

# Acts 23 "The Threads of Your Life Turned to a Tapestry of Meaning"

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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.

Father, you know that our minds need food to grow, and that our hearts and wills need goodness and beauty to grow. That in all things, Father, what we most need is you to grow. You know in Father through the gospel. And so we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would move with gentle but deep power upon each of us, so that we might know you, that we might know Jesus, that we might be filled with the Holy Spirit, that your word might do its wonderful work of grace deep in our lives. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. So I'm going to tell you an opening story, and it's really funny. For some reason, I keep having this sense that I shouldn't tell you the story. But on the other hand, I also have this other deep sense that I should tell you the story. So I'm going to tell you the story, and then I guess we'll find out whether it was Jesus telling me to... Anyway, we won't go all that place. In 2007, in November of 2007, I was called in on a Saturday afternoon to the Bishop of Ottawa's office to be fired. You know, some of you know a little bit about the history of our church, and it wasn't because I had done anything grievously wrong. But our church was in a struggle with our diocese. We were part of the Anglican Church of Canada at the time. And the presenting issues were certain types of issues between us and the diocese. But at the end of the day, the issue is really whether the Bible is God's Word written, and rather Jesus is Lord and Savior. Like, that's really what the issue is about. The other, you know, the other issues are what reveal the deeper issue. And we had been in a period of witness, and because of witness, some conflict with the Diocese of Ottawa. And I mean that the Bishop of Ottawa might say something different, but for... I'd been a priest in the Diocese of Ottawa for over 22 years, and everybody and their dog knew that if you get called in on a Saturday morning to see the Bishop in his office on Saturday afternoon, you come out fired. You don't come out with a gold star and a happy face and a raise. And so I was very nervous. I got that call. I didn't feel particularly brave about it.

I was very, very nervous about it. And so the word went out. You know, my wife prayed. The word went out through the internet to pray into this. And one of the people who called me up to pray with me also wanted to give me some legal advice. She was a lawyer. She lived in Vancouver.

[ 4 : 01 ] And one of the things she said to me is she said, George, that he's going to make lots of accusations about you before he fires you, and he's going to ask you to try to defend yourself against these accusations. And you have to know that the laws, the fundamental laws of Canada govern the Diocese of Ottawa. And that means that you are innocent until proven guilty. You do not have to defend yourself and prove that you are innocent. He has to prove that you are guilty. So he said to me, so I want you to promise me that you're going to just, to everything he accuses you of, that you're just going to say two things. I am an Anglican priest who is faithful to his ordination vows,

number one, and I am a member of the Anglican Church of Canada, number two. Doesn't matter what he says to you, you answer every time with that, in a sense, a sentence with a semicolon or two sentences to how you, I am, I am an Anglican priest who is faithful to his ordination vows, and I am a member of the Anglican Church of Canada. And that's all you say, don't say anything else. So I went, they'd asked me to come by myself, but I came with two of my deputy wardens, which made them angry. But they made a big mistake.

And the big mistake was, is that the bishop had not just his executive archdeacon with him, but he had a lawyer with him. And so that was when the Diocese of Ottawa discovered that I had a lawyer, because I came up to him, and he sort of was puzzled as to why I brought two wardens.

And I said, well, I'm not going to say much about that, Bishop, but I want you to know that my lawyer told me that I should never be in a room with you when you have a lawyer present, and my lawyer isn't present. So I gave him my lawyer's card and said, your lawyer can call my lawyer and set up a meeting, and I'll come to that meeting with my lawyer. And then there was another moment or so of conversation, and then I left. Now, I mention this story to you because it's very, very, very relevant to the story which we're about to look at today in the Bible. And it's very relevant for several reasons, is that some people after that said, George, you must have been very brave, you know, to do that, take that stand. Let me tell you, I did not feel brave. I didn't. But I, you know, I did it. But the other thing is, it, it, it, it, this story helps you to understand, and this is maybe one of my messages for those who are outside the Christian faith. It's only as you get deeper into the Christian faith that you understand how profoundly emotionally satisfying it is, not just intellectually satisfying, but emotionally satisfying, and how it builds courage. Anyway, so let's look.

It's a very, very stark story. And if you turn with me in your Bibles, it's in Acts chapter 22, verse 30, just that one verse, and then we go, basically, it's chapter 23. So I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles, Acts chapter 22, we'll begin reading at verse 30. And so the context is this, you know, in a sense, if you were looking at this as an Amazon Prime or a Netflix series or something like that, there's, you know, this is the, the book of Acts is a whole pile of episodes, and what just happened in the last episode for a recap is that Paul had been in the temple, he's falsely accused of doing something to desecrate the temple and desecrate the worship, and the people who falsely accuse him do it in such a way that a mob is formed, and the mob try to punch and kick him to death. And the Tribune, the Roman army, which is over the Jewish people, because the Jewish people were part of the Roman Empire, conquered by Rome, they see that there's a riot forming, a mob going on, and so they act to stop the riot before it spreads. They're not really interested in rescuing Paul, they're really interested in stopping the riot from spreading. And so, and those of us, you know, we're all aware of the fact that governments and military and police, they regularly do things like that. So they, and it's a completely fine thing to have as an objective, who wants mobs and riots to spread. And so they march in, they're able to get hold of Paul, but then later on, as they're trying to get Paul out of trouble, the crowd is, the mob is so enraged, they keep trying to attack him to kill him, and they yell, kill him, kill him, kill him, kill him, death to him. And they get him up on the steps to go into the fortress, and before Paul does that, Paul asks if he can speak to the crowd. And that's sort of what immediately happens before this. Paul speaks to the crowd, they're all quiet for a moment, but then they get really enraged by something that he says.

[ 8 : 43 ] And then Paul is taken back into the fortress, and Rome did not have the law that you were innocent until proven guilty. I mean, they did for certain people, but not as a general principle. So the tribune assumes that Paul is at fault and decides to torture Paul to find out what the reason is. Isn't that a reasonable thing to do? You just torture the guy who's been murdered to find out what he's done wrong, to make them so angry. But before Paul gets tortured, he reveals that he is a Roman citizen. He's actually one of that very small percentage of people in the Roman Empire who has certain types of rights.

So they take a step back. They don't release him. They keep him in custody, but they don't torture him. And you'll notice, and this is where now our story catches up, and look how it goes in verse 30. But on the next day, right, the next day, desiring to know the real reason why Paul was being accused by the Jewish people. The tribune unbound him, in other words, took the handcuffs off, so to speak, and commanded the chief priests in the council to meet. In other words for that is the Sanhedrin.

That sort of, under the, the Rome, Rome had ultimate authority, and no law could violate Roman law, but they allowed local discretion on matters of custom in that area. And that's, so he took them

to the people who would decide that. And he brought Paul down and set him before them. So that's, that's what the tribune does. He's trying to figure out what on earth to do with Paul. He doesn't want to let Paul go if it turns out he's done something really terrible. He doesn't want to let Paul go out and have, there's more riots come. He's also a bit caught because, you know, those of you who are bureaucrats, you can understand he's a bit caught as well because he wants to do his job. The last thing he wants is to be the guy on, on duty when a Roman citizen gets, you know, killed or murdered. So he's a bit caught. He, he does the responsible thing. He keeps him in custody, but he allows Paul to go.

And if you could envision here, there's, you know, maybe up to 70 people in the room. It's sort of a circular type of area, semi-circular, and Paul's in the middle of it. And the tribune would have been sort of like back where the exit door is over there. So the, he wasn't right in the Sanhedrin, but he's watching and observing because he wants to figure out, you know, what's going on.

[11:12] And so then the story continues and Paul does something a bit surprising and a little bit unsettling to the powers that be. He, verse one of chapter 23, and looking intently at the council at the Sanhedrin, Paul said, brothers, because it's all men, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day. And so that's what he says. And as soon as he says it, look what he's what happens. Verse two, and the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by Paul to strike him in the mouth. They sock him in the mouth. Boom. We're not in an Ottawa courtroom here.

And so there's a couple of things here that are going on. The first thing is, and you know, one of the things about the New Testament is it doesn't tell you the emotions that are going on. It tells you what happens, what you can observe. And it often gives you that, as we're going to see at the heart of the story is the meaning of what's going on as well, but not the emotion. So we have no idea whether Paul was sort of like me before the bishop, not that I'm saying the bishop is like this situation, but I mean, if you could see me, I mean, I was probably gushing fountains from my armpits.

You know, my knees were shaking. I'm, I'm very, very nervous and afraid. I'm not, I'm the opposite of what you would think of as somebody being courageous. But Paul looks each of them in the eye. In other words, he stands in front of them unbowed, un intimidated. Now there's lots and lots of, well here, and so what, what the Ananias does is he said to himself in a sense, well, we can't allow this guy to look like he's going to just stand up to us.

So there's two things that go on. The first thing is he's trying to intimidate Paul by slapping him, having him slapped, punched in the face. And the second thing he's trying to do is he's trying, it's in a sense a public, he's publicly declaring by this action that Paul is lying, that Paul is a liar.

[13:16] Okay. So, well, what happens? Well, you know, one of the things you can say about Paul from what you know about him is you never can accuse him of not saying what he thinks. I'm sure there were lots of times his friends were saying, Paul, you don't always have to tell people exactly what you think.

You know, like sometimes you can just be a bit quiet about things, you know, but we see this characteristic of Paul. So for some of you who are that type, who just tell people what you think, I mean, you can relate to Paul. That's what he does. Look what he does in verse three.

Then Paul says to the high priest, God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall. Whoa. That means that the whitewash, the imagery there is that it's, you know, it's as if you have something that's all broken down, completely useless, completely decrepit, but you just cover it up with some white paint so you can't see that it's rotten and not going to hold anything up. And he says, God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall. Are you sitting to judge me according to the law?

And yet contrary to the law, you order me to be struck. That's what Paul says. Boom. Now what Paul is doing here is he's pronouncing God's judgment on the high priest. Whoa. The high priest would say, listen, I'm in the pronouncing of God's judgment business. I'm way over you. You don't say that to me. You can just imagine how furious he is at this denunciation. And the interesting thing about here, and this is a little bit goes to the situation of the lawyer giving me advice beforehand.

The Old Testament law assumed, taught, and was structured around the principle that you are innocent until proven guilty. The idea of being innocent until proven guilty is not something that came to Canada through the Enlightenment or through atheists. It's an Old Testament idea.

And it's very wise and very profound. And so Paul is innocent until proven guilty. And the high priest violating a fundamental tenant of the law, yet wanting to be the judge, accuses Paul of lying and also does something to intimidate him by having him slug on the mouth. And so that's what Paul is

saying here. Now the response of the room is going to be very important. And look what happens in terms of the response of the room. Verses 4 and 5. So in verse 4, so here's the thing, right? Do they say, the other 69 people, do they say, hey, come on, Ananias, come on. Like, you're not allowed to hit him.

[ 15 : 55 ] Like, he's innocent until proven guilty. Like, you can't abuse your power. Is that what they all say? Well, no, they don't say that. They turn on Paul. They turn on Paul. Look what happens. Verse 4.

Those who stood by said to Paul, would you revile God's high priest? And Paul here, you know, part of the lesson of the story is if God is giving you sufficient wit to use your wit to help you in situations of conflict, go for it. Because Paul gives this witty type of response, which is both an insult, but on a technical level, he can say that he's innocent. Because hear what he said, verse 4, sorry, verse 5. And Paul said, whoa, whoa, whoa, I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest. For it is written, you shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people. And the implication here is it's a bit of a put down. He's saying, oh, you know, obviously anybody who does so something so wrong and so against the law. Of course, I didn't think he was the high priest. That's in effect what he was saying. He was really dissing the high priest, but he says it in a way that there's not much that they can do. Now, here's the thing about it. And this is what's important about this story. This is a story of Paul. And in a sense, this is something that can speak to Christians and to non-Christians about how do you deal when you are in a situation, potentially a life and death situation, or if not life and death, at least a situation that has huge personal ramifications to you, when you are dealing with a group of people who hate you and are willing to abuse power to get what they want.

That's what the situation is, which is here. You know, one of the things that's so wonderful about the Christian faith, I'm going to probably try to talk about this a little bit in my vestry report, is, you know, the Bible isn't just written for Canadians living in, you know, post-modernist, advanced capitalist Ottawa, where you still have a strong legal tradition of eating until proven guilty and a whole pile of rights and everything like that. And we can all talk about whether they're being, you know, weakened or whether they're strengthened. That's a whole. We can all disagree on that.

But the Bible is written for, so I guess what I'm saying is this. If you were an Iranian Christian reading this in Iran, you would go, wow, Paul had to deal with what I would have to deal with if I was brought before a court. If you were in large parts of China or Pakistan or North Korea or Saudi Arabia, and you're a Christian reading this, in many of those places it would have to be an underground church. You'd go with this and say, okay, wow, Paul actually, this is what, you know, boy, the early Christians had to go through this as well, like dealing with a group of people who don't care what the law says. You know, some of those places might formally say there's freedom of religion, but functionally, no, that's not the case. The USSR always said they had freedom of religion, but they mercilessly persecuted the Christian church. And so you can, they can look at this and say, okay, this is a story written for me. And it could also be us, because we as well can also be caught in situations, maybe it's a family that are out to get us, maybe it's a teacher or some institution or a boss, maybe it's some underlings who have worked together to get you in trouble, and you know that they're not actually interested in justice or anything like that.

And so this is a story of trying to deal with this, and it's going to open up the profound emotional and intellectual comfort that's going to be the culmination of the story, but we have to get there first. So now Paul does something a bit different, and it's something which is a bit odd at first sight. Look what he does in verse 6.

[ 19 : 50 ] Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out on the council, brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of a Pharisee. It is with respect to the hope of the resurrection, the hope, it is with respect to the hope and resurrection of the dead, that I am on trial. Now when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledged them all. Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisee's party stood up and contended sharply, we find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him? And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take Paul away from among them by force among, and bring him into the barracks. Now this is a very interesting thing that just happened. So the first thing is this, Paul did not cause dissension dissension and dysfunction. His comment revealed dissension and dysfunction, and Paul's

comment did not cause violence. It revealed that these were violent people who would use force to get their way.

And the question that he poses before them that he wants to do is actually, if you go back and read 1 Corinthians 15, something that Paul wrote, you'll see that he deals, in fact, in 1 Corinthians 15, with people who say there is no resurrection from the dead. And Paul says, well, obviously, if there is no resurrection from the dead, Jesus can't have risen from the dead. And so what Paul is doing here is, he's talking to these people, it's probably in the year 57, so it's 24 years, if, you know, Jesus rose from the dead either in this April of 30 or April of 33. I think he rose from the dead in April of 33. And so 24 years after that, these men have not been at all affected by the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. And there's two completely different types of claims here about why they don't believe in the resurrection from the dead. One is a group of, in a sense, skeptical type of people who just believe that when you die, you die, that's it. And the other group who say, well, you know, there is, in a sense, no resurrection from the dead, which is a physical resurrection. It's just a type of spiritual resurrection. And so Paul wants to begin there because, you see, what he's going to do, even in the face of a murderous, unjust, dysfunctional, violent court, he wants to bear witness to Jesus anyway. Like, whoa.

And what he does is it ends up revealing that they don't have any interest in this. They just have interest in using force to get what they want. And so the tribune takes them away.

And then here now is, in a sense, not only one of the heart of the whole story, but it's one of the most important verses in the whole book of Acts, and it's very important in the Christian life.

Look what verse 11 says. The following night, right? So Paul has spent that afternoon and a night in jail, and it's during this night. The Lord stood by Paul and said, take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.

[ 23 : 26 ] I'll read it again. The Lord stood by Paul and said, take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome. Now, here's what's going on. I went looking for some public domain images of this. I couldn't find it because I'm completely, I'm a doofus when it comes to navigating the internet, and I didn't think of it early enough to ask somebody who actually knows how to use the internet very well to find it. But if you have a tapestry, and, you know, a tapestry is something where there's, you know, thread or some other type of thing, you know, through some type of a medium, and it's used those threads to create some type of a picture, some type of an image, and some of them can be very, very intricate. And on one side of the tapestry, you can see the beautiful picture and the beautiful image, but if you go to the other side of the tapestry, you don't see anything like that at all. In fact, you might have to be able to vaguely guess about what the picture is like, but the other side of it, all you see are lots of different knots and tied off ends of thread, right? Because you use maybe red for a couple of stitches, then, you know, blue, and then green, and then yellow, and each one of them has to be tied off, and depending on how you tie it off, but the bottom line is that if you look on one side of the tapestry, you don't see anything at all.

You just see, in a sense, random colors, and random knots, and random pieces of, you know, whatever the medium is, wool or whatever thread used to make the image. But if you see the other side of the image, you can see something which can be very, very beautiful. And so one of the, what Paul is, what Jesus is doing here is Jesus is telling Paul this. He doesn't give all the details, details. But over the next two plus years, Paul is going to always remain in legal limbo, and but in custody with Rome, and yet be in limbo. And he's going to undergird, undergo, he's going to have to live with a Roman governor who doesn't let him go because he wants to be bribed. He's going to undergo other types of attacks. He's going to undergo, as we'll see in a moment, 40 military-aged men deciding they're going to launch a conspiracy with the council to have Paul murdered. He's going to undergo shipwrecks. He's going to undergo all sorts of terrible things.

And that's going to be going over the last, the next two plus years of his life. And in fact, when the book of Acts ends, but from the book of Acts, from that few chapters earlier to the end of the book of Acts, Paul is always in legal limbo, but under custody of Rome. And so it can look like things are chaotic, and things don't make any sense. And why, God, is this going on with me in my life?

And where are you, God? And how come there's these, all these things? And just nothing seems to make sense. And what Jesus is, in effect, telling Paul is you are looking at things from the, underneath the tapestry. But I see the side of the tapestry, which is a beautiful and profound image. And I am making a tapestry. And part of me making a tapestry is not that you've got to do this, but

you get to do this for me. So on one side, it looks chaotic. It looks empty. It looks as if nothing good is happening.

But from the view of Jesus, the risen Lord, that's not what's happening. He's in control. He's weaving a beautiful tapestry. And Paul is part of that weaving. His suffering is not meaningless.

[ 27 : 15 ] His suffering has meaning. A transcendent meaning. We live in a world where the average Canadian, if pushed, will just say one of two things. Life is one dang thing after another, and then you go to a better place when you die. But they don't really believe that. Because really, in our heart of hearts, they think life is just one dang thing after another, and then you die. And most of them won't say the word dang, they'll use something stronger. But you know that underneath that is a desire that it shouldn't be true and can't be true. Because you see, if you live in a world where it's one dang thing after another, there's no, it's just, there's no meaning. And if there's no meaning, how can you show courage? Like how, you know, how, how much, how, is this really going to give you courage? By the way, friend, life is one dang thing after another, so you, and then you're going to die. So you should be courageous. Like what? That doesn't follow. Life is one dang thing after another, then I'm going to die. Therefore be courageous? No. You know, create courage isn't the thing that's going to spring to your mind in that. And, and so that's what, that's what Jesus says to Paul. And, and it's some, in some says, in some sense, when we see what Jesus says to Paul here, I'm going to come back to it as to how this is a profound comfort and how it creates a context for him to be courageous that's relevant for us. But it's also connected to another, even more, the most famous time where

Jesus does something similar. What is the most famous time when Jesus does something similar? It's in the institution of the, of the, of the Lord's Supper.

On the night that he's been going to be betrayed, and he knows he's going to be betrayed, in the context of a Passover meal, he sits his disciples down and he said, this is my body, broken for you. This is my blood, shed for you. This blood is a new covenant that I am inaugurating for you. You are to get me inside of you. And if you are inside of, if I am inside of you and you are inside of me, then you are part of this new covenant. A new covenant that's eternal and has, will make all the difference in the world. You will know my presence and my power and my comfort and my meaning in this life. And why is that a tooth? Why is that the same thing as the tapestry?

Because in a sense, what Jesus knows is this. What they're going to experience, and they can't remember at the time with the Lord's Supper, is they're going to experience Jesus crying out in desolation, Father, may this cup be taken from me. But then they hear not my will, but thine be done.

They will see Jesus so emotionally distressed that his sweat looks like blood. They will see their best friend, Judas, come with a crowd and have Jesus arrested. And they will see Jesus not use his power to keep himself alive. And they will all scatter in terror when their Lord is gone. And they will go and hide. And even Peter, who will try to follow along, will deny Jesus three times. And they will watch as Jesus is falsely accused, as he is whipped, as he is taken through the streets, carrying a cross, and then collapsing from being whipped almost to death. And they will see him stripped naked. And they will see him hang upon a cross. And they will see all of the crowds mocking him and making fun of him. This is all after the crowds have turned against him and chose a terrorist rather than Jesus. And they will see him. And they will see him mocked on the cross. And they will see him die on the cross. They will see his side pierced. And they will be completely and utterly desolate.

[ 31 : 24 ] And it will only be after Jesus appears to them in his resurrection, when they see the grave empty, they see the grave closed there, and they see him alive, that they will understand that on this side of the tapestry, it just looks like chaos and evil is winning. But the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, who institutes a new and most perfect covenant, a covenant that brings the Holy Spirit, that is not just that there is a circumcision of the outer flesh, but there is a circumcision, a tearing, and a rebuilding, and a planting of the Spirit in the inside of your soul, that will make you God's children by adoption and grace, and that you will be born again, and that there will be the eternal life actually comes into you, and that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit will actually indwell you, and that you will, in a very true sense, be in Christ, that this completely brand new covenant is what was actually being instituted. So from the underside of the tapestry, it is chaos, and tragedy, and despair. On the other side, it is the most profoundly beautiful, beautiful story imaginable of God's good justice, God's good mercy, God's good grace, extended to people

like you and me, extended to unjust judges and unjust rulers. The world is no longer going to be divided between those who think that they are good and those who are bad. The world is divided between those that they need to receive the gift of God's grace and those who reject it, and there is no person so broken, so far from God, so evil. There is no one who has done so many horrendous deeds that they are beyond the scope of God's mercy, and this is actually, and this other thing is very important to others. I know there are many people in our culture.

Years ago, there was a woman in my rural parish, and I never knew if she was married or single, because it's very common to see women in churches and never see their husbands, right? I've done, you know, and so I said to her, should I call you miss or missus? And she was really funny. She was really, really funny. She was this short little woman who was probably as wide as she was tall, and she had a big smile, and she said, no, no, you should call me missed, not miss, M-I-S-S-E-T. I'm missed. Nobody chose me to marry me. She was really funny. And, and, but there are many people in life, that's what their experience is, and they might say, okay, George, this, this does sound profoundly emotionally comforting and all, but that's not for me. You know, my parents didn't care for me.

My siblings didn't care for me. Bosses overlook me. Underlings ignore me. I don't get those promotions. I don't get the house. Like, I'm missed. But the message of the gospel is you're not missed.

I mean, in fact, if you're hearing me right now, all I can tell you is, as Jesus is herald, is it's Jesus speaking to you right now. He's speaking to you. You're not missed.

[ 34 : 57 ] Christ. This, this offer is for you. It's for you. And so what we see here is something which matters to, to, to all of us.

It might be that none of us will ever face such a horrendous situation that Paul had to face. But the basic picture here is a profound truth, is that when you are in Christ, you are in this large story, this large tapestry of beauty and goodness and truth and justice that he is weaving.

And to know that that is the case doesn't make you complacent. But it means you have the courage to step forward and do hard things.

Because you know that it's worth it. You see, if you live in a world where it's one dang thing after another and then you die, why should you step forward and do hard things? But if you know that God is weaving a tapestry, that Jesus is ultimately in control, and it's not just fate, it's not just something like that.

It's the one who died on the cross for you. You know, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son to the end, that all that believe in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Those words of Jesus, that's Jesus speaking to you.

[ 36 : 22 ] And he's the one who has redeemed you as he is the one who is in control. And so some of us have, all of us have different very, very hard things that we have to face. Maybe for some, you know, it's the hard thing of being single or not having children.

For others, it's the hard thing is the children. For some things, it's things that are going on in your work which are not right. You know, for others, it's just, you know, maybe you feel like you're a drudge in cubicle land or something like that.

But you see, the point of all of this is to understand that your situation in a very different way, that you may be that drudge in that land and everybody else views you as a drudge, but that's not how you should view yourself.

Jesus has placed you in a place where only you can share the gospel with those people who are around you. Or you can show through your actions when people hate you or deride you or miss you or misuse you or when there's things that mean that you don't get the type of social things or just even the natural human things that you want, that by your response that you walk towards those things and the grace to accept it and the grace to move forward and the grace to allow that weakness to be something that has transformed within you.

Because the fact of the matter is, is that every single one of us as human beings, we have all of the weakness needed for Christ to do remarkable things through you. Whether it's dealing with colicky kids or grumpy husbands or whether it's dealing with bad bosses or just being stuck in a dead-end job, that you have all of the weakness.

[ 37 : 52 ] You are in places where you can make a profound difference to bear witness to Jesus, not just about the truth of his death and resurrection, but also just in the way that you forgive and you're generous and you're kind and you step forward and you stop the bullying or you stick up for

the underdog where you speak against, like in all of those things, you can do this knowing that you might not have Paul's direct experience of having Jesus reveal himself before you and say, all these things are part of my tapestry.

But you get to hear it from the word today. They're part of the tapestry that I am weaving because I am in control. And evil doesn't win.

Death doesn't win. The powers of this world do not win. Jesus says, I have overcome the world. I invite you to stand.

Bow our heads in prayer. Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would bring this story deep into our heart and that your word would form us at a very deep level.

We ask, Father, that as we celebrate the Lord's Supper, that we will remember how it is, in fact, that Jesus did die for us so that we could be made right with you when we put our faith and trust in you.

[ 39 : 31 ] And, Father, if there are any here hearing this, whether in this room or online or downstream, Father, as these words hear them, may your Holy Spirit move in their lives so that they will move in their heart, whether at first just with their lips quietly or out loud, that they will call upon you, Jesus, to be their Savior and Lord as they understand what you have done for them.

We ask, Father, that you help us to understand that none of us are missed, that the Lord is by each one of us, that he is bringing things to their proper end, that we can trust that we are in his hands, and knowing that, not that it will make us lazy or complacent, but that it will give us the courage.

It's worth it. It's worth it to bear witness to Jesus in truth and goodness and justice and mercy and beauty. It's worth it, Father, for us to know that Jesus, that you, Father, are truly sovereign.

Father, grow these truths deep into our heart. And we ask these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.