

## Acts 24 "The Solution to an Accusing Conscience"

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Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0:00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah. It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me, actually, to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Let's just bow our heads in prayer. Father, we give you thanks and praise for Jesus. We give you thanks and praise that He died on the cross as our substitute to be our Savior. We give you thanks and praise that there is no human being so far from you, no human being who has done anything so evil that your Son's death upon the cross is not sufficient to save them. That you have and can and will forgive even the worst when they come to you, asking for your forgiveness and for Jesus to be their Savior and their Lord. So Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would bring these precious truths home to us in a very powerful way as we look at your Word. May they form our heart and how we live. And we ask these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated.

Amen. Amen. Amen. I think I think I think I think I think I think I think I think I think I  
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guilty person or stop the bad thing from happening.

And most of the more popular books in that genre have a bit of a semi-tortured hero. Somebody who in fact is struggling because they've done some horrible things and they're a bit uncomfortable with their conscience, so to speak, as they try to deal with that other issue.

[ 3 : 10 ]      And so it's just, I think it's now viewed as a very common place of contemporary wisdom that people need to learn how to forgive themselves.

But the problem is, like why is it that this is going on in the culture? And you know, the problem is, and many of us are probably living with this right now, some of us have seasons in our lives and sometimes those seasons of our lives can last a very, very, very long time.

When we have a conscience that accuses us constantly. Our conscience isn't quiet and it isn't settled. But it's as if there's something inside of our head with a loud voice that accuses us over and over and over again.

And it affects how we relate to other people. And it affects our sleep. It just deeply affects us. And on top of that, some of us maybe live with, it's not just a voice inside of our head which is accusing us very shrilly.

But we actually might live or see regularly somebody who accuses us. And that is how a lot of us live. And I think it's in that context that our cultural wisdom is that we have to learn to forgive ourselves.

[ 4 : 34 ] It's an attempt to quieten that conscience which accuses us, which says you are no good. You are terrible. You always do terrible things.

Did you see what you just did? That just shows how bad you are. I am bad. You are bad. It's just over and over and over in our head. So how do we live with that?

Well, actually, believe it or not, the Bible text that was just read by Josiah, on one hand, probably some of you find the text very, very boring.

And in some ways, it is a bit of a boring text for a lot of us Canadians. It might not be boring for lawyers because of the two legal arguments summarized in it.

And I don't know if you picked up that actually within that, there's not only something which is in the midst of that story, which some of us would have found boring. It's actually a thing that if you understood what he just said, you'd go, whoa, whoa, he just said that?

[ 5 : 35 ] Because he touches on something which for many people in our culture, we find, they find is a problem with Christianity. But it's actually in this story, if you actually enter into what's going on in the story, there's a key building block of solving the problem of accusing conscience.

And the key building block is vastly better than the futile attempt to forgive yourself. So open your Bibles. Let's have a look and see what it says. And we're looking at Acts chapter 24.

And if you're watching or you're here and you haven't been to our church before, we preach through books of the Bible. We're going through the book of Acts. It's an... And we've started chapter one.

We're going to go right till the end. And we're looking at chapter 24. And what has just sort of happened here is that Paul, who's an apostle, he's in Roman custody.

He's been accused of things that he hadn't done. There's been a mob that tried to kill him. There's been a plot to try to kill him and to save him from the plot. The Romans, when they discover he's also a Roman citizen, they've brought him into still not protective custody.

[ 6 : 43 ] It's still criminal custody, not protective custody. It's criminal custody. And they've brought him to the capital of the whole region before the governor of the whole region so that there could be a type of trial about what should be done about Paul.

And that's where we are in the story. And so let's begin at chapter 24, verse one. And here's how it goes. And after five days... So the five days is the plot to murder Paul.

So five days after the plot to murder Paul, the high priest Ananias came down with some of the elders. They're sort of... Elders is a good translation, but what you should understand, it's a bit of a formal title for the nobility.

Okay, so Ananias, who's the high priest, has come down with some other people of the priestly elite, and he's also brought some of the secular elite, so to speak, down for this trial.

So they're very invested in finding Paul guilty so that he will be killed. That's... If you don't understand that it's all about Paul being killed, you won't understand the drama of the text.

[ 7 : 51 ] By the way, I planned it exactly that there'd be kids coming in at a dramatic moment like that. It takes lots of extra planning to do that. So verse 21 again.

And after five days, the high priest Ananias came down with some of the elders, or the lay nobility, and a spokesman, one Tertullus, basically a lawyer, because it's going to be a trial.

And they laid before the governor their case against Paul. And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse Paul, saying... Now, just before we go any more into it, just a bit of an aside, in terms of the historical accuracy of the book, Ananias, the high priest, is...

They know a lot about him because a Jewish historian wrote about him. And at the end of this, we're going to discover that it's Felix, who was the Roman governor, and they know a lot about Felix because the Roman historian Tacitus talked about him.

And if you're very curious, you can go into some academic commentaries, and they'll talk about how Tacitus lived and Ananias lived and their conflicts and all of that other stuff.

[ 9 : 02 ] There's this whole other subtext going on in the bottom of it. But the bottom line is that if you know the historical record about these two men, you'll understand that what happens in this story is completely plausible and reasonable.

There's no reason historically to doubt that this actually happened and that this is an accurate state of affairs. So what's their argument as to why Felix should put Paul to death?

This is life and death. It begins then in verse 2, halfway through. Tertullus says, Since through you we enjoy peace, much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation.

In every way and everywhere, we accept this with all gratitude. So basically, this is just a summary. Like in real life, he spent 20 minutes, 25 minutes, shameless flattery.

That's what he would have done. And by the way, we know that flattery works. Otherwise, people would stop using flattery. But it's just shameless flattery. They just summarized it very briefly.

[ 10 : 11 ] And then it continues, verse 4, But to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. For we found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots.

Sorry, that's verse 5. For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jewish people throughout the world, and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

Now, just pause here. The word translated is plague. It's a very good word, but it's actually a technical legal term. And so what the charge is, is they've said, the word for plague could also be translated as public enemy.

And so the charge that they're going, they're not going after anything religious with Paul. Paul knows that it's, for religious reasons, that they're after him. But they don't use that. They don't use anything spiritual.

They go after a very, very, very serious crime, and it's the crime of sedition. That Paul is a well-traveled public enemy. That's what the word plague is.

[ 11 : 11 ] And so you can get it. It's a plague. He's a public enemy that's just going to spread and spread and spread unless you put him to death. And even when they say that he's a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, that's furthering their claim that he is a public menace.

Why? Because they say you follow Jesus. And who's Jesus? Well, Jesus was executed 20-some years earlier for being the king of the Jews.

He's been accused of sedition. Verse 6, he even tried to profane the temple. So now they're sort of giving him some arguments. He even tried to profane the temple, right? He's a troublemaker. But we seized him.

We're the good guys. We're the good guys. We seized him. Verse 8, By examining him yourself, you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him.

The Jews also joined the charge affirming that all these things were so offering of our evidence. And the thing to remember in all of this is that in Roman trials, you are not innocent until proven guilty. That's why Paul is still not in protective custody, but in criminal custody.

[ 12 : 16 ] He is not innocent. They've made this accusation against him. In Canada, at least, I think still primarily, I don't have to say a single word in my defense if I'm accused of that.

They have to prove the case. Not there. Paul has to prove his innocence. It's a very, very clever legal ploy. So what's Paul going to do about it? Well, verse 10, And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied.

Paul has trained in rhetoric. He's going to defend himself. And he says this, Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense.

Now, by the way, we don't know if when he says cheerfully he's, like most of us, his knees are going like this and there's sweat pouring down, you know, but he said at least cheerfully.

That's, I guess, maybe his aspiration rather than what he's actually really feeling right then. We'll say that again. I cheerfully make my defense. You can verify that it is not more than 12 days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem and that they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city.

[ 13 : 28 ] And what Paul's going to do is he's going to try to ignore the sedition thing. He's going to just say there's no evidence of this and he's going to try to bring it back to a type of religious issue. But here's the point. Unless you're a lawyer and you're really interested in the strategy, we're coming to the part which is that we just read over but actually we should understand that that's like a woe moment.

Okay? Verse 13. Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me. But this I confess to you that according to the way, it's an early way of describing Christianity as the way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the law and written by the prophets.

That's why Christians, I sometimes shock some of my Jewish friends or acquaintances, they don't, there's a lot of Jewish people who don't understand that Christians believe the Old Testament is part of their Bible.

I mean, I say that to some and they go, like, they make a bit of a surprise to me. But it's, Christians believe the Old Testament is part of the Bible. Verse 15.

Having a hope in God, now here's the hope, which these men accept, okay, what's Paul's hope? which these men themselves accept, the Jews, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

[ 14 : 47 ] Now, pause here. That's, this is a woe moment. Woe. This is the language. Paul is a nobody.

Paul's a nobody. I mean, it's sort of one of those ironies of history that today, unless you happen to go to a church and they happen to preach on Acts, or unless you're into ancient Roman society, you have no idea who Felix is or Ananias.

Paul has schools named after him, cities are named after him, but back then, he's a nobody, complete and utter nobody, surrounded by all of the powerful people in criminal custody, and he's looking, the governor, whose nation has conquered the Jewish people, and he's saying, this is my hope.

My hope is that there will one day be a true and greater court, and every human being, the implication, you too, are going to stand before the triune God and be judged, and not everybody is going to be found innocent, and by him saying it's a hope, his belief is that when that final, true, and greater court comes, called by the triune God, every single person who's ever lived is going to appear before it, some will be found guilty, and this leads into the whole doctrine of eternal punishment, but my hope is that I will stand in that judgment, and he says that to the Roman governor.

That's a woe moment. I bet the Jewish people went, woe, and then they probably chuckled, now we got him. He's just insulted Felix.

[ 16 : 35 ] He's just called into question everything that Felix is doing. He's implying that there's a chance that Felix, when he appears before the triune God, will be found guilty and judged by God.

They're chuckling to themselves, and who knows, maybe some of Paul's friends are thinking, Paul, that's not a smart move.

Paul is playing for bigger stakes. In a sense, what's going through Paul's heart is what does it profit me to stand justified before God on the judgment day when I didn't give Felix an opportunity to also stand and be found justified on the last day of judgment.

What's far more important? In Felix's mind, he's probably going, hmm, this is interesting. I'm a Roman.

You're a Jew under my thumb. I'm a governor. You're a nobody. I'm rich. You're a nobody. I'm powerful. You're a nobody. My brother personally knows the emperor.

[ 17 : 50 ] Da-da-da-da. You're a nobody. You're in my court. You're a nobody. I get to decide your fate. You're a nobody. That's probably what's going through his mind. But Paul makes this very, very bold claim.

And as we're going to see for a moment, it's going to be something that he doubles down on in a couple of minutes. Let's look what happens. Verse 16. So, this is what he says.

And here's where it touches in with what I said. It's actually something which is important to understand the issue of a severely accusing conscience. Look what he says in verse 16. So, he has this hope that every single human being will appear before the judgment seat of the triune God.

This, by the way, is not a popular doctrine in Canada, in case you're not aware of that. And my hope is that when that happens, I will be declared innocent. And then, look, he directly connects this to his conscience.

Look at verse 16. So, I always take pains to have a clear conscience before both God and human beings. Continues. Now, after several years, I came to bring alms to my nation.

[ 18 : 57 ] In other words, rather than coming to bring trouble, I brought money to help the poor and to present offerings. While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple without any crowd or tumult. It's a religious question, not political.

But some Jewish people from Western Turkey, they ought to be here before you and make an accusation should they have anything against me. In other words, none of these people actually witnessed the thing that got me into custody.

All of their testimony is completely and utterly valid. The lawyers amongst will say that it's hearsay and hence doesn't have any place in the court. Verse 20, or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council.

Other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them, it is respect. Look at this again. To the resurrection of the dead that I am in trial to you this day.

He returns to it, although obviously in a bit of a different tenor, hinting at why he has a conscience before him. Now, how does it all play out? Well, I'm going to get into this whole issue of the judgment, but we need to see the rest of the story because it's going to come up a third time in the text.

[ 20 : 02 ] Look at verse 22. But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the way, put them off, that's the Ananias and the Jewish elite, by saying, when Lysias, the tribune, comes down, I will decide your case.

Then he gave orders to the centurion that Paul should be kept in custody but have some liberty that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs. Paul is still going to remain in criminal custody.

Verse 24, after some days, Felix came with his wife Drusilia, who was Jewish, and Felix sent for Paul and heard him speak. Now, what does Paul speak about?

Third time, he talks about faith in Christ Jesus and 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, Felix was hoping that money would be given to him by Paul.

[ 21 : 10 ] In other words, he's hoping for a bribe. So he sent for Paul often and conversed with him. For two years, when two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus and desiring to do the Jewish elites a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

So, what's going on? Well, on one hand, what's going on here in this story is, here's the problem.

So, on one hand, how you can read this story. This is a story that, on one hand, probably none of us have been in this exact situation, but many of us have been in situations which are similar, which is that you're innocent, you have the evidence on your side, but your enemies are powerful, they are insistent upon your defeat, they will not listen to reason, and the ones who can judge it are corrupt.

Or, in other words, what, they're corrupt, that's maybe a strong word. Sometimes we've all been, and maybe it's been in a church, maybe it's been in school, maybe it's been a place of our employment, where the person who makes the decision, rather than looking at the facts of the case, does this, and sees which way is the wind blowing from the powerful.

And that's what's going on in the story. So, on one hand, it's a very, very human story. We've all probably been in some situations similar to this. But the big issue is, what does this have to do with accusing conscience, and how on earth can this idea that human beings are going to appear before the judgment seat of God, and be judged by Him, every single human being, how can this actually be helpful to anything?

[ 22 : 52 ] In fact, I think if you'd ask, and it wouldn't matter if you were in the most trendy coffee house, it wouldn't matter if you were in a Tim Hortons, or everything in between, it wouldn't matter if you went into an elite cocktail bar, or like a low-level pub, many people would say that they could never believe in a God who judges.

That's one of the problems I have with Christianity, George. You believe there's going to be a final judgment, some people are going to go to eternal punishment, others are going to be saved, I could never believe in a God or a religion that talks about stuff like that.

Paul is tripped down on this particular topic. So how can this actually be part of the help? Well, here's the first thing to think about, and this might be something you might want to say. Maybe if you're thinking these very things yourself, this is something here you'd consider.

Or if it comes up in conversation, it's come up in conversation with me, by the way. Sometimes people, after I've talked to them about Christianity for a while, have brought this issue up to me, and in a second way, because they'll also say, okay, by the way, George, you actually think, you think you're going to stand in the judgment day and I won't?

And you can sort of see them smirk, like, really? You think you're that much better than me? Like, really? And the implication is that I'm very deluded. But here's some things we could say.

[ 24 : 14 ] The first one is this. Everybody wants to live in a moral universe. We want to live in a moral universe at a very fundamental level. If you watch the Netflix series, it's very, very dark.

I'm not recommending it. It's called American Primeval. But one of the things which makes that series so dark is it's a fundamentally amoral place.

And when it's an amoral world, all that matters is who has the gun, who will kill to get what they want.

We want to live in a moral universe at a very fundamental level. But here's the question. How on earth can we live in a moral universe if there's not a final judgment? You can't have a moral universe without a final judgment.

If there's no final judgment, even if there's morality, it's not a moral universe. I'm not going to give you any spoiler alerts, but occasionally, there'll be movies that you can watch.

[ 25 : 17 ] And, you know, in hindsight, I'll go back and think, oh, it's one of those movies that had like a 96% critics liked it and 4% viewers liked it. And that should tell you something right off the bat if you have a movie that's reviewed like that.

And it's a movie where at the end of the movie, the victims die, the persecutors live, the oppressors live, those oppressing die. The people who do horrendous things, they live, and the people who've been trying to do the good thing, they all die.

And you end up watching a movie like that and you think, this is not like a moral movie. Like, I think to myself, I've wasted my time watching a movie like this. If there's no type of final judgment in the world, and all you have is this life, even if you have a sense that there is right and wrong, it's not a moral universe unless there's a final judgment.

People don't think about that. And then the second thing about it is about, and it goes without being a moral universe, is you can't have a moral universe if there's no guilt, if there's nothing like conscience which is built into you.

And here's a problem for our culture. You know, the most successful species are like ants and cockroaches and they have no conscience. Conscience doesn't do anything to increase your chance of your species surviving, but we have consciences and we actually really need to have a conscience and we need to have guilt.

[ 26 : 42 ] I've told some of you this story before. I haven't used it for a couple of years, but a couple of years ago there was an interview with a well-known actress and they said if there's one thing you could change about life, what would you change?

And she said if I could change anything in the world, it would be to get rid of guilt, that I have no sense of guilt whatsoever. And the interviewer sort of nodded. I mean, obviously, I'm reading it, but you could tell they were nodding with approval, but she just said she wanted to be a sociopath.

I don't know if it's a sociopath or a psychopath. Whatever one it is that has no guilt. She just said, I want to be a psychopath. And the other person nodded as if, like, this is a really good idea.

It's not a good idea to be a psychopath. Psychopaths don't have that experience of guilt. You see, part of our rejection, the human rejection of the idea that there is a final judgment is the sense that if there is, you won't pass.

Only the raging narcissist think, oh yeah, that's good. I'm looking forward to it. Look at my dimple. Dimple? I don't know if I have dimples, you know. You know, look at my scars.

[ 28 : 00 ] God, I'm in for sure, right? And especially, you know, for those of us who have accusing consciences, this whole idea that we will appear before the judgment seat of God just seems to even be more depressing and create even more despair.

But is Paul a narcissist? Like, as I said, when I've talked to some people occasionally, it hasn't happened in a couple of years, they directly asked me, do you think I'm going to go to hell if I don't believe in Jesus?

I wasn't expecting that question. And I started to give an answer. And the person said, so you think you won't? You'll pass the judgment, but I won't?

And that's when they just looked. like there's something hopeless about me if I think that's what's going to happen to me. Well, the Bible is wise.

I mean, I've already pointed out to you, you can't live in a moral universe. You want to live in a moral universe, but you can't live in one if there is no final judgment. Then by death, it is not going to be a moral universe. And you need to have conscience.

[ 29 : 10 ] If there's no type of conscience, then you want to live in a world filled with psychopaths. And if there's in fact something in your conscience that knows that if you actually stood before the God as described in the Bible, you wouldn't pass.

Well, you see, here's how Canadians think a little bit about this whole question, about whether I would stand or not, or they would. The average Canadian thinks something like this.

We sort of think a little bit as if God is going to rank people sort of the way he ranked stadiums. If you go to a hockey game, how the stadium is ranked. And so the rich people can afford the seats really close to the ice.

And the poor people get the seats in the nosebleed section. And so how God's final judgment is going to be is that at the end of the day, everybody's seated in the stadium.

And the line goes horizontally across all human beings and those human beings which are below this line in the expensive seats, the good seats, they pass.

[ 30 : 21 ] The people in the not good seats, well, they're the ones who are going to fail. But the Bible says something which is in fact why our conscience, only the Bible actually explains how that type of thinking is not accurate thinking.

It doesn't even fit with human experience. You see, because the Bible actually says that the line between good and evil goes right down every human being. It's not a horizontal line.

It's a vertical line. And you see, the Bible doesn't say that human beings never do anything good, but it does say that we can never only do things which are good because there is this line down the center of every human being.

And so I would have to say to that person who said to me, you need to understand something about Christianity. I know that in and of myself I could never stand before the judgment seat of God.

And in fact, actually, if I have ever acted in such a way that I looked like I thought that somehow just because of who I am I would stand before that, I apologize to you.

[ 31 : 32 ] Because that's not true. It goes right down me. And it goes right down you. See, the other type of thing which makes this doctrine a little bit hard is that is the whole idea of presumption.



You see, as the average Canadian, even if they think about this as a topic, what they tend to think of is that it's sort of like university students at the beginning of a term. And if a university student at the beginning of a term said, I already know that I got an A plus, you'd go, what?

Like, you're still having to do the papers. You haven't done the exams. The final mark isn't in yet. But once again, the fact that we are troubled about standing before God in fact is a hint that what the Bible says is true.

And the Bible says is that for every one of you, both in Christ and out of Christ, the final mark has already been given. Paul says to the church in Rome, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

The final mark has been given. My hope of not failing is not based on my performance.

[ 32 : 49 ] See, what is the biblical... The biblical hope is this. That unworthy and as undeserving that I am.

I don't know who first said this, but somebody said that mercy is not getting what you deserve. So, you get shown mercy when you deserve something, but you don't get what you deserve.

But grace is even greater. It tops up mercy. You get what you don't deserve. You get what you don't deserve.

And my only hope in life and death is that I have one who's taken my place and died in my place, who lived the life that I should live, but wasn't able to live, who died the death that I deserve, but he taps me on the shoulder.

And if you're here outside of Christ and if you have a visual imagination, as you hear me, I am now speaking as his ambassador, his representative, and I want to tell you that he is tapping you on the shoulder right now and saying, Bob, Sue, I'm willing to take your place.

[ 34 : 05 ] let me stand for you. I will take the doom that you deserve and I will offer you the destiny that I deserve.

And I will do it because I love you. Because I love you. And you might say to God, Jesus, Jesus, do you realize what I've done?

Do you realize how terrible a person I am? I don't want to say this to other people. To other people, I say that I'm a good person, but do you realize in my heart I know that I have done horrendous things?

Do you realize that I have a conscience that screams at me every night so that I cannot sleep? Sometimes I can hardly hear you because my conscience is screaming at me so loud. Do you realize what I have done?

Do you realize what I have failed to do? And I can only speak now as the herald of Christ and say that Christ will say to you as he taps you on the shoulder, yes, I know.

[ 35 : 08 ] Yes, I know. And he'll show you his hands with the nail print and maybe he'll show you the side where the spear went in and he say, I did these for you.

I will take your place if you will but let me. If you will but let me.

You see, the thing is about the whole story of Christianity is it fits this riddle of our existence that on one hand, yeah, that God himself who sees all things that only he can truly forgive and it's not just a matter of forgiveness of the bad things having been dealt with in Christ as he takes our place, but it's also a matter of him clothing us with his accomplishment.

Paul might have had in the back of his mind is one of those times when he spoke to Felix. Felix, I'm sorry I didn't have it put up on the screen, but if you have your Bibles, it's a very famous text.

It's Isaiah chapter 53. I'll just read part of it. It's verses 1 to 6. Who has believed what he has heard from us and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

[ 36 : 32 ] This is a prophecy 600 years before Christ and Isaiah prophetically saying for Jesus, for he grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground.

Speaking of Jesus, he had no former majesty that we should look at him and no beauty, humanly speaking, that we should desire him. Jesus was a nobody from Nazareth, which is nowhereville.

And Jesus was despised and rejected by human beings. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He would have buried his father.

And in those days, who knows how many brothers or sisters that Mary bore that died in childhood that Jesus would have helped to bury as the oldest son.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces, that's what they did on the cross, he was despised and we esteemed him not.

[ 37 : 34 ] Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

And with his stripes, we are healed. You are healed. If you put your faith in him, you are healed.

All like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Brothers and sisters, this is the Christian hope. You will appear before the judgment seat of God. There is no hope other than this.

[ 38 : 38 ] There is no moral universe without a last judgment. There is no explanation of your conscience unless it is part of God's good gift to call you to himself.

And there is no savior and no salvation other than him taking your place there is none. But he offers it for you. There is no sin so bad that he did not die to cover it.

None. And that is why it is the beginning of the quietening of our conscience to know this. A couple of things in closing.

If you struggle with a conscience that screams at you, there is the body of Christ who can pray for you.

Share that burden and ask people to pray for you. Sometimes this problem is a truly spiritual problem.

[ 39 : 46 ] there is a devil. There is a devil. And one of the names of the devil and all of the evil spirits is the accuser. The accuser.

Once again, you have your own authority. You can say, in the name of Jesus, evil spirit, be gone from me. In the name of Jesus, be silenced.

In the name of Jesus, don't speak. And if that does not help, you have brothers and sisters in Christ who can pray for you. There is freedom.

And a third thing you can do is to meditate upon the finished work of Christ. Meditate upon texts like Romans 8. There is no condemnation now for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Meditate upon the end of Romans 8. Will this separate me from the love of God or this or this or this or this? No, nothing will. Meditate upon it. Claim that as your promise.

[ 40 : 47 ] Ask people to pray that you will take that heart as it brings the gospel home to you. What Christ has done for you. And a fourth thing that you can do is very, it's a thing we can do today.

It's the wonderful thing about celebrating the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a reminder to us of what Jesus did for us on the cross. And that when we put our faith and trust in Him, it's like you enter into a new covenant with Him, one where He will never let you go.

And it's not, I'm not going to get up and say, by the way, only the people in the expensive seats can come forward for communion. All you losers in the nosebleed section, you have to stay back.

I don't say, by the way, all of you really, you know, scummy people who haven't had a very good week, like you have to stay in your seats. No. The Lord's Supper is this visual reminder of what Christ has done for us on the cross.

It's an opportunity for us to reflect again upon what the gospel has accomplished for you. And it is an invitation for you to come and say, you know what, that person probably isn't any better than me and they're receiving communion and that person isn't any better than me and George isn't any better than me and they're all receiving communion.

[ 41 : 59 ] And Jesus is, George is being Christ's herald and say, come. And I will come and I will feed on Christ. And it reminds me that it's, his blood has covered me and entered me.

His body has entered me. I can feed on him spiritually and I can remember with the invitation that the words of the accuser is wrong. That Christ welcomes me.

One final piece of advice. I mean, you know, part of the whole problem with accusing conscience is we can't go back in time to fix things. And one of the things, upon all those other four things which I've told you is that one of the things that we can just do is pray.

If there's some other thing of amendment of life that we can do, then the Holy Spirit should lead you into it. You see, the wonderful thing about the gospel is that once it becomes more real to your heart, it doesn't become an excuse for you to do more bad things.

It becomes a secure, emotional, and intellectual place to stand where you can ask the Holy Spirit, you can ask Christ to make clear to you what you did and what you did not do wrong and ask for his help to make things right and to walk towards it.

[ 43 : 20 ] And if there's nothing you can do, well then, just to at least pray into the situation. You see, the gospel doesn't give you a license to sin. It provides this strong emotional and intellectual place and communal place because we are a congregation of the cross to support each other.

So sinners, if you're in Christ, you are redeemed. And when it comes time for communion, come on up and remember Christ.

I invite you to stand. Let's pray. Father, your Son is a wonderful and beautiful Savior.

We give you thanks and praise that though evil runs through the center of every single human being and will be there to some extent until we see you face to face and are glorified to be like Christ and to see you face to face unashamed, basking in your beauty, the beauty of your smile and of your goodness and of your love and beauty and all of that, Father.

We give you thanks and praise that your Son died to save us, that he died to take away that sin and that shame that he dealt with it on the cross and that he clothes us when we put our faith and trust in him, that not just him, he doesn't just take away the sin and the punishment our sin deserves, but that he clothes us in his righteousness, he clothes us in his beauty, he clothes us in his goodness and that he calls us to be part of his people in a covenant with him forever.

[ 45 : 14 ] Father, we are not worthy of anything like this. We are dependent completely upon your goodness, completely dependent upon your goodness and we ask, we are so thankful, Father, that you do not have us walk alone but that we can be part of a community centered around the cross in Christ and that week by week we are invited to remember what he did for us on the cross.

We are reminded to meet other people that we can ask to pray for us and we can come and receive and feed spiritually upon Christ Sunday after Sunday. Father, we thank you for the grace in Christ and the means of grace in Sunday services and Holy Communion and we ask, that you bring the gospel home more and more deeply to us so that, Father, out of that, out of that, we might deal with the crap in our lives knowing what the final judgment is.

And we ask all these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior and all God's people said, Amen. Amen.