

Acts 25 "Hope When Justice is Subverted"

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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.

Let's pray. Father, we confess before you that we do not really know how often we read the book, your book, the Bible, and we either make the mistake of it applies to somebody else, or we make the mistake of thinking that it just doesn't apply to us at all. It just seems odd.

Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would bring your Word deep into our heart that it might form us so that we will live lives both intellectually and emotionally secure in what Jesus has done for us on the cross and for the eternal weight of glory that you are preparing for your children adopted by you through grace. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated.

I've only had a couple of times where I've prayed, and I think something like a miracle happened. Some of you have heard this story. It's from quite a few years ago. I was looking after four little churches in the country. It was my first time as a rector, and it was July or August.

[2 : 24] I can't remember which month, but I was at work, and the minister in the town of Renfrew was on holiday, and I was covering for him. And I lived about half an hour away from Renfrew, and the other churches that I served were in the opposite direction from Renfrew.

And it was about a half-hour drive to... That morning, I had to drive to Tremor, so it's a bit more than half an hour. And just a little bit, like five minutes before I was to leave, go out the door, ten minutes maybe, the phone rings, which is very unusual to have the phone ring at like 20 after 8, quarter after 8 on a Sunday morning, so I answered the phone. And it was a nurse from the hospital in Renfrew. And the nurse said, are you George Sinclair? I said, I am. She said, are you the minister who's on call for X? And I said, I am. And she said, well, I have a man who's been in a coma now for 48 hours or whatever it was.

He is... We think he is maybe just minutes from death. In fact, I feel bad that I didn't call you earlier, because the family would really like you to be with them before he dies, and he has very little time to live.

So could you come? And I said to the nurse, I said, I'm really sorry. I cannot come down to the hospital in Renfrew. I can't cancel my service in Tremor. We're my service in Eganville to drive down and do this.

[3 : 49] And she was very insistent that this man was close to death. It was very important to the family, and she really tried to lay some guilt trips on me. And I was feeling a bit guilty, to tell you the truth.

But I just said, I'm really, really sorry. I cannot... I have to go to... I can't do my services. If he's still alive, when I'm done my services, I'll come. And she said, well, he almost definitely won't be alive, just to give me that final kick of guilt.

I did my services. As soon as I'd finished my 11 o'clock service in Eganville, I called the hospital, and the nurse answered, and she said, well, I don't know what. He's still alive. He's still... I mean, he should have died three or four hours, a couple of hours ago. He's still alive. I said, well, I'll come. And my wife made a sandwich for me and put some coffee in a cup, and I hopped in the car and I drove to the hospital, found him, and the man was still alive, still in a coma, and his wife and daughter were with him. And so I told him who I was. I put my hand on his shoulder and just said, hi, I'm here. I'm the minister in charge. I always speak to the person in the coma in the hope that maybe they can hear. [5 : 00] And I spent a couple of minutes talking to the wife and to his daughter, and then I prayed for the man. I put my hand on his shoulder and I prayed for him. And when I pray in a situation like that, I pray for the wife and the daughter.

I pray for the people who are, you know, mourning and, you know, concerned for him. I pray for all who are praying for him. And I pray several things for the man. And one of the things I always pray for is I always pray that he will be healed or she will be healed. I always pray for that. That's in God's hands. It's the right thing to do. I pray, Father, if it's your will, that this man would be healed and that he would have more years of life. And then I go on and pray fundamentally that Jesus, I say something to the effect of Jesus, he's in a coma. We can't reach him. We know that Jesus can talk to him even in his coma and make Jesus minister to him and prepare him, Father, to see you face to face. And then I said, amen. And the man opened his eyes and said, thank you. And he lived at least another two years. He left the hospital the next day.

[6 : 09] That's the most dramatic of any of the times where I prayed for somebody and there's been something like a miraculous healing. Now, I mention this because most people, when they think of how God relates to the world, they either think of miracles like this or they think of things.

And we could all probably have many stories about this, like what we would consider to be dramatic answers to prayer. But skeptics could say that, you know, maybe it wasn't the prayer that some other type of thing would happen.

But they're pretty dramatic. We all probably have tales of praying for people. I have a purse for other people that the healing wasn't dramatic, but they were supposed to die and they lived quite a few years. The cancer was completely gone, not in remission, but completely gone, died of something else.

We all have stories like that. And the other way that Christians tend to talk about how God relates to the world is in the doctrine of providence. And that's where God seems to work through the changes and chances of this fleeting world through events in a way that works out for his people.

And some of us have stories about that. They wouldn't be a miracle, per se. Nobody would say it's a miracle. It would be something along the lines of you're late to have dinner with your friend and you come into your dismay.

[7 : 19] It looks like there must be a convention going on or something. All the parking spots in the street are filled. And then you're just behind, you know, you're late and then the guy ahead of you, the light hasn't even gone yellow light yet, but he stops.

You miss going through the light and you think, oh, I'm going to be even more late. You know, what am I going to do? And then as you pull through, just ahead of you, in front of the restaurant, a car pulls out and you're able to park there.

And so most of the time when we think of providence, we think of something like that. You know, you wouldn't say that's a miracle. It's just one of those things. God just took care of you in providence. Now, I mention all of this because, you see, if you think that God only relates to you in terms of dramatic answers to prayer, and if you think that the other way is acts of providence where it's something like the car leaving so you have a parking spot, you're going to miss out on actually how God works for his children, especially how he works for his children when life is very difficult, when life is exceptionally difficult.

And the story that we're going to look at today is a story that will help us to understand how God deals and is with us even in very, very difficult times. And it's going to point us in a different direction from the type of advice that we often hear in Christian and in non-Christian circles, which is to say there must be some reason that this is happening.

There has to be a reason why this is happening. And that, of course, is very, very frustrating if it's very hard to see the reason or if the only reasons you can guess aren't very good ones.

[8 : 57] And when you look around at other people who don't seem to be having those hard times that you're having, and there must be a reason doesn't really seem like it's true. And it seems like very thin gruel, something very thin to eat.

So let's look at this story, which talks about something better than there must be a reason for what's going on, and which helps it open our eyes to providence, especially providence when we are having very difficult times in our lives.

So if you turn with me, it's Acts chapter 25. And if you're a guest here in the church, one of the things that we do at Church of the Messiah is we generally either preach through books of the Bible or take big chunks of the Bible and preach through it.

And we're going through the book of Acts, and so this is the next story. And what's just sort of happened over the last couple of chapters, it's all downstream from this fellow by the name of Paul. He's come to Jerusalem to bring money for the poor. He's in the temple. He gets accused of something he hasn't done. He's falsely accused.

[10 : 00] A mob is formed. They try to kill him. He comes into custody. It's not protective custody, but in a sense a type of criminal custody under Rome. And now things have happened.

There's been other attempts on his life. There's been other fights. And then what's just happened the week before is that Paul is, in a sense, on trial for his life before the Roman governor in Caesarea. And you hear the legal arguments.

And at the end of it, Paul's left in jail because Felix is hoping for a bribe. And he doesn't get the bribe. So Paul spends two years in criminal limbo.

And now our story continues. Verse 1. Now, after three days, Festus had arrived in the province. That's the Roman province. Sorry. Now, three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea.

So Caesarea is the capital of the province. And Jerusalem, though, is a very important city to the Jewish people. So he's been a good governor, and he goes up to Jerusalem. And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jewish elite laid out their case against Paul.

[11 : 09] And they urged Festus, asking him as a favor against Paul, that Festus summon Paul to Jerusalem. Why? Because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way.

And just sort of pause. You can see right off the bat that this is a bit of a dark story. They want Paul dead, dead, dead, dead, dead. That's what they want.

They are corrupt. They are not taking their proper function. Paul has never been actually, he's innocent until proven guilty by Jewish law.

He hasn't been found guilty. And they are willing to conspire with murderers to have Paul killed. And another thing about this story, which is very striking, is it's been two years, over two years since Paul has been in jail.

That means, and there's even been a change in the high priest, and that means despite the change of whoever's in control, there has been this festering, murderous hatred against Paul.

[12 : 10] Two years of festering hatred. You can see that the Bible here talks about the real world. Not a hallmark romantic world, but the real world, where this is sometimes what people have to face.

Murderous hatred. And now there's another thing here. I've talked about it not for a couple of weeks, but it's really important for you to hear. If you read this story as there's good guys and bad guys, and Paul is the good guy, and so you think, okay, all these others are bad, like Festus, and then later on, oh, and all these people are bad, like the Jewish elite, and oh, these people are bad, like Agrippa and Bernice.

Oh, and here we come to Paul, the good guy. Here's us Christians. That's not the way to read the text. In fact, if you read the text this way, you haven't actually heard the text. The way to read the text biblically is after every character is introduced to say to God, is it me, Lord?

Is that me? Because the fact is there are Christians who labor under over two years of hatred, and rather than having it lessen over two years, they let it fester.

In fact, not only do they let it fester, they feed it. We know Christians who feed hatred. And so when you read the story, in every case, you need to ask yourself, Lord, is that me?

[13 : 41] Is there an area in my life where I am nurturing hatred? And in the next few characters, you're going to see it. Ask yourself, is that me? Don't just jump to, oh, yeah, I'm Paul. I'm the victim.

Everybody, all the others hate me. No, no, no, no, no. You haven't heard the scripture. Is it I, Lord? That's the response we should see in a narrative. See, it's one of the reasons why biblical narrative helps to form nuanced moral reasoning.

And if it's read properly, self-awareness. That you ask yourself, is it I? So what happens? Okay.

Paul, you know, Festus, the Jewish elite have asked that Paul, Festus would bring Paul down, and the Jewish elite wants to kill. What's Festus going to say? Verse 4. What does it say?

Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea, and that he, that is Festus, himself intended to go there shortly. So Festus said, let the men of authority, in other words, people who can actually make decisions, let the men of authority among you go down with me.

[14:43] Don't send lackeys. I want the guys who can actually make decisions. Send these men. Come down with me. And if there's anything wrong about the man Paul, let them bring charges against him.

And the first thing that we see about Festus, he seems like a competent person in authority. Like a, you know, basically a good guy.

But the next few verses reveals that that's actually not true. There is a competence about him, but there is something else that goes along with power.

That's not good. Well, what is it? Look at verse 6. And after Paul, after Festus stayed among them not more than 8 or 10 days. By the way, I love that.

That shows how Luke, the writer of this, is really concerned with accuracy. He doesn't know if it was 8 days or 9 days or 10 days. So he doesn't try to pretend he knows when he doesn't.

[15:40] He says what he does know. It's somewhere between 8 to 10 days. You know, it shows how Luke has a concern for accuracy. I'll read that verse again. After Festus stayed among them not more than 8 or 10 days, he went down to Caesarea.

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

Paul argued. And by the way, Luke can say this because of what happens later on in the story. It's not just Luke's opinion. It's what turns out later on in the story, that they couldn't prove it.

Paul argued, verse 8, in his defense, neither against the law of the Jewish people nor against the temple nor against Caesar have I committed any offense. So if some of you are familiar with the sermon from last week, you'll know in the trial last week, it's very different than this, and there's no summary.

And the reason there's no summary, it's sort of obvious there if you look, but in the original language, it's very obvious. What happened the week before is they'd hired a professional. And so he attacked Paul like a surgeon will do surgery with a scalpel.

[17:07] Very precise, very fine cuts, a very clear strategy. This time what the elite has decided is they're not going to go and pay for a high-priced fancy lawyer that didn't get them anywhere anyway.

They did the full court press, the blitz read, the I am going to make a list of every possible imaginable thing that Paul has ever done wrong, and we're all going to make a list of it, and we're just going to stand there flinging every potential thing he's ever done wrong at him.

Just a full court press, nothing finesse about it, just throwing everything at him. And that's why they don't summarize it, because it's obviously in the original language.

And Paul just argues in his defense, it just summarizes, listen, whether it's against the temple, against Jewish people, or against the Roman state, I've done nothing wrong. And that's sort of the answer.

I've committed nothing. Now, it's in this next bit that you start to see the problem with Festus, and it's a very, very common human problem. Now, by the way, it's a very common thing that there are bureaucrats who are honest and fair.

[18:13] That's fortunately common. Maybe, yeah, it's common. We don't have to say, oh, there's a bureaucrat, they're probably not doing a good job. No, that would be a wrong way to look at the world.

But the next thing shows that there's, in fact, beneath that surface competence is something else going on, and it's seen here in verse 9. But Festus, wishing to do the Jewish elite a favor, ah, favors, said to Paul, do you wish to go up to Jerusalem there and be tried on these charges before

me?

Sounds very innocent, sounds very innocuous, sounds very, like, almost like a wise thing to do, but it's, in fact, highly problematic.

See, now Festus isn't actually following the rules or doing his job. He's thinking about the politics, and he's thinking about what will make him look good, what will make his life easier.

And I didn't mention it earlier, but you're going to see throughout the text, there's constant ways, both in the English and the original language, that emphasizes that Paul's a nobody. As I said last week, it's hard for us to think of it in these terms, because unless you're a real Bible person, or you happen to study Tacitus or Josephus minutely, you don't know who Festus is.

[19 : 42] But Paul has cities and schools and churches named after him. So Paul, but in those times, in this story, Paul is a nobody, absolute nobody. And all the powerful people are figuring out what to do with this frankly inconvenient Jew.

Just in the way. He's just in the way. And so Festus wants to do a favor, and he wants to do a favor to the Jewish people, so he makes his suggestion.

Paul knows he's not a dummy, so how's Paul going to respond to it? See, and once again, our response is to say, is it I? Do I treat weak people in my organization in this way?

Do I not actually think about what I'm supposed to do, but do I think of who I can make favor with?

Do I, in fact, in my office, just act in a way that will make my job comfortable, and I don't actually care about the people that I have a responsibility for?

Is it I? So what does Paul do? Verse 10. But Paul said, I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried.

[20 : 57] To the Jewish people, I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death.

But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them, I appeal to Caesar. Now what you have to understand here is in the world at that time, there were three levels of courts.

You could sort of imagine that the Jewish court was sort of like, if there was a municipal court, it's a municipal level. Where Festus is would be like the Ontario Supreme Court, and then there's still the Supreme Court of Canada.

And in our day, if you want to appeal a decision by the Ontario Supreme Court, you ask the Supreme Court of Canada to consider taking it on, and they can say no.

But in those days, if you're a Roman citizen, tried at this middle level, the second you appeal to Caesar, you can go to Caesar. That's what you can do.

[22 : 01] And in fact, one of the things you see here is that Paul understood the laws and the rules, in fact, probably better than Festus and his opponents did. You know, one of the things to do if you're in trouble in a bureaucracy or in the legal system, know the rules.

I mean, one of the reasons that we were able to be as successful as we were against our former diocese, when the diocese sued us, is we knew the canons in the law better than the other lawyer did.

Like, just hands down. We knew it better. Like, we just did. And that's not boasting. It was just very obvious. They kept being surprised, thinking they could do things, and it turned out they couldn't. They didn't have the power to do it. But, this really is going to catch Festus by a surprise, well, here, let's read it, and then I'll tell you why it's going to catch Festus by surprise.

So, he appeals to Caesar. Then, Festus, verse 12, when he had conferred with his counsel, answered, to Caesar you have appealed, and to Caesar you shall go. Now, why is it that this probably caught him by surprise?

[23 : 07] It's because when Paul appeals to Caesar, he has to pay all of the costs out of his own pocket. He has to pay all of the travel costs for himself, whatever his traveling companions are, and for whatever soldiers need to accompany him.

He has to pay all the costs all the way until he finally appears to the emperor. Paul is unemployed, and he's not wealthy. It's a very, once again, this is the normal life, folks.

It's not unusual for a big corporation or a government or something like a diocese to put into place legal proceedings just believing that the other side, the small person, the nobody, doesn't have the financial resources to fight back and will have to cave.

It's in the news all the time. It's normal life, and Festus probably figured he had a very brilliant solution to this, and Paul goes ahead and says he's going to do this, and part of the conferring might have been where it is.

And by the way, there's an indirect lesson here about Christian generosity. We are never told who paid all of these expenses. You know, the Bible says don't let your left hand know what your right hand is giving.

[24 : 22] Like, don't give money for the furtherance of the gospel and the help of the church to get praise. We're never told who paid these bills, but they would have been considerable. Anyway, Festus goes ahead and makes a snap decision, but probably the very next day he realizes he made a really, really big mistake, and he's caught in terms of how he thinks because he's not thinking in terms of processes, but he's thinking in terms of favor.

Well, how does that, well, let's see. Verse 13. Now, when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice, sorry, when some days had passed, comma, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus.

Now, just pause here. Agrippa's another character, and you need to know that, so here's one of the things that's really neat about the Bible. When Luke is writing the book of Acts, he doesn't know that after he's written the book of Acts, Josephus will become a famous historian who's going to write about a lot of the same things, and he doesn't know that a famous Roman historian by the name of Tacitus is going to write about the same things, and so historians know all sorts of things about Agrippa and about Bernice and about Festus and about the high priest.

They know who the high priest was then, but here's the thing about Agrippa and Bernice. It's going to be important to know. They were brother and sister and they were married, and it was a scandalous, incestuous relationship that the powerful would tolerate even while they, in secret, would deride them, make fun of them, but he was married to his half-sister.

There are people who like the good life and, you know, frankly, frankly, what I want, I want, and what I want, I get. We all know people like that, and once again, is it I, Lord?

[26 : 19] Am I the type of person who wants what they want? I want what I want, and I get what I want because I want it. Am I that person? Well, what's the problem that Festus has created for himself?

Look at verse 14. As they stayed there many days, that's Agrippa and Bernice, they, you know, Agrippa is the king of the neighboring area, and Agrippa has control over the temple in Jerusalem. Verse 14, and as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, um, there is a man left prisoner by Felix, in other words, not my fault.

By the way, this whole bit is a perfect example of a combination between bureaucratic butt covering and bureaucratic gas lighting. Once again, that doesn't happen anywhere in the modern world.

Like, no politician or bureaucrat, or for that matter, pastor, ever does things like cover their butt and try to make people think that their remembrance of the past isn't exactly how it happens.

[27 : 27] But that, I'm not going to go into all the detail, but that's what he's going to do in this little recounting. He's going to make himself look like a hero, leave out all the bad bits, blame everybody else other than himself, and here's how it goes.

He said, there is a man, verse 14, left prisoner by Felix, and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders and the Jewish elite laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation.

In other words, they wanted a capital they wanted him to be found guilty of a capital offense so that he could be killed. And verse 16, I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accuser face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge against him.

So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. But when the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in the case of such evils as I supposed.

Rather, they had certain points of dispute with Paul about their own religion and about a certain Jesus who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive.

[28 : 33] I'll mention that again in a moment. Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them.

But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar. And there's the summary of what he says to Agrippa. Now, you start to get a bit of a hint of the problem. Festus knows that Paul is not guilty of any of these capital offenses. He's just basically admitted it to Agrippa. And it's a master class in butt covering and gaslighting. And then he has this little summary to show you a little bit about how Paul comports himself. And something very, it's actually really powerful evidence to the truth of the resurrection. Festus confesses to Agrippa, I don't understand, I don't really understand how, I don't have a place in my mind for it because the Jewish elite says that Jesus is dead and Paul says that Jesus died. [29 : 40] Yet somehow Paul says that Jesus died and he's alive. I'm like, what? Doesn't make any sense.

We're going to hear a little bit about how Paul describes it next week. But you have this very powerful evidence of the truth of the resurrection. That there's a common ground that he died by crucifixion, that he was buried in a tomb, and maybe they don't want to talk about the grave being empty, the tomb being empty if you're the Jewish elite, but Paul says the tomb is empty and in fact Jesus has appeared alive. You know, by the way, we're going to talk about this in a moment. If the resurrection is true, it changes everything. I was just talking to somebody within the last couple of weeks and I said, they were talking to me about a whole pile of Islamic objections to Christianity and one of the things I said is, if the resurrection is true, it changes everything. It means Islam is wrong, is false. The resurrection changes everything and it's not just the resurrection but it's the meaning of the resurrection and one of the things, once again, I've said it many times, I'll say it again, we all know people who die for causes.

[30 : 58] Most people don't die for a fact and Paul will die for a fact, the fact that Jesus rose from the dead and what it means and he will die for that. So, what type of advice does Agrippa give?

Well, it's very interesting. It's a type of advice that a self-centered, indulgent person would give. Look what he says in verse 22.

He says, Agrippa said to Festus, I would like to hear the man myself. Tomorrow, said Festus, you will hear him. Now, here's the thing which is very, very interesting.

Agrippa could have said, hey, Festus, buddy, puts his arm around him. He's innocent. Let him go. What's the big deal?

Just let him go. He's innocent. Let him go. You see, and I'm not going to read the rest of it because I want to get to some of the other applications which are important. If you go back and read, then actually, we'll read it very closely.

[31 : 59] Here's the issue. Here's where Festus has painted himself into a corner. Next, verse 23. So here's the thing. Agrippa doesn't say, listen, acknowledging you made a mistake is always an option in life.

In fact, in many places, many times in life, the best option is just to acknowledge you've done something wrong. Be prepared to lose face. The guy's innocent.

Let him go. Agrippa says, whoa. I mean, what you might not know is Agrippa's dad was the one who killed the first Christians.

Killed James. And Agrippa's great-grandfather was the one who wanted to kill the baby Jesus. And Agrippa has probably heard about these things that Paul has done in his travels and his argument for the resurrection.

And Agrippa's just really curious. He'd just like to hear Paul. So he doesn't think about what's right or wrong. He just thinks about how he would like to hear Paul. Well, here's the problem.

[32 : 59] Verse 23. So on the next day, Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city.

That's both Jewish and pagan. Then at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in from jail. And Festus said, King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see, now here, this is in the original language.

It's a dismissive gesture with a dismissive way of describing Paul. Festus, they're all in their finery, their finery. They're all wearing the most expensive clothes.

They're all in their robes. They are the elite. And Festus brings Paul in, obviously as a prisoner. And Festus says, King Agrippa and all who are present here, verse 24, you see this man, this nobody,

this little person, this inconvenient Jew.

You see this man, this nobody, about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me both in Jerusalem and here, shouting they ought not to live any longer. But I found that he had done nothing deserving death.

[34 : 11] And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. He's going to get in trouble with Nero if he sends an innocent guy there.

He has to dream up some reason that he's being sent there. How is he going to gaslight the emperor and cover his butt without doing the obvious thing which is just saying let him go? None of the important people think of it in terms of that because for important people you can't lose face and you can't acknowledge that you're wrong. It doesn't go with pride. Pride and idolatry will always lead you to not apologize and not acknowledge wrong.

It's one of the signs of your pride and or of worshipping idols. Therefore I have brought him before you all and especially before you King Agrippa so that after we have examined him I may have something to write.

He's not looking for justice. He just wants something to help them cover his butt and gaslight. For it seems to me unreasonable in sending a prisoner to not indicate the charges against him.

[35 : 19] Duh. Yes it is. So what's going on here with this whole text and how on earth does this fit with the idea of providence? Well it begins like this.

The problem that we have with providence is that when we think of providence we think of examples of when we are late for supper at a restaurant and a parking space opens just in front of us and that parking another way to talk about it would be that it was fortuitous to use a big word. It just it makes our life easier. It puts a smile on our face. It rescues us from a hard time. But how is it that there is something like providence when frankly you are in a very hard time right now and in fact many people on the outside of your life would agree if you say my life sucks.

How is providence at work when you have been deeply hurt? How is providence at work when you are accused of things you didn't do? How is providence at work when powerful people treat you like a nobody and they don't admit that they are wrong?

How on earth can you Christians say that there is something like providence? Well the resurrection changes everything.

[36 : 48] And the resurrection is not just a story of the resurrection part of what it is all about is the meaning of the resurrection. And in fact one of the ways that you can get a better sense of the gospel and how it is that for many people the gospel seems implausible because what is plausible for us as human beings is the way that powerful people treat little people and how powerful people in the world often not always but often treat the little people is well it doesn't really matter if they are treated as guilty when they are innocent and it doesn't really matter if you drag it out and maybe they die or maybe they go away and their case is never heard because powerful people are about powerful people.

but the gospel is the complete inverse of this. The gospel is the most powerful being in the universe the triune God seeing nobodies like you and me and seeing not that we are innocent but that we are guilty and acting to make the guilty innocent and to be free.

That is the gospel. gospel. God shows that for him there are no little people there are no nobodies in a sense some Christians have said that even if there was only one sinner in the entire universe Jesus would still have died on the cross for that one sinner but we are all sinners unlike the story we actually are guilty but God acts to save the guilty and he acts in a way which is powerful and effective and we know that this is true because we can believe Jesus why can we believe Jesus because he died on a cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and he experienced all there is to taste of death and all of that the guilt and the shame connected with death and on the third day the grave became empty as Jesus is resurrected and he appeared before a people to prove that he was alive and if the resurrection happened you can absolutely take as rock solid what Christ says to you and what Christ says to you you can look in the many promises precious promises of his presence with you that he will never leave you or forsake you the fact that it is a good thing that I go away the fact that you are beloved of the Father the fact that he gives the Holy Spirit the fact that he will not abandon you or leave you ever that he will not cast anybody out who comes to him that he will comfort you all of these things all of these things he has promised he doesn't tell us he doesn't tell you and me that for everything that we are going through

we will know in the moment what the meaning is the importance of the doctrine of God's providence is that

I mean Festus is doing what Festus is going to do and the elite are doing what the elite wants to do and Agrippa is doing what the Agrippa wants to do but despite all of it remember Paul just a couple Jesus just a couple of chapters earlier said don't worry Paul I am with you and you're going to go to Rome but that general specific promise is a general promise to us that Christ is with you and so people are doing what people do and you're caught in it and it doesn't look like any parking spots are opening for you but it doesn't mean that Christ has abandoned you you see knowing that Christ is with you even in these really difficult and lonely times it means that we have to die to the idea of providence as being always finding the parking spot and die to the idea as to there must be some meaning here by the way in heaven we will discover these meanings but those are things that come when we see Christ face to face and we might know some meanings of hard times while we were here before we see

Christ face to face but there's no promise about it but what we do know is this because of Christ and because of his providence it means that we have a secure intellectual and emotional space to pour out our hearts to him with all of our sorrows you know there's a song that earth has no sorrow that heaven can't heal and that's part of the doctrines of providence Paul says that these afflictions that we have in this life is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory doesn't say it's going to give us the meanings right here on this side of the grave but we're being prepared for an eternal weight of glory and so in light of that we can pour out our heart to Jesus and say you know Jesus this is just so hard and I don't understand and we can pour out our hearts to him and the other thing that the doctrine of providence here even in hard times brings to us is that it makes us think about Jesus is with us he is with us he is with us he does love us we just have to think about the cross to know that he loves us even in these hard times but the question that we should be asking you know as in between pouring out our heart and sorrow to the Lord the question we ask is this how can I bring you glory in this hard time

[42 : 41] I mean maybe part of the way you bring him glory is by being a stunning model of forgiveness to others or that even when things are going very hard you stun people by being concerned for them rather than being self-centered I mean I don't know there's all sorts of ways but that's the question those are the two things that providence brings home to us we can pour out our heart and sorrow and we ask how can we bring you glory how can we bear witness to Jesus even at this season of my life which is very very hard always remembering that when Jesus died from the cross for us it shows that I am not a nobody to him I am not inconvenient to him I matter to him and he will bring me to stand before the presence of God the Father with great joy he will do that for me he will do that for you if you are in Christ invite you to stand just bow our heads in prayer

Father some of us are having really good times we're healthy we have money in the bank we have a good job or career we have our relationships are good and Father we confess before you that often when we have things really going good for us we aren't as grateful as we should be and so Father we ask that you remind us of the deep need that we have as human beings made in your image to express gratitude for the simple but profound blessings that we can enjoy and Father you know that there are some of us who are maybe going through a short season of really hard times some of us maybe have been going through quite a long season and in fact Father there might be some amongst us who realistically think that there's going to be some hard times for the rest of their life and we ask Father that you would make us by your Holy Spirit a congregation that would be prayerful and supportive of each other both in good times and in bad and Father for those of us who are struggling with a hard time that your Holy Spirit might bring these truths home to them that your hand is upon them you have not abandoned them they matter to you and help them to pour out their heart and help them to pray that they can bear witness to you and bring glory even in very very hard times and we ask

Father that you deliver us from our own moral blindness of seeing specks in other people's eyes and not the logs on our own and if we have been nurturing hatred if we have been turning away from opportunities that you give us to forgive if we have been holding on to hatred or bitterness if we have in fact been self-indulgent if we have in fact acted in ways that despise others and treat others poorly we ask Father that your Holy Spirit would convict us of that so that thinking of Jesus we might confess our sins that we might try to make amendment of life that we might live lives that bring you glory and we ask all these things in the name of Jesus your Son and our Savior Amen

Amen