. Nasty piece of work.

[15 : 45] And so, Here he is now, He's the governor, Of Palestine. Tacitus, Was a Roman historian, Of these times. Tacitus, Said of Felix, That this was a man, Who had the power, Of a king, In the spirit, Of a slave.

He was merciless, He was ruthless, He was hated, Even in Rome, Because of his brutality. There were insurrections, All during the governorship, Of Felix.

People rose up, In rebellion, In anger, To try and throw off, The power, Of the Roman, Governance there. Because, Whenever, Felix identified, The leaders, Of a rebellion, He had every one of them, Crucified.

So, Crucifixions, Were frequent, During his, His governorship. So, This was a nasty, Piece of work. Married to a nasty, Piece of work. Who had abandoned, Her husband, In order to, Jump into, Felix's bed.

He sent for Paul, And heard him speak, About faith, In Jesus Christ. And as he reasoned, As Paul reasoned, With him, About righteousness, And self-control, In the coming judgment.

[17 : 00] There's a, There's a famous story, Told about, Bishop Hugh Latimer, In the time of, Henry VIII. Latimer, Was called, To, To the king's palace, To deliver a sermon, On the Sunday.

And, The king was so, Upset, By Latimer's, Delivery, Of the truth. It was, In your face, It was, There was, No holds barred. He delivered the truth, To this corrupt king.

And, Henry VIII, Said to him, At the end, He said, You will come, Next Sunday, And you will preach again. And you will preach, A sermon, That is acceptable, To this throne.

Well, Hugh Latimer, Duly turned up, The following Sunday, And before he started, To preach, He started, To say this, He was speaking, To himself, He says, Now think, Latimer, Before whom you, Stand, You stand, Before, The gracious king, Of England, Who has all power, At his feet, And has the power, To remove your head, From your body, If you were to offend him, Think about this, And he's talking to himself, Before he starts preaching, And then he started, Saying to himself again, Think, Hugh Latimer, Before whom you stand, You stand before, The eternal, The most high God, The judge of all men's souls,

And then he proceeded, To deliver exactly, The same sermon, He had given the week before, This is Paul, He's standing here, In front of a man, Who has the power, Of life and death, And he reasons, With him, He's trying to explain, To this man, What the gospel means, In terms of righteousness, And self-control, And the judgment to come, The only way, We dare face, The judgment to come, Is if Jesus Christ, Has taken our place, In the place of condemnation, Felix was alarmed, And said, That's enough for now, It's getting too hot in here, So he, Brought an end to the whole thing, There and then, But he had this fascination, With, With what Paul was saying, It's interesting,

[19 : 45] That when Felix, And Drusilla came in, To this, They weren't listening, They didn't set themselves up, To hear Paul's case, In his own defense, Against the charges, That were made against him, That wasn't, What they asked him to do, They asked him to explain, His faith, They're sitting, Listening to a man, Explaining his faith, Why is that?

We're told that Felix, Had, Quite an understanding, Of, In verse 22, That we didn't read, Father had a, Felix had a, Rather accurate knowledge, Of the way, As it was called, I, Suspect, That Felix, Understanding, This, Body that Paul belonged to, Felix, Being the political animal, That he was, Had seen this movement, Spreading like wildfire, This was happening, On his watch, And being, The man who was obsessed, With his own power, And his own, Benefit, He wanted, To keep his, Enemy, His friends close, And his enemies closer, And he wanted to know, Just exactly, Everything he could, About this movement, That was spreading so fast, Through the Roman Empire, He also knew, That the charges against Paul, Were absolute rubbish, He knew that,

But here's Felix, He sends for often, That's reminiscent of, Herod, Is it not, Sending for John the Baptist, And listening intently, To this man, He found himself, Absolutely fascinated, With John the Baptist, But it didn't stop, Herod, From removing, John's head, And it didn't stop, Felix, From keeping this man, In custody, For two years, On charges, That he knew, Were false, So we could, Want to take a hint, Of hope in this, That here's Felix, He's really, Really interested, In the gospel, He listens to Paul often, He sends for him, Every now and again, And says, Tell me more, And you tend to think, Well this is a man, Maybe God's at work, In this man, But at the end of that, At the end of these two years, He's had the best teaching, You could ever sit under, He's heard the finest theology,

You could ever learn, He's seen the greatest hope, That could ever be, Held on to by anyone, And he's seen, The power of that, In Paul's own demeanor, He sees in Paul's face, The evidence, That everything Paul says is true, Felix is blessed, Can you imagine, Peter says, God is not slow, As some understand, Stand slowness, He is patient with you, Not wishing anyone to perish, But all to come, To eternal life, This is, This is what's happening here, God is being, Very patient with this Felix, He's giving him two years, Of solid, Wall to wall mercy, Wall to wall patience, For this evil man, And at the end of it, After two years have elapsed, Felix leaves Paul in prison,

You've got to have a hard heart, To do that, So, God is merciful, He says, His word never returns to him empty, Who knows what it achieved, In the heart of Felix, But it certainly didn't achieve it, At that time, I'd like to think, That we might get a glorious surprise, And Felix will be there, When we get there, But I tell you what, The biggest surprise of all, Is going to be discovering, That we're there, That's going to be the biggest surprise, Not that Felix is there, But that David Andrew is there, So he leaves Paul in prison, After two years, And then three days after, Festus takes up the new job, He decides to go up to Jerusalem, Because Jerusalem is the key city, For the Jews, And Festus goes up,

[24 : 11] And he holds a conflagration, With the chief priests, And the principal people of the Jews, And he lets them, Set out their case against Paul, You can be absolutely sure, That Festus would have done his homework, This governor didn't dare, Play games, With these people, Because insurrections were normal, In that part of the world, At that time, So he would want to get his facts, And he would already have been briefed, By the tribune, About the plot to kill Paul, So when they come to him, They ask him for a favor, Now, You could help us out here, We'd rather, Not come all the way up to Caesarea, For this, Really, I mean, His offenses are against the Jewish faith, Could you please just send him down to Jerusalem, He should be tried under Jewish law, And they would put all these reasons to him,

But in fact, What they were doing was planning an ambush, Hello, They were planning, Where have we heard that before? That was like two years, After they had planned an ambush, And been thwarted, By the Roman tribune, Here they are two years later, Still full of the same hate, And spleen, Still full of the same determination, To murder a man, Rather than give him a trial, Two years later, They've still got the same plan, Brothers and sisters, Persecution, Persecution is a, George, George Whitefield, Called persecution, A many-headed monster, He says it comes in so many forms, But the worst of all, Perhaps he says, Is that it comes in the form of religion, And I want to promise you,

Brothers and sisters, That the direction things are going in our society, Where there is no interest whatsoever, Not only has our society rejected truth, It has rejected reality, Even secular people are up in arms, About the extent to which reality, Is just being thrown out now, And we're supposed to believe, I've got an article in the latest edition, Of the magazine, Bit of an advert here, An article in the latest edition, Of the magazine called, Charlie the Grand Piano, And this is about a man, Who decides to self-identify, As a grand piano, And the folks around him, Have to try, And cope with this new identity, That the man has, They have to call him Steinway, Because that's his preferred nickname, And he paints his teeth, Alternately black and white, So that when he smiles, He looks like the real thing, You see where I'm going, Okay, But we're losing touch with,

We're losing respect for reality, And these men here, That are opposed to Paul, They're not interested in the facts, At all, They already know that the facts, Don't support their case, Now can we hear this please, Because persecution, Is coming upon the church, In the west, We've had a comfortable time, For hundreds of years, And that comfort, Has all but killed the church, Satan can destroy a church, With a cushion, As surely as with a, Kalashnikov, Satan knows how to comfort us, Into our own extermination, Festus, Refused, Refused, To play ball with them, And send them up to Jerusalem, And said, No, No, No, I'm going up to Caesarea soon, That's where Paul's being held, And you guys can,

Pick some of your own, And come with me, Which of course, Made it impossible for them, To send a very large contingent anyway, After he'd stayed there, For a few days, He went down to Caesarea, And the very next day, He took his, Seat in the tribunal, And they brought, All these serious charges, But they couldn't prove, Any of them, They just, Couldn't prove the charges, That were made against Paul, Let me see, I'm having trouble here, The guilty, The guilty, The guilty in this situation, The guilty party, Was actually the, The accusation, The guilt was on the part, Of those who were accusing Paul, Paul was guilty of nothing, And here's, Here's the quote, I was looking for earlier on,

[29 : 23] And I remembered where I'd put it, George Whitefield said this, It would be impossible to enumerate, In what various shapes, Persecution has appeared, It is a many headed monster, Cruel as the grave, Insatiable as hell, And what is worse, It generally appears, Under the cloak of religion, But cruel, Insatiable, And horrid, As it is, This is still Whitefield, They that live godly, In Christ Jesus, Must expect to suffer, And encounter with it, In all its forms, They that live godly, In Christ Jesus, Must expect to suffer, And encounter with it, In all its forms, He's quoting Paul, But he's not quite quoting Paul, Sadly, Brother Whitefield here, Has missed out a crucial verb, That Paul used, Paul said, All who desire, To live godly, In Christ Jesus, Will be persecuted, All who desire, To live godly, In Christ Jesus, In other words, Persecution isn't reserved,

For people, Who've made a good, Fist of being a Christian, Persecution isn't reserved, For the best of Christians, Persecution, Will happily, Descend upon anyone, Who just simply desires, To live a godly life, In Christ Jesus, Paul helped us, All identify, With the struggle, Of being a disciple, When he said, The good that I would do, That I do not do, And the evil, That I would not do, That I do, Indeed I find it, He says, To be a rule, That when I want to do good, Evil lies close at hand, That's all our experience, And if you desire, To do good, You will be persecuted, If you desire, To live a godly life, You'll be persecuted, Why?

Because we all have, Three enemies, Which are darkly spiritual, All of them, The world, The flesh, And the devil, The world around us, Is constantly persecuting us, Because it's flooding us, With images, And sayings, And ideologies, And all sorts of things, That are meant to throw us off course, The flesh is our own old nature, Which is hostile, To what the work of the spirit of God, Is doing in us, And our old nature, Will not give us any help, To be followers of Jesus, And the devil himself, Is absolutely relentless, He accuses the brethren, Day and night, Before the throne of God, We're told, In Revelation, He accuses the brethren, Day and night, Before the throne of God, Do you think, If he's got the audacity, To accuse you and me, Before the throne of God, Do you think he would hesitate, To pour poison into your ear directly?

I don't think he would, We need to be sober, Brothers and sisters, We need to support, The persecuted churches, In these countries, Like Nigeria, North Korea, Where persecution, Right now is off the scale, But let's not fool ourselves, Into thinking that persecution, Is something that always happens, Overseas, If you're a true follower, Of Jesus Christ right now, You're being persecuted, By the world, The flesh and the devil, That's a fact, And the only question then, Is how do we deal with that?

How do we deal with that persecution? Well actually, Paul would say, I don't want to give you, A strong teaching on persecution, I don't want persecution, To become your preoccupation, I want Jesus Christ, To become your preoccupation, You see, When you turn your eyes upon Jesus, And look full in his wonderful face, The persecutions of earth, Become strangely dim, In the light of his glory and grace, It's that simple, It doesn't take away the pain, It doesn't take away the suffering, It doesn't take away the injustice, It doesn't give you back the goods, That have been confiscated from you, But it lets you like, The Hebrew saints of old, Accept joyfully, The confiscation of your possessions, Because you know, That you have a better hope, You have, You're moving towards,

[33 : 55] A city, Not made with hands, That God himself, Has created for us, Brothers and sisters, Persecution is a reality, For us right now, We need to come to terms with that, But let's meet the persecution, With a preoccupation, And let that persecution, Not divert us from our preoccupation, With Jesus Christ, When it comes to the point, Where Paul is asked, If he's willing to go up to Jerusalem, To face trial there, It's very interesting, You see, Because, Paul is making full use, Of God's providence here, By God's providence, Paul was born, A Roman citizen, And because he was, A Roman citizen, He had to be treated, In a certain way, The Romans, Were required, To treat him, In a certain way,

In order, To not get on the wrong side, Of their own law, And Paul knew this, When he was, Abused, And mistreated, In Philippi, And slammed into jail, With his back bleeding, And his feet in the stocks, And then there was a miracle, And God released all the prisoners, And the jailer was converted, And baptized that same night, With all his household, What a glorious time that was, I love it when God just, Breaks, Stirs things up like that, But when that happened, The authorities, Realized that, They were on the wrong side, Of something, And they had heard, That Paul, Was a Roman citizen, And now it was a case, Of damage limitation, So they sent word to the jailer, Let these men out of prison, And Paul says, That's not going to happen,

No, No, No, No, No, No, No, This is not the way, It's going to happen, You see, I'm a Roman citizen, And my friend here, Silas, Is a Roman citizen, So, They will come, Here, Personally, And escort us out of prison, As a public apology, For having treated us, In a way, That is disgraceful, For Romans to be treated, Paul was using, God's providence, In making him a Roman citizen, For that situation, We were using, God's providence, In laws, That were on our statute books, For about the past 400 years, To force, The Scottish government, To reopen the churches, During the lockdown period, That's what we were doing, We were using God's providence, The government did not have a legal right, And the court said so, Government did not have a legal right, To close the churches, And that's why, Many of us, Signed a letter, And got in behind, The folks at the Tron,

Who had stirred the whole thing up, In the first place, So, Paul's making full use, Of God's providence here, And we need to learn, To do that too, God's providence, In Paul's Roman citizenship, And his word, In assuring Paul, That his mission would stretch, All the way to Rome, Remember, A couple of chapters, Years ago, God said to Paul, Paul don't be afraid, Because you must also testify to me, In Rome, Just as you've done in Jerusalem, And that makes the outcome, At Caesarea here, Almost comical, Because when Festus, Finally says to Paul, Well, You've appealed to Caesar, And you must go to Caesar, That was always going to be the outcome, Because God had decreed, That Paul was going to Rome, And a few chapters on from now, We're going to be reading, About the significance of that, Again, When Paul suffers, Shipwreck on his way to Rome,

But God has said, You're going to Rome, So shipwrecked nothing, He was going to go to Rome, So we'll be in there, In a couple of weeks time, I would think, These people who imagined, That their power to rule, Was absolute, Were merely contingent, Really, Upon the will of God, God had placed them in power, In God's time, He would remove them from power, In his time, He would remove them, In the meantime, Their decisions just, Simply played into, The plot that God had already written, And that doesn't mean, That they were mere puppets, Of God, Nor does it absolve them, Of responsibility, For their decisions, And their actions, But God, Sees the end, From the beginning, He knows how human, Motives and choices, Are going to play out, And he sovereignly makes use, Of our mortal machinations,

[39 : 03] To suit his own purposes, God can't be turned aside, By a split, A split degree, We should not think, For a minute, That any earthly power, Or authority, Is ultimately, In control of our lives, Because that's just, Simply not true, We can't even say, The devil is in control, Of our lives, John, 1 John 5 19 says, We know that we are children, Of God, And that the whole world, Lies under the control, Of the evil one, The devil holds sway, Over people who are not Christians, He does not, Hold sway, Over Christians, The Holy Spirit, Holds sway, Over a Christian life, That doesn't mean, To say we can't get it wrong, It doesn't mean, We can't sin, It doesn't mean, We can't have, A rebellion break, Because we frequently do, But it does mean, That the devil,

Is not in control, Of our lives, He's not in control, Of our circumstances, We should never say, As far as we're concerned, The devil is in the details, It's God, Who's in the details, And this is proved here, We have respect, For authorities, We pray for those, Who are ruling over us, We're commanded to do that, But all power, Belongs to God, And his good plans for us, Will never be diverted, Or hindered, In the least degree, There's one last thing, I want to leave you with, God, Is for us, Said Paul, If God be for us, Who can be against us, I want us to think, Just for a moment, What's going on in Paul, Here with these people, What would Paul have been doing, During the two years,

That Festus, Was questioning, Him and asking, To have the faith, Opened out, And explained to him, What would Paul have been doing, I think we can be certain, That Paul was praying for Festus, I think we can be certain, That Paul was, Seeking the good of Festus, As Daniel sought the good, Of Nebuchadnezzar, It's inconceivable, That Paul wasn't praying, For his persecutors, Because he was a follower, Of Jesus Christ, And he had been taught, And he had been taught, Personally, By Jesus Christ, During his three years, In Arabia, So he would have been, Praying for his enemies, He would have been praying, For this man, I think, The reason for that, The reason for that, Is because, When Paul finally came to understand, That God is for us, It must have been, Like a, Like a thunderclap, That shakes the windows, Of your soul, And suddenly,

The light dawns, Because you see, Paul had it the wrong way around, As a, As a devout Pharisee, As a, A religious fanatic, He thought the important thing, Was that he was for God, And I tell you what, It's not this generation, That invented virtue signaling, The Pharisees, Were doing it all the time, They loved their flowing robes, They loved to be greeted, In the marketplaces, And have people deferring to them, And all this kind of stuff, And Paul was a proud man, And he was constantly signaling, That he was for God, Even so much, That he was the one, Who actually, Signed off, On the executions, Of the Christians, That were captured, He was making orphans, Of children, And in his sick, Twisted mind, He probably thought, These children, Were better off, Orphaned, Than being corrupted, By parents, That needed to die, I mean, How twisted can you get,

You've got it the wrong way around, He thought, He was for God, He had no idea, That God was for him, That must have been, An astonishing discovery, For Paul, But you know, Once you discover, That God is for us, Not only can you say, Who can be against us, But you've become, A debtor to mercy, And you can also say, Who can we be against, Who can we possibly hate, Who can we possibly, Want to destroy, If God is for us, Who can we be against, Surely we have to pray, For the festivities, Of this world, Surely we have to pray, For Nebuchadnezzar, Surely we have to pray, For the politician, Who most gets up our noses, Surely, Surely, We have to pray,

[44 : 08] For the enemies, Of our faith, Surely we have to pray, For ISIS, And the people, Caught up in that, That wicked, Corruption, Surely we have to pray, For unjust employers, Surely we can't leave, Anyone outside, Of our prayers, Because, Because the mercy of God, That has come to us, Is now owed by us, To the entire world, That we live in, The mercy of God, So we're going to sing, Brothers and sisters, That we have a hope, And that hope, Is something that needs to show, In our faces, It needs to be seen, In the warmth of our handshake, It needs to be seen, In the confidence of our step, And it needs to be a hope, That is so visible, That people, Will come and ask us, For a reason, The hope, That they see in us,

It needs to be visible, For them to come and do that, Now, This is where we have, A wee bit of a challenge, All of us, Myself included, We've got to sing, This next song, Without a poker face, Now the poker face, Is something that comes, From the gambling den, Okay, The guy's holding the hand, That is going to be, All the other hands, Around the table, He knows, He knows, He's got the hand, That kills everything else, And he's going to be, Very rich at everybody else, His expense, He's just waiting, For them all, Or he might not be, Holding the best hand, But he's got a face, That gives nothing away, That's a poker face, It gives nothing away, There's not a flicker, Of an eyelash, There's not a little, Twitch in the mouth, There's nothing about him, There's no sweat, In the forehead, There's nothing, To give away, The fact that he's holding, The killer hand, That's the poker face, But brothers and sisters, That might work,

In a casino, But it doesn't work, In a church, We don't know, Who's with us today, We don't know, Who might walk in, Off the street, While we're singing, And look at our faces, And say, Well, Wow, They kind of be very excited, About what they heard today, So I think, I'll just go and see, A fortune teller, So here's the challenge, Brothers and sisters, Let's not have a poker face, It's okay, To have a big smile, At each other, And share the glory, And the joy, Of this hope, That we have in Jesus Christ, Let's do that, And let's sing, There is a hope, ■■■ today, And so I'll just talk here, There is a joke, Because of this, So to speak,