

Acts 20:1-38 "Led by the Holy Spirit to Imprisonment?"

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[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.

...and bow our heads in prayer. Father, we ask that you would continue to gently but deeply and powerfully pour out the Holy Spirit into the very centers of our hearts. And Father, as your Holy Spirit moves and comes even more deeply upon us, we ask that you would tune our hearts to receive all the grace that you desire to give us this morning, both through the Lord's Supper and through your Word written. Tune our hearts to receive your Word and to respond to your gift of grace in a worthy manner. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. One of the perennial problems or issues that people talk about, they've been talking about in our, you know, in our culture for quite a long time. It would be something that wouldn't matter if you went to a very high-class cocktail party. It wouldn't matter if you went to a Tim Hortons. And if you said, you know, why is it you think that really hard times come to us? Do you think there's any meaning to hard times? Any purpose? Like, how does it, what do you think about that? How do you think about it spiritually or just in terms of your own life? And I don't know, some, many people might not know what to say. Many people, if you said that in that type of environment, their ears would prick up. They'd be really curious to hear what you had to say because they might not know what to say. But it is something that we think about. We think about it while we're driving, while we're doing our work, maybe at four o'clock in the morning when we wake up. The Bible has some very profound and wise things to say about that topic today. Although I have to say, from the outset, if you're listening or here and you're outside the Christian faith, it's really more the text today has some very wise things to talk about how Christians are to understand this when it happens. So if you're outside the Christian faith, this should be of great interest to you. You might be one of those people that if you were at that Tim

Hortons, your ears would prick up. You wouldn't know what to say and be very interested to hear what we have to say. Although in some ways, if you get to begin to understand a little bit how Christians are invited to think about it, given that Christ is always hoping that you come to him, it's also a bit of an invitation for you to enter into that way of understanding. So let's have a look at the Bible. We're going to start earlier than what Ross read, and we're going to look at Acts chapter 20. Acts chapter 20, beginning at the first verse.

[4 : 02] And while you find that in your Bibles, just sort of the context and the flow of the book, we're getting towards the end of the book now, actually. And Paul has just been in Ephesus, one of the most important cities in the Roman Empire. It is in what we now call Western Turkey. And he had already decided that he was going to go, that he wanted to go to Jerusalem. And then after Jerusalem, he wanted to go to Rome, the very center of the empire. And he'd already made that plan. But before he could leave, a riot started. And we looked at that a little bit last week. Started by

Demetrius, because fewer people were buying their talismans and their idols, and it caused a big riot. And now the story continues.

Acts chapter 20, verse 1. After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples. And after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia. That's a part of Greece. So he's in Western Turkey.

He's going to go now back into Europe, to what we now call Greece. Verse 2. And when he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. And just sort of pause. I don't know why the ESV doesn't translate this here. It's actually sort of missing a word.

It's not that Paul went to all the churches that he'd been before and gave everybody high fives, fist bumps, and way to goes. He encouraged them by opening the word. I mean, he might have also given them high fives and fist bumps and all that, and hugs and everything like that. But he encouraged them by opening the word. Verse 3. There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews, as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. In other words, he decided to go by foot. Now, just sort of pause, and this is the beginning of us beginning to look at what the Bible has to say a little bit. I mean, it's not an exhaustive talk about it, but some things that the Bible is saying about afflictions. We don't know exactly what was going on here, but the best guesstimate as to what was going on is this. You're going to see in, if you look around in the context, you're going to see that Paul really wanted to be in Jerusalem for the Passover, and he wanted to be there not just for the Passover, but for the three great feasts that people were to come to Jerusalem for. For people who were part of the Jewish diaspora back in those days, it was almost like it is for Muslims wanting to go at least once in their life to Mecca, and so for many Jewish people who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire, they had at least one time where they would let... Now, Paul's, of course, been to Jerusalem many times, but what's probably happened is the ship is filled with Jewish pilgrims, and somehow or another, Paul figures out that if he gets on that boat, he will only leave that boat when they throw him overboard dead before they get to shore, and he figures that out somehow. We're not told how, and so, you know, just imagine something like one of your favorite spy movies or mystery movies. You know, who knows?

Maybe he came up to the gangplank and even went on the ship, and just before the gangplank was taken off, he ran down the gangplank and took off, leaving the people who wanted to kill him behind. We don't know what it was, but rather than taking an easy and fast route, he's now going to go on foot to avoid this attempt on his life, and it also means that he'll end up missing the first two feasts in Jerusalem and only be there in time for Pentecost. So here's the first thing. Paul, and the text seems to speak of this in the right way, Paul senses or comes to some information they're going to murder him, and he embarks on a ploy to avoid being murdered and go on. Well, that just sounds like normal common sense, but the story gets a bit more puzzling, and it's in this puzzling bit that we get a bit of an insight about why it is that hard times happen. So you can read it later on, verses four to six. It gives a list of Paul's traveling companions, and it also introduces the we language, so it means that Luke is now back with Paul, and the story continues in verse seven. On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. Now, just sort of pause here for a second to get the picture. This is actually like one of those real big aha moments. It's the first time that there is recorded that at least in this particular place, the regular day of Christian worship was no longer

[8 : 42] Saturday but Sunday. It's actually really like, whoa, because especially in the original language, the implication isn't that they had a special meeting because Paul was there, but that they had their normal worship, and because Paul was there, he was going to speak. The second thing, and some of you know the story, it's going to be Eutychus falling asleep and falling down dead.

There's no hint at all in the story that Paul was speaking too long, that he was doing something wrong. In fact, in the original language, the idea is that he was, the language implies that he had a set topic or set of topics that he and they wanted him to cover, and the original language says that he covered it at length. So the way to understand it is this. About a year ago, I got, a year and a bit ago, I got invited to speak to the youth group, and I was given the task of speaking for 20 minutes, and I set my timer there, and I hit the 20-minute mark. I think I maybe went 30 seconds over.

When I was in Angola seven or eight years ago, doing some speaking in Angola through SIM, I was invited to speak to the only Anglican church in Lubangu, which is in southern Angola, and the pastor was going to have me preach on Sunday, but he also wanted me to speak at length on Saturday morning for the congregation. So we had a bit of a discussion as to what at length meant.

Well, actually, you know, you've heard about it before. He wouldn't tell me until Friday at lunchtime what he actually wanted, but at the end of the day, he wanted me to speak for three hours on the first two chapters of Genesis. That was the task, to speak for two hours. Now, he said, it's not just speaking, you have question and answer, but that that would be very helpful for the congregation to hear somebody like me, you know, white guy, you know, used to all the challenges that come with evolution and all that other stuff, to speak to the congregation at length for three hours. So they might have thought I was unbelievably boring, by the way. That's a whole other separate topic, but I was fulfilling my task. If I spoke for three hours to the youth group, it wouldn't have lasted three hours. The youth group leaders would have started throwing things at me or eventually coming and saying, I'm sorry, George is having a senior's moment and ushering me out of the room.

And if I had gone to Angola and spoke for 20 minutes, they would have been very upset. So Paul speaking at length, that's what they expected. Continue on, verse eight. There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered and a young man named Eutychus, and you, some of you might or might not know this, Eutychus means lucky. So there was a young man named Lucky sitting at the window.

[11 : 26] He sank into a deep sleep, as Paul talked, still longer at length, and being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. Now in the original language, it's very clear that he's dead. It's not that he just appeared to be dead, he was dead. Verse 10, but Paul went down and bent over him. So there's several verbs here. He went down, he bent over them. There's the implication of prayer. He takes him in his arms, sort of there's like a prayer with putting, not just putting his hands on him in prayer, but encircling him with prayer. And after that, he says, do not be alarmed for his life is in him. And the implication of the story is that God has done a miracle of resuscitation and a miracle of healing. So whatever it was that caused the death, that's been healed.

And it's obvious in the rest of the story, Eutychus is able to go up, he's able to go back up to the third floor, he's able to walk home, he's able to eat. So there's a miracle here of resuscitation. Verse 11, and when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them at length until daybreak and so departed. And they took the youth away alive and were not a little comforted.

And that's just a little bit of a, you know, it's, it's, sometimes people say, George, you have all these asides, but I throw in asides because I want you to enter into the story and to remember it and notice things about it. Because the story is more important than what I see. If you go back and read this story better after the sermon, that's, I've achieved my job. If you can't remember anything I've said, but you can remember, think of the story better, praise God, that's the way it should be. And so it's really interesting, think about it, they didn't leave, they didn't see this miracle and go, whoa! They were comforted. They weren't astonished. They weren't gobsmacked. They were comforted. Very, very interesting, as if they expect God to do such miraculous things. And in the course of it, you'll see that you get a bit of a glimpse of what early Christian worship was like. Early Christian worship had, as it sort of pillars, the preaching of God's word and the celebration of the Lord's supper. And in the early worship, the third component would have been a buffet. So that there's the three things. There's a time to open the word. There would have been singing and other things in prayer, obviously, but the three big pillars, sermon, opening God's word, holy communion, and having a fellowship meal together to build community. Now, here's the thing about the story. Why am I mentioning the story? Well, here's the thing about the story. Why is it that people have, why is it that Christians have hard times? Why is it that we get afflictions? And that's a very, very good question.

[14 : 07] It's a natural human question to ask. And this, in fact, seems to be making the question even harder, because here we see that it's completely valid for Paul to avoid being murdered by doing some subterfuge so that he avoids getting murdered and walks instead. And here we see as well that the God that Paul believes in, that we Christians believe in, is a God who can raise the dead.

He's obviously a very powerful God. So if we have a God who loves us and can raise the dead, and if it's fine to avoid being murdered, well, this sets up the next stage. Now, by the way, if you just read the next little bit, we're not going to read it. Read it on your own, verses 13 to 16.

This is actually, this with the name part that I skipped, is part of, if you want a cumulative evidence about why the New Testament, this book is an accurate historical account, people who've studied this, the stops and the lengths of things all reflect the time of the year and the wind patterns. The names reflect that time period when they, it's all part of what builds the fact that you can trust the New Testament, you can trust the book of Acts of speaking accurately.

But now he's not looking to be there in time for Passover because he celebrates that in Philippi. He wants to be there for Pentecost, and the story continues in verse 17. Now, for Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And that doesn't mean he called the old people. An elder is a title. I was 29 years old when I was ordained an elder. That's, and you know, some of you know ministers who got ordained earlier. I was ordained a deacon first when I was 28, and 29 I was ordained an elder. So it's a, it's a leadership role within the church. So he's called the leaders of the church in Ephesus to come to be with him, and we'll hear why in a moment. Verse 18, and when they came to him, he said to them, you yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first time that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jewish people, the Jewish leaders. Verse 20, how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks or pagans of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Now just sort of pause here. It's just a bit of an aside, but it's an important aside. It's going to fit with one of the two main points or themes for the whole text. If you could put up the first point, Claire, that would be very helpful. Life is often hard. Preach the gospel and the whole counsel of God anyway.

[17:08] Like, you know, the normal reaction for Canadians is to say, so even, you know, when he said he didn't shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God, well, what does that mean? Well, if you look at last week, he was going around telling people, I mean, the whole society was organized around pagan, around idol worship. Everything in the society was organized around idol worship. And Paul went around saying, oh, by the way, did you know that gods made with human hands aren't gods?

Okay, that took chutzpah. That took courage. And he didn't shrink from declaring that. He didn't say, oh, no, no, no, no, no, people aren't going to like it if I say something like that. I'm not going to say it. No, no, you declare the whole counsel of God. And in our culture, we are very prone to think, well, if it's going to be difficult, if it's going to be hard, maybe we should just tone things down, you know, oil on, put some oil on troubled waters, you know, let things, no, no, Paul said, life is often hard.

Preach the gospel and the whole counsel of God anyway. Let's continue, okay?

Because we've already got here that Paul had troubles, right? So we've had here that it was, he was all right for him to evade being killed. It's, we see that God's able to raise the dead.

Now we go a little bit of this affliction thing about the fact that there are hard times. And so it continues in verse 22. And in some ways, this gets to the nub of the issue.

And now behold, I am going, and here behold is like, and now behold, like it's like a, like, whoa, wake up type of thing. It's, it's bringing some type of emphasis to the text. And now behold, I'm going to Jerusalem constrained by the Holy Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

[19:02] Huh. George, how does this fit together? How is it that whether through natural or supernatural means, the Holy Spirit, whether through natural or supernatural means, Paul avoids getting murdered.

How is it that God's able to raise the dead? And how is it now? And the word constrained is a very good word. You could also sort of look at it as herded. You know, as if you're watching, Louise and I and Emma watched like a modern Western, and you could see the horse riders, the cowboys herding the cattle in a particular direction. And that's the type of image which is going on there. It's a stronger type of image. They're herded, herded. He is being herded to it.

And it's the same language. If you go back and look at chapter 16, Paul is going through what we now call Turkey. And I think it's like 500 miles, 800 kilometers that Paul kept wanting to go down left to Ephesus. And the Holy Spirit was constraining Paul to keep straight, not go down there. And Paul then at times wanted to go, wanted to go, not sure, not west. He wanted to go south. And they said,

no, no, no, no, you keep, you're going west. And then other times he wanted to go north. No, no, no, you're going west. And it's constrained. And it led him to bring the gospel into Europe. And that's what happens in Acts 16. And now we see this, this thing of Paul being constrained. I'll read the text again, verses 22 and 23.

Behold, I'm going to Jerusalem constrained by the Holy Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there. In other words, he doesn't know if he's going to go to jail and then be released. He doesn't know if he's going to go to jail and then die. He doesn't know that. Except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. So what's going on? In fact, actually, before we say anything else, let's look at verse 24, because this in some ways makes it the thing even more telling for us, a bit shocking. And as we read verse 24, just think of how it would sound if you read it in a Tim Hortons or a boutique coffee place. Verse 24, What? But I do not account my life of any value, nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course in the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. Now, just to be honest, isn't this the way depressed people talk? I'm just such a terrible, bad person. I don't account my life of any value, nor as precious to myself. Wouldn't we want to say, snap out of it. Come on. Jesus loves you. Don't think like that. That if you thought about having this read to people who are outside the Christian faith, they'd go, what? Like, George, this is, both of these texts are exactly why I'm not a Christian. Like, think about it, George. Shouldn't spirituality make you feel good about yourself? Give you, like, uppers? Make you feel, like, excited? Like, what? How does this go on?

[22 : 13] So, a couple of things. Hopefully, this is a bit of a help for it. Just to sort of place, help us to rethink our reactions, to challenge how we react to it. I'm going to talk about three things to help us challenge how we react to it, to start to think Christianly and get at what Paul is saying here in the scripture. The first thing is, why is it that we never ask? So, why is it? Let's, I'll sort of use my brother, Jono, here. So, let's say Jono says to himself sometime, I don't know, here I am at this stage in my life, and I'm leading worship for 80 people.

Like, at this stage, with my skill, why aren't I leading for 800 people? Why aren't I leading for 8,000 people? Like, why don't I have a record deal? I'm not saying you say this, brother. I'm just using you as an example, right? And we can all extrapolate that. Why don't I have the promotions? Why don't I have the family? Why don't I have the kids? All of those types of things. Why is it that if we were to share that with others, people would shake and would nod their head? But we never ask ourselves, why is it that I get to be in Ottawa and I'm not a worship leader in South Sudan? One of the poorest countries in the world. Dysfunctional state, always under threat of Islamist attacks. Why is it that we ask one question and we all feel very sympathetic to it, but nobody ever says, gosh, it's quite astounding. Here I get to be in Ottawa and I'm not in South Sudan. Why is that? Well, it helps to fit with this next thing, my second point. In our natural way, or did she put it up? Oh, she did. Okay, well, there you go. I'll read it then.

[24 : 03] You are not the sun with planets in orbit around you. You are a planet orbiting the sun along with other planets. Now, I might ask her to, I don't know, I can't see if it's up or how I might have it come up a couple of times.

This is, if you think about it, the normal way, not the normal way. I'm talking about in the very depths of our being, if we were actually really honest with ourselves or something forced us to be honest about ourselves. We tend to think, I tend to think, I will use I, even though I know better, and even though there's obviously other types of pressures, it's not that I'm completely evil or any of us is completely evil, but I tend to think that I'm the sun and Louise orbits around me and my kids orbit around me. And by the way, you folks all orbit around me. Now, here's the problem.

And Louise is vastly holier than I am. But there's a temptation for her to think that she's the sun and I'm orbiting around her. And for each of my children to think they're the sun and the parents are orbiting around them. In fact, isn't that actually part of discipline of young kids? You can see very early that young kids naturally think they're the sun and everything revolves around them. And part of actually helping children to grow up is at least helping them to know enough politeness to say, no, I am not the sun with my parents and my siblings as planets orbiting around me.

And you see, and so if, in fact, part of the fruit of the gospel is that the Holy Spirit, through understanding who Jesus is and starting to be able to hear the word afresh, I come to, as a bit of a check time and time again, okay, I am not the sun. I am a planet. And there's lots of other planets.

And I'm sure we're orbiting the sun. Now, you see, from the outside, for those who still are, they don't have that any type of perspective that there is, in fact, a God, that, that, in fact, the real world, the real world is like our real galaxy, our real, you know, our real, our real solar system.

[26 : 11] It, in fact, is delusional to think you're the sun. It is wisdom to think that you are a planet. Or maybe, for some of us say, George, I'm not even a planet. I'm the moon going around a planet that's going around the sun. And if you hear that, and it's expressed in other types of ways, for those whose perspective is that you should, you should claim you're being the sun. That's, that's wisdom.

Claim the fact that you're a sun. Claim that. Get people to be around you. Just align yourself with the universe so the universe is aligned with you. All of that, what are they called, manifesting, all that manifesting, all that. No, no, no. That is the direction of foolishness and loneliness and discord. Wisdom is to come to know, I'm a planet. It's going to sound like it's self-depreciation from a sun-centered perspective. But in the real world, it's actually wisdom. One final thing, which now gets us into this as well. So just to say that again, you're not the sun with planets in orbit around you. You are a planet orbiting the sun along with the other planets. And here's the other thing. You might as well put it up, Claire. That would be helpful. It is, it is absurd to think eternity has to fit into your life. It is wisdom to fit your life into eternity.

What do I mean by that? I was watching just the other day, an old, a year, a year and a half ago interview with Douglas Murray, the controversial cultural critic and political commentator.

And the conversation got to the fact that so many people in the world, only they have no place for transcendence, no place for something which is sort of bigger that might touch on eternal things.

[28 : 04] And Douglas Murray, of course, is an agnostic. And he talked quite movingly in the interview about, like on one hand, when he walks past St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, it isn't that he believes in the God that's worshipped in that cathedral. But he finds the cathedral itself something which induces awe and transcendence in him. And he talked about how, whether it's through art and aesthetics of beautiful architecture, or in particular for him through music, that when he hears certain pieces of music, there's this profound sense that there's something eternal, there's something transcendent, there's something bigger than this world. And he wants to live in a world that sort of open and appreciative to that. And he has a type of disdain to people who don't have that type of, even a desire for something which is transcendent.

But you see, the fact is that the way that Canadians tend to think, just let the culture tends to push us in a direction of thinking that in a sense, it's rarely expressed so bluntly, but that life is just one dang thing after another, and then you die.

And when you live in a world where it's just one dang thing after another, and then you die, then the fact of the matter is, is that it matters that you have as many pleasurable experiences as possible, and as many toys as possible, because life is just one dang thing after another, and then you die.

But at the same time that we see that, many people would resonate, whether they do it in their own life, but they would resonate with this contradiction that Douglas Murray has. Because at the end of the day, because he's an agnostic, he has to sort of think that life is just one dang thing after another, and then you die. And yet he is very conscious that there is something, that window opens some, music opens some type of a door to glory, to transcendence, to eternity, and beautiful architecture.

And he could probably go on with several other types of things. And so there's this war. And in some way, in some ways, the Christian gospel is, your longings became flesh and died on the cross for you.

[30 : 12] Your deepest longings and yearnings took on flesh and died on the cross for you. And that life, in fact, the real way to understand the real world, just as it is not the real world to think you're a son, that is the way towards chaos and unhappiness. And in fact, the real world, there is eternity. There is transcendence. And it does come into this world because the eternal and transcendent and imminent God created this world. And there are streams and hints that take you to glory and transcendence, into goodness, into beauty, into justice, and to truth, and to mercy.

And for some people, they start to have a sense that these aren't just social constructs. They're more like mountains. It's more like being in Vancouver. And for a moment, the rain and the clouds go away, and you see the Rockies just in your face in all their glory. And that's what things like goodness and beauty and truth really are. And the good news is those intuitions took on flesh. They walked amongst us. They are true. And if you just think about it for a second, if in fact there really is

eternity, and there are things connected to an eternal God, then eternity cannot be lassoed by you and controlled by you.

You need to enter into eternity and fit in with that. That is wisdom. That is the way of wisdom.

So just a couple, if you could put up the next point, that would be very helpful. In Christ, you are never his pawn. You are always his child, his beloved child by adoption and grace.

So listen to what Paul is saying again when he says it doesn't count as anything other than the fact that he... How does it again look at verse 22 and 23? And now behold, I am going to Jerusalem constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment awaits me.

[32 : 26] But I do not account, verse 24, my life of any value nor is precious to myself. If only am I... Whoa, look at this, course. And the ministry that I receive, course implies that life isn't one dang thing after another, but he's in a race.

Life isn't meaningless. There's a race. He's going to finish it well with God's help. And he has a purpose, and that's the ministry that I received. And what is it? It's to testify to the gospel of the grace of God, that your longings and your earnings, your yearnings and longings and intuitions of a far better world, that there must be something better, took on flesh and died upon the cross for you. And when you understand that, you understand that you're never... Whatever Paul means and understands, he might not know exactly why God is calling him, constraining him to go to Jerusalem to suffer afflictions, but he knows he's not God's pawn.

He's always the beloved child, and God the Father is his Father in heaven who loves him, and Jesus is the Savior who will always walk with him, and the Holy Spirit is that beautiful, loving presence of God that will always be present within him.

If you could put up the next slide. By faith in Christ crucified, you enter into union with him and now belong to him. By faith in Christ crucified, you enter into union with him and now belong to him.

[33 : 50] I just sort of jump ahead a little bit. If you look at verse 28, verse 28, where it says here, pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you bishops, basically, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

It is not a sign of depression for me to say that I don't belong to myself, but I belong to my Savior who loved me so much that he died for me, that I now belong to him.

That is not the sign of a depressed person. And nothing in this world will give you more hope and comfort than to know that you belong to your loving Savior and that he will never let go with you.

And you see, when you understand that you live in an eternal frame of reference, and it's not just an eternal frame of reference, but the eternity comes into the life that we live, you can begin to understand that you're loving God who loves you so much that Jesus died on the cross for you, that he can have purposes and things that he is going to accomplish through even hard times in your life that you might not understand on this side of the grave.

But your life doesn't end on this side of the grave when you are in Christ. It goes beyond. And that there can be meanings and purposes and beauties and wonders and glories than purposes that God has.

[35 : 31] Even beyond death. Because it's not just stuck with this frame of reference. And here's where I come to you who are outside the Christian faith. Earth has no sorrow that heaven can't heal.

It's words from a song. I can't remember the song. It ultimately comes from the Bible. Earth has no sorrows that heaven can't heal. And even if your life has been one train wreck after another train wreck after another train wreck and after another train wreck.

Jesus died on the cross for you. He loves you. And it might be that nobody wants you in their lives. But Jesus died. He shed his blood so that you can be in union, have your sins forgiven, union with him, and belong to him.

and he, I can't tell you exactly how to do it, but he will redeem those things in your life and bear fruit even out of the worst things all for his glory.

You see, here's the wonderful thing, and I, I, I, I think actually I'm going to bring the sermon to a, to a bit of a close. I won't talk about the rest of the, you can read, read the rest of his address to the elders.

[36 : 52] Actually, I'm just going to say one, one, one thing in a, in a moment. It'll be point number nine. Don't put it up yet, Claire, but, but, but that's, that's, that's, that's this.

One of the wonderful things about the Bible, about God's word written, is that there's so many different genres. So, you have Proverbs, like the book of Proverbs, and in some ways you should understand 1st John or James to be really a type of, a collection of Proverbs.

And then you have poetry, and then you have history, and you have quite detailed, complicated theology that has intersections with Aristotelian logic and categories.

If you look at Hebrews and Romans. But it, it also has stories like this. And this is the wonderful thing about the story. You know, brothers and sisters, you need the church to figure out where you are on these things.

You see, the story gives you both the example of the Holy Spirit constraining you to go towards afflictions, but it also gives you in the same basic, in the same chapter, the story of being delivered from murder.

[38 : 04] And it also gives you a story of the goodness of God, and it also reminds you of the cross. And you see, that's why you need to have spiritual friendships. It's why you need to have mentors. Not just you, me. It's why we need to have women's ministries and men's ministries and small groups and Sunday gatherings where you make friends, where you can just unburden your heart and say, I don't know why I'm going through these afflictions, or, you know, I don't know, I'm coming up to this situation, I'm not sure that if I speak my mind in this situation, I could either lose my job or I could never get another promotion for the rest of my life, and I don't know what I should do.

On one hand, I'm constrained to do that, even though I'm not going what to happen, or am I called to just be, you know, to bide my time? And there's these things, and the Bible doesn't just give you an oh, it's very simple.

You just kiss your brains goodbye, and you just tick off these boxes and you know exactly the recipe. No, no, that's not what life is like, and it's not how Christ relates to you. It's why, you see, the church is part of God's plan, his design, that's the whole thing here, that God made the church, and he made the church by having Jesus die on the cross, and we need each other, we need counselors, we need older women to befriend younger women, and older women need younger women to befriend them, because older women have some wisdom, and younger women have different type of wisdom, and we need the wisdom of both, and we need the encouragement from both, and we need to have help navigating these types of things, and we need to be able to have somebody say, you know, I think in this particular case, God really is calling you to take that stand, and maybe lose your job.

We're to help you to think and pray through the other things, things, because the Christian life is a life, it's a beautiful life lived with Christ, and you're never his pawn, there's never a point in time when you are not his beloved son or daughter by adoption and grace, never any time other than that, even in the hardest times.

In fact, that's one of the main things, in fact, this fits with nine, if you could put that up. I had a couple of other things. To flourish, you need healthy food all the time, and medicine some of the time.

[40 : 29] And what's that healthy food? That's what we're doing right here. The medicine is, well, we didn't have time to go into the fact that there's sometimes false teachers and wolves, and you need to stop them, and you need to rebuke them, and you need to guard the church, and that's, I don't have time to do that today.

But this, we feed on the gospel, we feed on the word, and the gospel, God will sometimes rebuke you, but when he rebukes you, it's his attempt to connect with you again, so that you will remember and live out of your identity in Christ, which is union with him, which is that you are his adopted child by grace, and you are not his pawn, and he will use you and your life, even the worst things in your past, for his glory.

And when we are in the new heaven and the new earth, and we will in fact experience that profound truth that earth has no sorrow, that heaven can't heal, we will also see from an eternal perspective the things that God wove out of the terrors and afflictions of your life for your good and for his glory. I invite you to stand. Bow our heads in prayer.

Bow our heads in prayer. Father, there's enough people here and enough people online that some of us are probably just doing absolutely fantastic.

[42 : 13] Our finances are good, our health is good, our exercising is good, jobs going good, relationships are good, and Father, I know that there have to be people in this room that would say none of the above.

In fact, probably the opposite of the above. And we give you thanks and praise, Father, that you not only call each one of us as particular people to enter into a loving relationship with Jesus Christ, to have our sins forgiven, to have new hope, a hope of glory, to enter into union with Christ and be invited to abide in him, remembering that he loved us so much that he died on the cross for us. And so, Father, we give you thanks and praise not only that we become Christians, but that you have called us to be part of a church community and we ask that your Holy Spirit would do a wonderful work in our lives, that we would be a church where friendships do develop, where small groups and ministries do flourish and where we can cry with each other and we can celebrate with each other and we can laugh with each other and everything in between that we can mourn with each other.

So, Father, we ask that you would continue to do that wonderful work of the Holy Spirit in our lives as the gospel grips us and we become a prayerful congregation more and more and more.

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