

Adjust Our Lives for the Unadjusted Gospel

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Preacher: Jim Masters

[0:00] If you would take your Bibles and go to the book of Acts, Acts chapter 21. Wow, I've got a lot of people out today.

Acts 21, we're going to start in verse 27. And starting in verse 27, then we're going to go into chapter 22, all the way to verse 29.

So a big chunk. I did that on purpose because it goes together and I really didn't want to split it apart. So that's why I'm doing this big chunk together.

Paul gets arrested and he connects with Rome and things with Jews and then gets arrested by Rome and then he makes the speech. So I just didn't want to break it up. It just flows together. So starting in chapter 21, verse 27, I'll read all the way to chapter 22, verse 29. Oh, and by the way, before I forget, I want to make the announcement.

[1:12] Again, for those of you, if you weren't here for the announcements, for this women's conference, I got two free tickets for any of you ladies. If you want to go, let me know.

You can get a free ticket, possibly even four free tickets. So if you're interested in going, let me know about this. And I can inform Joshua Vincent, the pastor of Trinity Bible Church.

He said he would give us two, maybe even four tickets. Sorry. Chapter 21, verse 27. And when the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing Paul in the temple, stirred up all the multitude and laid hands on Paul, crying out, men of Israel, come to our aid.

This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the law and this place. And besides, he's even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.

For they had previously seen Trophimus, the Ephesian, and the city with him. And they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. And all the city was aroused. And the people rushed together.

[2:17] And taking over Paul, they dragged him out of the temple. And immediately the doors were shut. And while they were seeking to kill him, a report came to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.

And at once he took along some soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. And the commander came up, took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains and asked who he was and what he had done.

But among the crowds, some were shouting one thing, some another. And when he could not find out the facts on account of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. And when he got to the stairs, it so happened that Paul was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob for the multitude of the people who kept following behind, crying out, Away with him!

Verse 37 And as Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, May I say something to you? And he said, Do you know Greek? Then you're not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the 4,000 men of the assassins out into the wilderness?

But Paul said, I am a Jew of Tarshish in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city, and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people.

[3:32] And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand. And when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying, Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you.

We're in chapter 22, verse 2 now. And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet. And he said, I am a Jew, born in Tarshish of Cilicia, but brought up in the city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, just as you all are today.

And I persecuted this way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, as also the high priest and all the counsel of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus, in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem, as prisoners, to be punished.

It came about that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

And I answered, Who are you, Lord? And he said to me, I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting. And those who were with me beheld the light to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me.

[4:51] And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me, Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that is important for you to do. Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus.

And a certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me and standing near said to me, Brother Saul, receive your sight. At that time, very time, I looked up at him. And he said, The God of our fathers has appointed you to know his will, and to see the righteous one, and to hear an utterance from his mouth.

For you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard, and that while you delay, arise and be baptized and wash away your sins calling on his name. Verse 17. And it came about, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, and I saw him saying to me, Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.

And I said, Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another, I used to imprison and beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of your witness servant was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the cloaks of those who were slaying him.

[6:07] And he said to me, Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles. And they listened to him up to this statement. Then they raised their voices and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth, or he should not be allowed to live.

And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air, the commander ordered Paul to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging. So he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way.

And when they stretched him out upon the frame, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned? And when the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, What are you about to do?

This man is a Roman. And the commander came and said to him, Tell me, are you a Roman? And he said, Indeed. And the commander answered, I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money. And Paul said, But I was actually born one.

Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him. And the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman and because he had put him in chains. Gina Sandoval, the daughter of Matthias and Janet, they're out of town this weekend.

[7:26] Kind of funny that they're out of town and I'm talking about their daughter. I've asked Gina permission to say this, so just so you know. Gina Sandoval works at an after-school program at a particular school in Phoenix while she's finishing up her degree this spring at GCU.

This past week, she posted the following story on her Facebook page. Yesterday at after-school, that's the name of the program, one of my students told me today would be his birthday and asked if we could celebrate with cupcakes.

So of course, I arrived at work today with the cherished desserts only to find out his birthday is in July. After making it abundantly clear to the student that lying to others is not okay, I did what any good teacher would do.

I googled February 24th holidays to find a backup plan. And that is how the story of how, excuse me, and that is the story of how my first graders celebrated National Tortilla Chip Day with chocolate sprinkled cupcakes.

I read that story three times this past week and I was laughing hysterically all three times.

[9:00] Now, if there's anyone who's good at adjusting, it's Gina. She's really good at that. She can adjust. She's very flexible. Seriously.

Seriously. When things don't go our way, we don't want to adjust, do we? When circumstances don't go our way, we want the circumstances to adjust.

We don't want to adjust our lives to the circumstances. Oh no. That's out of the question. But that's not how the Lord God works.

God doesn't work like that. God doesn't adjust your circumstances to fit how things you want them to be. God doesn't adjust my circumstances to fit them to how I want them to be.

God says, adjust your life for the sake of the unadjusted gospel. Right? And we say amen until we're facing some difficulty then it's different.

[10:18] We adjust not the gospel. We adjust not God's truth. We adjust not God and what He's doing. So when we come to this large section in Acts, let's just be who we are.

God just do it. Let's let God use us to fulfill His mission. Here we're going to see how we should be adjusting our lives for the unadjusted gospel.

We are adjusting our lives for the sake of the gospel which is unadjusted. The gospel doesn't adjust. We do. God's Word doesn't adjust.

We do. We make the adjustment in our lives and then we use the things that God gives us within the circumstances that He puts us in to proclaim the gospel and to live out the gospel in our lives.

That's what we do. And that's what we see Paul doing by way of example. That's exactly what Paul does. He faced suffering. He faced horrible circumstances. And what does he do?

[11:24] He adjusts his life and he takes the opportunity to give someone the gospel. That's amazing. How he does that. I wish I could do that.

That guy does it so well. I mean he does it perfectly here. I mean he's about to get killed and he does it perfectly. He doesn't moan and gripe and whine.

That's what I do. I moan, I gripe and whine. Right? I know none of you do that. Only pastors do. Adjusting our lives for the unadjusted gospel.

In a statement for you. As God is using us to fulfill his mission remember that it won't be an easy road. But it's in those hard times where we must trust the Lord Jesus trust and obey.

And flexibly adjust our lives for the sake of proclaiming and living out the unadjusted gospel.

There's a method to my madness for the songs that we sang this morning.

[12:35] Do you notice that? In suffering and affliction and trials we're trusting God. And we're praising his name. See the gospel does not adjust.

We do. Our lives adjust. The gospel remains the same. So as God's using us we must realize it's not going to be easy.

It's hard to be a Christian. But it's in those hard times where that's where God calls us to trust him. And that's where he calls us to be flexible.

Adjust like Gina. Adjust our lives for the sake of proclaiming the gospel and living it out in your life.

How are you going to live out the gospel in that situation? How are you going to proclaim the gospel in that situation?

How are you going to display the gospel in that situation? The gospel remains the same. What is the gospel? God saves hell deserving sinners through the person and work of Jesus Christ when they repent and trust him alone.

[13:42] Jesus lived. He died. He rose. That's the gospel. Repent. Turn away from your sin and put your trust in Jesus. That's the gospel that we proclaim.

Hopefully you proclaimed yourself to... You proclaimed the gospel to yourself this morning when you woke up. Thank you, Father, that you love me. I turn from my sin. I put all my trust in Jesus. Did you proclaim the gospel to yourself this morning?

We adjust our lives so we can live out this gospel truth and then take the opportunity to proclaim this gospel truth. of God's grace working our lives.

Of God's grace transforming our lives. That's what we do. That's what Paul does. He's a master at this mixed to Jesus. Here's these zealous Asian Jews.

They're disturbing the peace. Crying out these false accusations against Paul. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Who's trying to complete his purification like a good faithful Jew. A faithful, law-devoted Jewish Christian who's falsely accused of being a faithless, law-breaking, Jew-hating Christian.

[14:55] Well, that makes no sense. What does Paul do? He trusted God and then he argued his case of innocence taking the opportunity to present the gospel clearly, accurately, patiently, right there before his attackers.

You know what was more important for Paul than his own life? Was proclaiming the gospel and showing God's grace at work in his own life.

I mean, do we do that? Do we take those opportunities of horrible sin taking place in your life, horrible circumstances you find yourself and you say, well, look at God being so gracious to me and you show that to others.

Look how God's been so gracious to me. I'm such a flagrant sinner and you're so gracious to me.

Do we do that? No, we rant and complain and whine. At least I do.

I know none of you people don't. It was more important than his freedom to let the gospel be displayed.

[15 : 59] And as we trust Jesus, take advantage of those difficult circumstances that he's brought to you. and wisely use the cards he gives you.

I'm going to explain what I mean by the cards. So I, certain quotations? Yeah. The cards. I'm going to mention that what I mean. But there's certain cards that he gives us. Certain things that he gives you. Play those cards right.

Play those cards wisely and graciously. He's giving you the opportunity to do that in this circumstance. You find yourself there. So, number one.

Actually, first part, I should say, not number one. The hard work of Christianity. That's when you trust the Lord. Chapter 21, starting verse 27 through verse 36.

27 through 36. Yeah, I got the verses there. Oh, I put this up here too. Oh, I didn't want to do that. I wanted to put this up here but I don't have it up there.

[17 : 03] That's okay. I'll just read it. The hard work of Christianity. Look, people are going to oppose you. People are going to persecute you.

People are just going to hate you because you just say you're a Christian. You don't have to say anything to them about nothing. You say you're a Christian, they'll automatically hate you.

They'll disdain you. People will oppose us, persecute us, disdain us just for being a Christian. It's hard to be a Christian. It's not easy. Everybody will be a Christian, right?

Starting in verse 27 of chapter 21. Notice, seven days were over. We talked about this last week. He wants to complete his purification vow. So, the cleansing was tied to the vow.

And the cleansing will be done the third day and the seventh day according to Numbers chapter 19 verse 12. He's on the last day. He's about to do the ritual purification and he's about to leave. He's almost at the point of, I mean, he's almost there.

[18 : 10] He's like right there. He's going to go. And these Asian Jews, they recognized him. Saw him in the temple. They stirred up the multitude.

The idea is that they're bringing turmoil. Who are these Asian Jews? Non-Christian Asian Jews.

They stirred up non-Christian Jews. Jerusalem Jews. That's what's happening here. Non-Christian Asian Jews stirred up non-Christian Jerusalem Jews. And they give these false charges.

They say, this is the guy. First charge, he teaches against the people, the law and the temple.

Second charge, he brought Greeks into the temple and defiled it.

Gentiles or Greeks are not allowed in the main temple area. But then in verse 29, they had previously seen trophimist division in the city with them. They suppose that Paul had brought them into the temple.

[19 : 14] They mistaken. Paul brought them into the temple. Okay. What's really going on here? What is really their beef against Paul?

Don't I have that up there? I don't have that up there. Oh. That's terrible. I had that there. Somebody ate it. He did not insist that Gentile converts to Christianity had to become Jewish proselytes.

That was their beef. They had to become like Jews. They had to follow the law. They had to be circumcised. And he was telling them they can't do that.

He was telling them they didn't have to do that. You know, it's so ironic, by the way, that Paul here is trying to abide by the law and yet they're telling him he's not abiding by the law. Wait a second. What?

He was accused of something that's not true. That's the usual with false accusations. Those who come against us will bring false accusations against us. In the midst of our showing love for other Christians, even for non-Christians, they will accuse you of the very opposite.

[20 : 30] So what do we do? Adjust our own lives and take the opportunity to proclaim the gospel. See, that's where we get depressed, we moan, oh God, what are you doing?

I hate these circumstances. But here, you're going to see what Paul does. He adjusts his life and he's going to take the opportunity to give someone the gospel and to show God's grace working in his own heart and life.

It's amazing. It's amazing. Notice what happens in verse 30. The city was aroused. People rushed together. They grabbed Paul.

They seized him or arrested him. Took him outside the temple, dragging him outside the inner court and they shut the gates and they immediately began to beat the living daylight out of Paul.

Here, actually, it's a picture of the fact that the Jews were rejecting God's message of grace. Verse 31, they're seeking to kill him and a report came to the Roman garrison.

[21:40] Here, and you have the temple, in the northwest corner of the temple, there's a garrison. It's a station. A Roman station. So if a problem arose, which is always happening in Jerusalem, somebody's mad about something, if a problem arose, they could react quickly.

They had two sets of stairs that ran from that fortress down into the outer court of the temple. So they had a prepared garrison. Seeing the danger, the commander or the tribune or the official, says in verse 31, he sees the confusion and at once, verse 32, he took along soldiers and centurions and ran down to them and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped being brought. I don't do anything. I didn't do anything. I didn't touch them. He didn't touch them. No, it's not me. A cohort was a thousand men. A cohort had about 760 troops and the rest was cavalry.

So if you had, it says centurions, it's plural. So if you had at least two centurions, you're talking at least 200 soldiers. So maybe even more. Paul sent the troops down to stop the confusion.

The beating of Paul stopped immediately. Notice it says 33, the commander came up, took hold of Paul, ordered him to be bound with two chains. He didn't rescue Paul.

[23:04] He didn't say, oh, they're beating some guy. He's trying to stop the riots here. Now, it just so happens his life was saved. I'm glad those guys showed up.

And these Jews wanted to kill him. It bound him with two chains, probably a soldier on each side. Paul was now under Roman authority. His fate was in their hands.

And the tribune or the commander or the official says the end of verse 33, he began asking what he is. Why are you guys beating this guy up? What's going on? What's the cause of the chaos?

Notice he gets nothing but more chaos. Some were shouting one thing, some another. He couldn't find out what the facts were. He ordered him to be brought into the barracks and it got so bad.

When they got to the stairs of the barracks, the soldiers had to carry Paul because the mob was so violent.

The multitude was following behind him, screaming. The idea of the Greek is almost like this. Good riddance! Judge him! Get him out of here! Again, a telling picture, friends.

[24:15] A final rejection of the gospel by the Jewish people. An innocent Jew who abided by the law experienced injustice, suffering, affliction, opposition for his commitment to the good news.

His commitment to the good news, his love for Jewish Christians and even his love for non-Christian Jews. He's shown that love and they accused him of wrong. Look, the world opposes us.

Our flesh opposes us. The devil opposes us. The road of being a Christian is not easy. As John MacArthur said, it's hard to believe.

But praise God, he gives us the power to live the Christian life as we trust him amid our circumstances and trust his love for us in Jesus Christ.

He loves us in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's hard to be a Christian because we face opposition. And not just opposition in terms of physical people, but then you have not just the world, but then your flesh is in opposition to you.

[25:36] Your flesh hates you. The evil one hates you as well. He's in opposition to you. We have all three strikes against us already. But yet we have a mighty God. In the midst of those circumstances, he gives us grace and he says, trust me.

And we follow Paul's example here. We follow Paul how he adjusts his life and then he takes the opportunity to show God's grace at work in his own life proclaiming this gospel of grace to others. What a master at this. So that's what we move into now. What does Paul, what cards does Paul use? And how can we learn from Paul here?

What can we see? First, we can see, use your identity card. That's the first card you must play. Now you might say, what do I mean by this? What do I mean by the card?

This is what I mean and you'll find this maybe rather humorous. When I was assistant pastor in Sedona, a friend of mine, he's still a friend of mine, Buzz Likowski, we would always, we would tease each other about different things and I would start saying something, you know, you know, a good member should be doing this and he would always go, oh, you're pulling out the pastor card now, eh Jim?

[26:57] So then we kind of have a running joke here. I'm like, yeah, I'm going to pull the pastor card out on you. You know, we've got a running joke. Well, this is the card we pull out. When we're in the face of opposition and suffering and affliction and trials and tribulations, the example that Paul follows, he pulls out his identity card, he identified with those people that are against him and he used the opportunity to show that God's grace is at work in his life in proclaiming the gospel.

That's what he does. He does it superbly here. And he does it here in chapter 21, verse 37, all the way to chapter 22, verse 21. He used his identity card.

Notice how it begins. In verse 37, first he used the identity card with the commander. He's about to be brought into the barracks. The commander, he says to the commander, may I say something to you?

The commander says, oh, you know Greek? The idea is, not so much he knew Greek, but he actually was speaking Greek very well. He's like, oh, you know Greek? It surprised him.

I thought you were that Egyptian insurrectionist, crazy, psycho dude who brought 4,000 men, the assassins. And Paul's like, I'm a Jew from Tarsus.

[28:06] I'm not that guy. Corrected the commander, I'm a Jew from Tarsus. In Cilicia, which is not an insignificant city. Tarsus was a political, economic, and intellectual type city.

He's pulling out his identity card. This is the type of person, this is who I am. I'm not a threat to you. As a matter of fact, I have every right to be heard and treated fairly.

That's why he says here, in verse 39, I beg you, allow me to speak to the people. And the commander gave him permission. Paul sent on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand, and when he was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect.

Look at what Paul's doing. First he pulls out his identity card to the Romans. I'm a Jew from Tarsus, Cilicia. Cilicia, that's a really important city. You should know, Tarsus is a really important city, you should know that.

Let me talk to the people. The commander says, oh, okay. Then he pulls out his Jewish card, and he starts speaking to them in the Hebrew dialect, which is Aramaic. That was what the Jews spoke in. And notice, when he starts speaking to them in Aramaic, and notice the personal aspect that he gives, brethren and fathers.

[29:21] Brethren, you're my brothers. Jewish brothers. Fathers, in other words, they're leaders, but instead of saying, you're my leaders, he says, you're my fathers.

Notice the personal aspect that he gives. He's pulling out his identity card again. I'm a Jew. And notice, when they heard you addressing him in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet. Allow me to address, to defend myself, is really what the word means. Interesting, by the way, as we come into this portion of Acts, this is going to be the second time that we hear of Paul's conversion.

In the book of Acts, it's told three times. Later on in Acts, here in 22, and then earlier in chapter 9. Three times, so you think this is kind of important?

Yeah, probably. And what is he going to do? He's going to identify with them, talking about my former life in Judaism, the appearing of the resurrected Jesus, Ananias' role, his vision from Jesus, and his call to preach.

[30:29] Look, I'm a faithful Jew. That's what he's going to say. I'm a law-abiding, faithful Jew. I was a zealous Jew. Now I'm a zealous Christian who's a zealous proclaimer of the gospel.

I'm zealous for the law. I'm zealous for Jesus. And now, I'm zealous for the message. Well, how does that correspond to us when we're faced in this position? How do we emulate Paul's example here?

What do we do? He used, and will continue to use, his Tarsian citizenship and ethnicity to further the gospel. For us, what can we say?

We talk about our pre-conversion. We talk about our conversion. And we talk about our commissioning. That's what we do. We emulate Paul here.

This is exactly what Paul does. This is what happened before. This is what I was like before I knew the Lord Jesus Christ. This is his grace being shown in my life. And now this is what he's called me to do, to proclaim this gospel of grace to other people.

[31 : 32] We're interweaving the gospel within our testimony. That's what Paul does. That's exactly what he does. Let's go into this. Starting in verse 3 all the way to verse 21.

I am a Jew born in... Wait, hold on a second. Stop right here. Can you get the picture? Remember, they were beating up Paul. So he doesn't have a white robe on, all nicely, you know, his hair is all nice and combed.

So think of it. Here he's chained. Here he's bruised. Think of it. He's probably bloody. He's probably exhausted.

Right? So get the picture here. Here he's standing up. He's screaming like Blake, maybe earlier. He goes, Ah! Right? You know? And then he's bruised and bloody and everything like that.

He's just exhausted. And he's addressing the crowd. He says, I'm a Jew born in Tarshish of Cilicia. But I'm brought up in the city.

[32 : 40] Educated on Gamaliel. Strictly according to the law of our fathers. Being zealous for God. Just as all of you are today. Notice how he identifies with them. I'm a Pharisee.

I was a Pharisee. I'm a law abiding Jew. I was zealous for you. Just like all of you. What were the accusations that they had against him? He hated our people.

He hates the law. He hates this temple. I wasn't like that. Notice what he says. I had so much zeal. Verse 4. I persecuted this way to the death.

Binding and putting both men and women to prisons. The high priests. The council of elders. They can testify. From them I received letters. So the brethren started off for Damascus. In order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem.

As prisoners to be punished. What was Paul doing? Paul was trying to do whatever he could. To persuade his hearers of God's divine call upon his life.

[33 : 38] And how Jesus is both Lord and Christ. The fulfiller of the Old Testament promises. For his people. And that's us. We adjust our lives for the sake of the gospel.

We adjust our lives. We should do whatever we can. To try and persuade those. When we're coming against opposition. And suffering and affliction. We should take the opportunity to display. And show God's grace at work in our life. And proclaim that gospel. And then notice how we recount. So Jesus appeared to him.

Verse 6 through 11. When he's on his way to Damascus. At very noontime. High noon. This bright light. Brighter than the midday sun shone. Notice what he says.

I fell to the ground. Heard a voice. Saul. Saul. Why are you persecuting me? Who are you Lord? I am Jesus. The Nazarene. Emphasizing Jesus humanity. Whom you are persecuting.

[34 : 37] Check out verse 9. Those who are with me. Beheld the light to be sure. But did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. In other words. Paul was not having some vision. It was not a dream.

Those who are with him. They saw the light. They didn't understand the voice. He didn't have some inner experience. This really happened. And then he asked this question.

Lord what shall I do? In verse 10. He says. Arise. Go into Damascus. And there will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do. And since I could not see the light because of the brightness. I was led by the hand of those who were with me.

And came into Damascus. He would be part of God's plan. He had to be led because the light blinded him. And then Ananias steps in.

In verse 12. Who is devout. To live by the law. Well spoken of by the Jews. Notice he says. Brother Paul. Or Saul I should say. Receive your sight. And at that time.

[35 : 35] Very time. I looked up at him. Verse 14. And he said. The God of our fathers has appointed you to know his will. And to see the righteous one. To hear an utterance from his mouth.

You will be a witness for him. To all men of what you have seen and heard. God of our fathers.

Pointing out the fact that. This is something that the God of the Jews was calling Paul to do.

God. Had appointed Paul to know God's will. To see the righteous one. That is Jesus Christ. To hear from him. And to be his witness. Regarding what he had seen and heard. He'd be a witness to the righteous one.

Before all people. Because he witnessed the resurrection of Jesus. So this is what Paul is doing. This is what happened. This is what my life was like before. Then Jesus converted me. His grace came upon me. And then this is what he commissioned me to do. This is what I'm supposed to do. Here I was before God's grace. This is how God's grace worked in my life. [36 : 33] And this is the grace that I'm proclaiming to you now. And then notice at this point in verse 16.

And now why do you delay? Ananias said arise and be baptized and wash away your sins calling on his name. Which is a response of faith and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. What was the symbol? What was the sign? That Paul would show that he's responded to the gospel. What was the sign? The symbol that showed that God had changed him? Baptism. He went under the water. Now he's a whole new person. And that's what we proclaim. When we're facing the opposition. We talk about this is my life without God's grace. This is my life when God's grace overwhelmed me. And now I'm changed. I'm transformed. This is what he commissioned me to do. Notice what he says in verse 17 and 18. [37 : 38] And I returned to Jerusalem. I was praying. And I fell into a trance. Again showing his devotion to the people. To the law. To the temple. The Lord commanded him. Leave. Get out of here. Make haste.

They will not accept your testimony. The Lord Jesus was warning him of danger. And Paul questioned it. In verse 19. He's like. This doesn't make any sense Lord. I have credibility. I used to persecute those who believed in Jesus. I'm not doing it anymore. Why would they not believe me? This doesn't make any sense. They themselves understand in one synagogue after another.

I used to imprison and beat those who believed in you. When the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed. I was standing by approving. I was watching their cloaks. Those who were slaying him. I don't understand.

Go. The Lord said. I will send you to the Gentiles. This was not Paul's own thinking. God was responsible for Paul's call.

[38 : 37] God was responsible for this call upon. For this call upon Paul's life. So here was a faithful Jew. Who persecuted the way.

Now he's a faithful Jew. Who obeyed the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm a whole different person now. It was God's desire to invite Gentiles into the blessing of salvation.

It was God's will to bring salvation to all the nations. Not just to Jews. So we talk about. What does this mean for us? We talk about how our lives were without God's grace.

We talk about how God's grace just overwhelmed us. And then we talk about how now God's grace is calling me to proclaim his grace to others. That's what we do. We emulate Paul's example here. So what does this mean for us specifically?

We pull out the identity card in our lives. What's your identity card? Your ethnicity? Your skill?

[39 : 40] Your job? Your education? Maybe your hometown. Maybe a hobby. You like to golf. Family.

Hey, I got 10 kids. Hey, I got 11. That goes over well when you're talking with people. What is it? What's the connection? You pull out that card so you can further the gospel in the lives of other people.

So you can proclaim the gospel. And you can show how the gospel's been at work in your life. And you proclaim that gospel. And now the gospel needs to be at work in that person's life.

Now I'm not saying your testimony is giving the gospel. Your testimony is not giving the gospel. I'm not saying that.

What I am saying is we must realize that our testimony is not the gospel, yet we interweave our testimony in the gospel, in our proclamation to others. Take advantage of the opposition.

[40 : 40] Take advantage of the suffering. Take advantage of the hostility. Show the fact that this is my life without God's grace. This is my life now with God's grace. And just at work in my life transforming me.

And now I'm proclaiming this grace to you. Take advantage of it. Take advantage of it. The first card we use. We use our identity card. The second card you have.

Why is it use your government card? What do I mean? Whatever government you are under, use the rights and privileges given to citizens to further their gospel in your life and the life of others.

For us or the particular government we live in. But what if you live in Belarus? It's against the law for more than 20 people to meet together in Belarus.

So like we're about 50 here. So we're like 30 plus over. 30 over. You can't do that in Belarus. So what do you do?

[41:48] You adjust. You do what Gina does. I don't think it's National Tortilla Day in Belarus, but maybe it is.

You adjust your life. And you use the rights and privileges that are given to you in that particular government to do what? To further the cause of the gospel.

Notice what happens with Paul. Verse 22 of chapter 22. God's responsible for what Paul was doing. Talking to Gentiles about the gospel.

Well, they didn't like that. They didn't care. They listened to this point and they reacted vehemently. They're thinking Paul was pro-Gentile. Heeding Jews. Notice, Away with such a fellow he shouldn't even be allowed to live.

That's been their view all along. Notice how they showed their reaction against Paul in verse 23. They're crying out. They're throwing off their cloaks. They're tossing dust into the air.

[42:55] He spoke something offensive. Blasphemy. Notice it's another picture of God's, excuse me, of their complete rejection of God's grace.

That's going to happen. People are going to reject God's grace. Friends, you can say, you can say all the right things.

You can do all the good deeds you want. But some people will just hate you because you're a Christian. No matter what you say, no matter how you present it, they simply reject the gospel. It doesn't matter about nothing. They just can't stand you. And they'll make sure you know it. What do you do?

Show God's grace. This is my life without God's grace. This is God's grace in my life. And you just say, I'm just proclaiming God's grace. And they're still going to reject you. So what do you do?

[43:59] Notice what happens. Notice what Paul does at this point. Verse 24. The commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks. He should be examined by scourging. So he might find out the reasons why they're shouting against him that way.

See, he was speaking in Aramaic. So the commander had no idea what was going on. He's just, okay, he's frustrated. That's it. I'm done. He brought Paul into the barracks. I'm going to whip him. I'm going to whip up on him. Scourging, they used a whip with a wooden handle with leather thongs attached. And to which were tied pieces of bone or metal.

They would get anybody to talk. Because they're ripping your flesh off your back and your legs. You would probably talk after the first two strikes. Okay, I'll tell you my whole life story. Verse 25.

They're stretching him out upon the wooden frame. Paul asked, Is it law for you to discourage a man who's a Roman? Roman citizens, are they going to be treated this way without having a fair trial?

[45:05] Notice he's pulling out the Roman citizen card. Paul still takes advantage of the opportunity. Any opportunity is given to him. Even though there's a rejection over here, he's looking for any opportunity to proclaim the gospel of grace.

And that's what he does here. And then he uses the government card. Are you sure you guys can be whipping up Roman citizens without a fair trial? Well, the centurion, notice him.

What? He went to the commander. What are you going to do? This man's a Roman. Cicero says this. Quote, To bind a Roman citizen is a crime. To flog him in an abomination.

To slay him is almost an act of murder. End quote. With no fair trial. The commander came and said to him, Verse 27.

Tell me, are you a Roman? And he said, indeed. The commander answered, I acquired the citizenship with a large sum of money. Now, stop here. You couldn't just say, which I mentioned this before in past messages, you couldn't just say, Hey, I'm a Roman.

[46:16] You know, you're about to get away. Wait a second, I'm a Roman. You couldn't just do that. Because if you did that, and there's no record of you being a Roman, yeah, they'd kill you.

You're dead. I mean, they'd chop your head off right there. I mean, that's it. You're done.

Sometimes citizens, they carried like, diplomas, they were like wooden booklets that kind of had a registration of their citizenship.

The tribune, the commander, he said, Well, I paid a lot of money for me to be a citizen. In other words, I bribed somebody. Paul says, I was actually born one. Now, given their reaction, we'll see in a moment, this would have more weight than buying his citizenship.

Now, how did he become a citizen? We don't know. Maybe his father had some social status. Maybe his father or his mother, they did something for Rome, and they got Roman citizenship because they had Roman citizenship because he was born.

He was born Roman. We're not sure. We don't know. Whatever the case, in verse 29, those who are about to examine him, they immediately let go of him.

Oh my goodness, are you kidding me? And then the commander was fearful because of how they treated him.

[47 : 31] A Roman citizen by birth would outrank the commander who was a Roman citizen by this bribe or this large sum of money. But notice, Paul was focused on proclaiming the gospel while he was even defending himself.

In other words, he's saying, the Roman emperor has nothing to fear because we're not a threat to society. And that's the same thing we should say. As a matter of fact, Christians should be known as the most submissive people to the government.

We should be known of that. We're no threat. Whether you're talking about our brothers and sisters in Belarus or you're talking about our brothers and sisters in Cottonwood, Arizona, we're no threat to the government.

We should show we are the most submissive people to the government. Why?

Because in the circumstances we find ourselves in, whatever it is, we use our rights and privileges given to us to further the gospel in our own lives and the lives of others.

[48 : 45] We take the opportunity. Instead of us griping and whining and complaining, like I do, I know none of you people do that, but instead of us doing that, me doing that, we should take the opportunity to show God's grace at work in our lives and have the opportunity to proclaim the gospel to others using the cards He's given us.

Now, even though God can use the government to protect us, we can't fully rely upon the government. Amen? Amen. Amen. But that's why we started with the Christian life is hard.

Lord, who do we trust? We trust the Lord. Who will protect us according to His perfect plan so that the gospel can be clearly, accurately, and unmistakably proclaimed?

because God is a God who wants to display His grace throughout the world. We must, we must be able to adjust our lives within the context we find ourselves so that the gospel can be further.

Friend, it's about the gospel, not you. It's about the gospel, not you. Whatever circumstance, whether you're facing opposition and persecution from someone else, or whether you're facing affliction or trial through death, struggle, sin, whatever, whatever situation, this type of suffering or this type of suffering, God has you in those circumstances.

[50 : 30] How are you going to display God's grace in your life? How are you going to take the opportunity to show God's grace at work in your life and to proclaim that grace to others? How are you going to do that?

That's what Paul does. As God is using us to fulfill His mission, we must remember the Christian life is not an easy road.

But it's in those hard times where we must trust Him and flexibly adjust our lives for the sake of proclaiming and living the unadjusted gospel. As we trust Jesus, take advantage of the difficult circumstances He's brought.

Why is He using the cards He's given to you? How are you going to show God's grace at work in your life? God's grace at work and He's given us We thank you that you show such forgiveness and grace to us because Father, we know we mess up.

Which is why we proclaim your grace because you show grace and you continue to show us grace. So give us grace in whatever suffering we find ourselves in.

[51 : 48] Give us grace to proclaim your grace. Give us grace to remind us that you are so gracious.

give us grace. Give us grace give us grace so we can proclaim the gospel of grace to others who need your grace.

Take the next few moments and just ponder and think about what we've seen in God's Word this morning. mull over it in your mind.

Maybe take the opportunity to proclaim God's grace to you in the cross of Jesus Christ once again. Remind yourself of His love for you in Jesus Christ. Maybe pray that God would give you the grace to use those cards that He's given you.

Whatever it is just take a few moments of silence and then we'll do our time of giving our act of praise and our giving and sing our last two songs and then our closing prayer.

[53:06] God bless you for may to sing our love and growing and make and ears and from the and the and the the the right and the finite two and then