

Acts 22:22-23:35

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Preacher: Benjie Slaton

- [0 : 0 0] The following sermon is from Grace and Peace Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Grace and Peace is a new church that exists for the glory of God and the good of the northeast suburbs of Hamilton Place, Collegedale, and Ottawa.
- You can find help more by visiting gracepeacechurch.org. Brutal.
- Okay. So we are in that section of the book of Acts where there are long stories. Long, long, long stories. You can just see it in what I printed there.
- The next few weeks it's going to kind of be like this as we head towards the conclusion of Acts. So instead of just reading the entire thing, what I really want to do is just walk through this passage and attempt to bring some focus and some clarity to it and draw out a couple of the themes that I think unlock some of the key truths that God is showing us in that.
- So, you ready for that ride? Okay. Let's get on. Okay. So last week, where we left off was there was this big conflict between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians.
- [1 : 1 5] And it had spilled over into the larger Jewish population and had actually become violent. A riot had started. Some Jews who had known Paul as he's been traveling in Asia, they recognized Paul walking around Jerusalem and they'd seen him in the temple complex.
- They'd also seen him with a Gentile that they knew from Ephesus, a guy named Trophimus. And they assumed when they saw Paul in the temple that he had brought Trophimus into the temple, which was a big no-no to have a Gentile inside the temple complex.
- And so they lost it. A riot starts. They grab Paul. They are about to lynch him before the Romans show up. So it's a very tense situation.
- That's where we left off last week. Cliffhanger. That's where we left off last week. And so we're picking back up with the tension at kind of a height. So let's pick up at verse 35 of chapter 21.
- [2 : 2 2] Okay. And when he, meaning Paul, came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd. For the mob of the people followed, crying out, Away with him!
- Sounds like a crowd that went after another person in our Bible. As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, May I say something to you?
- And he said, Do you know Greek? Are you not the Egyptian then who recently stirred up a revolt and led the 4,000 men of the assassins out into the wilderness?
- Paul replied, I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people. And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people.
- And there was a great hush. Let me just stop there. Okay. So the Romans, they're bringing him up and Paul stops them and he speaks Greek. He speaks their language, the official language of the empire at that point.

- [3 : 26] And they're surprised by that. They had mistook him for this Egyptian, a well-known Egyptian terrorist. Now, why do I use the language of terrorist?
- Well, here's why. It's because this guy actually shows up in our history books. He led this revolt that was actually something very, sounds very familiar.
- He led this revolt of these assassins. The actual word here is Sicarii. Like, have you, have any of y'all seen that movie Sicario? I would not recommend it. It's very violent.
- I really liked it. It's very, very violent. You don't need to watch it. But it, what it, the Sicarii were these knife-wielding assassins.
- And what they would do was they would go and disperse. There were hundreds of them. They would disperse into crowds at festivals and other gatherings at public places. And they would go under the cover of the crowds and stab and kill Roman officials.
- [4 : 29] It was a way to try to destabilize the Roman, the local Roman government. And this was going well, this kind of guerrilla tactic, until he gathered, until this Egyptian gathered 4,000 guys.
- They went up onto the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem. He prophesied that he was going to, that the walls of Jerusalem were going to fall before him. And they started down the hill and the Romans came with their regular legions and slaughtered them.
- He fled off into the wilderness. And so the Romans thought, okay, this is that guy again. Same guy. And the reason that I bring that up is because, you know, we tend to think that the things that we experience in our day are new.
- They're not. Terrorists just like this have been people who've been with us from the beginning. You know, the writer to Ecclesiastes says that there's nothing new under the sun. There's nothing new under the sun.
- And that's exactly right. And part of the reason that that's important is that that detail shows that there's a lot of familiar stuff going on in this passage.
- [5 : 38] In fact, in this passage, there are a few themes that we've been looking at in the book of Acts over and over that are going to pop back up in this passage. There's something familiar about this passage, even though it's a totally new story.
- And I want to focus on that. So as we walk through it, I want you to see that there's a familiar problem. There's a familiar comfort in the midst of that problem.
- And there's a familiar hope that we have. Familiar problem, familiar comfort, familiar hope. So familiar problem. Let's keep going in the story. Wherever I left off.
- Verse 40. And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people, and there was a great hush. And Paul addressed them in the Hebrew language, actually in Aramaic, their kind of heart language.
- And he said, fathers, brothers and fathers, respectful, hear the defense that I make now before you. And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet.
- [6 : 41] And Paul said, I am a Jew born in Tarsus and Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel, who was a prominent religious, Jewish religious scholar.
- This was saying, like Paul is saying, hey, I went to Stanford, and I got a PhD from Harvard. Like he's showing off his impressive credentials. Strict manner, according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, as all of you are to this day, I persecuted this way, meaning Christianity, meaning the followers of Jesus.
- I persecuted this way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women. As the high priest and the whole council of the elders can bear me witness.

And I journeyed toward Damascus to take those who were, those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished. And as I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon, a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me.

And I fell to the ground and I heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And I answered, who are you, Lord? And he said to me, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

[7 : 57] Now those who were with me saw the light, but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, what shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me, rise and go to Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.

Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me and standing by me said to me, Brother Saul, receive your sight.

And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. And he said, the God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the righteous one, and to hear a voice from his mouth.

For you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait?

Rise, be baptized, and wash away your sins calling on his name. When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me, him meaning Jesus, saying to me, make haste, get out of Jerusalem quickly because they will not accept your testimony about me.

[9 : 17] And I said, Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of Stephen, your witness, was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.

But he said to me, go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles. Okay, let's just stop there for a moment. Okay, so the angry crowd, this mob, begins to listen to Paul because he's speaking their language.

He's talking about things that they know. And so Paul told his story. We've heard that story before. He's actually going to repeat it again in a couple of weeks. That's one of Luke's primary purposes in this part of Acts is to be repetitive about the themes that he wants us to see.

But what is his emphasis in this particular retelling? The emphasis here is on how offended the Jews got. They got offended by this.

What did they get offended by? Look back at where I left off. Let me, got to get my pages right. There we go.

[10 : 34] Verse 22, Up till this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth. He should not be allowed to live.

They got offended by this. What is it about Paul's story, his personal transformation with Jesus that offended them so badly? Here's what it is.

It was Jesus saying to him, They will not accept your testimony, so I will send you away to who? To the Gentiles. Up until that point, they were cool.

They were cool with Paul having a religious experience, even if it was Jesus. But the moment that he mentioned that he was going to be sent away to the Gentiles, that was a bridge too far. No mas.

Why was that so offensive? Here's why. It's because their entire way of relating to God was about their cultural closeness to God, not their spiritual closeness to God.

[11 : 39] This is the exact same thing that we looked at in the passage from Matthew that Robert read for us earlier. See, you are neither closer nor further from God depending on your cultural decisions.

The stuff you eat, the stuff you drink, how you talk, how you vote, how bubbly your personality is, how you dress, and even to some extent how we are relating to the church.

All of these things, they are important. You know, they're not unimportant, but they are not the primary way that we value how it is we are relating to God. Throughout the years, this is one of the things that never changes.

There are always people who think through, who think in religious categories instead of gospel categories. It's exactly what we read earlier.

The religious people confuse their cultural rightness with spiritual rightness. With a spiritual life that is close to God.

[12 : 50] See, the Jews demanded Jewish culture. They demanded circumcision. They demanded a certain way of dressing. They demanded a temple, the way that you dealt with the temple, food laws.

And Paul was completely unwilling to give them spiritual credit for it. He was unwilling to say, you're closer to God because you do it this way.

What Paul was unrelenting about was to say that the only way to be close to God is through His Son, Jesus Christ. And anybody, no matter their culture that they're coming from, has access to that.

Anybody. You don't have to go through Jewish culture in order to find God. You have to go through Jesus. That was Paul's point. Culture can look a lot of different ways.

These Gentiles can find God just as easily. We do this in all kinds of ways. In ways that are completely obvious and in ways that are not so obvious.

[13 : 54] I saw one of those ways this week. You may have seen some of the news stories about this. It's kind of made the rounds. But there is a, there's plans to print up a new version of the Bible.

I don't know if you've seen this, the God Bless the USA Bible. It's a Bible that within the pages of the Bible it has a copy of the Declaration of Independence. It's got a copy of the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and it's got a copy of the lyrics of Lee Greenwood's God Bless the USA because that's on the level of the Constitution, clearly.

And now, look, patriotism isn't bad. I mean, we're celebrating Memorial Day today. Like, it's a good thing for us to serve and to honor our country and to be proud of our country. That's a good thing.

But do you see the subtlety that is communicated in this printing of a Bible? There's a subtle communication that if we link our public feelings of patriotism, we will be better Christians.

We can get closer to God through this means. There is a, in communicating this, what is actually happening is, it is devaluing the centrality of Christ and elevating particular cultural values.

[15 : 21] We're elevating cultural values at the expense of Christ. It should not be this way because the only way to be close to God, the only way to know God is through the Christ who is revealed in the Scriptures.

and as we know the Christ in the Scriptures, that points us back to things like patriotism, which are a far secondary value to Christ.

But it's fascinating the way, that's just one example, we do this in all kinds of ways, in the ways that we demand that people speak. You know, we're nice southerners.

We speak in a certain way. We, in the way that we demand that people dress, in the ways that we choose to eat and drink, in the ways that we parent, in the ways that we, in the activities that we choose to engage in, in all kinds of ways we do this and we subtly tear down the centrality of Christ.

The problem is, and here's the problem, the problem is, is that some of us, because of these cultural things, we're more willing to rest in our cultural rightness than we are to rest in the spiritual centrality of Christ.

[16 : 39] Let me, let me say it in another way. What are the things that make you feel most like a Christian? Are they, the activities that you do, the way that you talk, the theology that you know, the friends that you have, your opinions about politics and culture, or is it resting in the fullness and the sufficiency of the work of Christ, of seeing Him, of worshiping Him, of finding your, of finding your life taken up in Him?

What makes you feel most like a Christian? That's a really great question for us. See, the gospel of Jesus, as it's given to us here, it gives us a fundamental reality.

This is what we talked about a couple of minutes ago, that in and of ourselves, we are all sinful. We are all dead in and of ourselves. And what that means is, all of our cultural stuff, our cultures, are dead spiritually.

Our, our, even our, our morality, our theology, our, our politics, all of those things are powerless to produce spiritual life in and of themselves.

And if you rely on them to produce your spiritual life, you're going, it's not going to satisfy, it's not going to give you what you want. Okay, I'm going to stop there and keep moving.

[18 : 15] So that, there's a familiar problem that we see from the Jews here. We see it in our day. We see it in our hearts. The, the problem of substituting something instead of Jesus.

So, there's a familiar comfort, however. Like all religious people, like all people who are trusting in something other than Jesus, they don't like to be told they're wrong.

They don't like it when somebody critiques them. And they did, the Jews here did not like that at all. But here's what I want you to see, is that God is in the midst of even this conflict.

So let's keep going. Up until this word, they listened. Then they raised their voices and said, away with him, such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live.

Seriously. He's making a theological, cultural argument and they want to kill him for it. That should shed some light on the kind of vitriol we see in our world.

[19 : 12] And as they were shouting and throwing their cloaks off and flinging dust into the air, the tribute ordered him to be brought into the barracks saying that he should be examined by flogging.

Now flogging, this is a whipping. Sometimes they would actually, if you've seen Braveheart, when he gets like pulled by cords, they would sometimes pull somebody by cords and then beat them, which was a particular way of trying to, they would do this for interrogation as well as for punishment.

So, saying that he should be examined by flogging to find out why they were shouting against him like this. But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?

When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, what are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen. So the tribune came and said to him, tell me, are you a Roman citizen?

And Paul said, yes. The tribune answered, I bought this citizenship for a large sum. That means he probably paid a bribe to some lower official who granted it to him. 29, so those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately.

[20 : 30] And the tribune also, I'm sorry, Paul said, but I am a citizen by birth, meaning he received this from his father. So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately.

And the tribune also was afraid for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him. But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused, let me make sure I'm not going too far with all this reading, why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet and brought Paul down and set them before them.

And looking intently at the council, Paul said, brothers, I've lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day. And the high priest, Ananias, commanded those who were by him to strike him on the mouth.

Paul said to him, God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall. Are you going to sit to judge me according to the law? Yet, contrary to the law, you order me to be struck?

Then those who stood by said, Would you revile God's high priest? And then Paul said, I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest.

[21 : 48] For it is written, you shall not speak evil of a ruler over your people. Now, when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees, the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees.

It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial. And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.

For the Sadducees say 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 Pharisees party stood up and contended sharply, We find nothing wrong with 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 him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks.

Wow. Violent. Verse 11. The following 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 also testify in Rome.

[23 : 08] All right, let's stop there for a second. Paul was smart. He was crafty. He appealed to the fact things were getting hairy.

Now, I don't know why Paul decides to wait until things start to get really bad before he pulls out the trump card of being a Roman citizen. That was a huge deal in this day.

A very small percentage of people who lived in the Roman Empire were actually citizens. This carried a ton of weight, as you can see, but at the very moment that he's getting strung up, he brings that out and it works.

They stop what they're doing and they treat him with greater respect. In fact, from this point on, he's going to be treated incredibly respectfully and kindly, even though he's in custody.

But he also, Paul also played the various factions off of one another, various Jewish factions. The Pharisees and the Sadducees. Pharisees, you know, Pharisees were cool with miracles and with resurrection.

[24 : 09] They actually believed that God was presently active in the world. Sadducees? Not so much. You know, the Sadducees, the way they looked at the world was, hey, God gave us a law.

He gave us the land and a temple. He gave us a moral code. We should just use that. God doesn't need to enter into the world. We should just be able to live out life as he's given it to us.

So Paul, seeing that this is there, stands up and says, well, the proof of my message is resurrection. And that just set everything off. Before you knew it, everybody was fighting amongst themselves.

But here's the thing. Here's what I want you to see. God didn't come and comfort Paul because he was smart and cheeky, you know, because he could kind of play to the crowd.

That's not why, you know, the moral of the story isn't be like Paul, be a little bit, you know, be a little bit cheeky. The point of the story is, is that in the midst of Paul's difficulty, Jesus shows up to him.

[25 : 14] Verse 11, the following night, the Lord stood before him. Jesus stood before him. You know, I wonder how alone and frightened Paul must have been feeling at this moment.

You know, Jesus didn't show up on the first night. You know, the night when Paul was still hopped up on adrenaline and courage. You know, this worked. I'm headed somewhere.

This is going to be awesome. This is going to be great. No, now the, you know, the wheels of Roman justice have slowed to a crawl just like the wheels of justice in our day slow down.

He knows now that he's in it for the long haul. This is a marathon, not a sprint. You know, I wonder if Paul was wondering, had he made the right decision?

I mean, he's given his whole future and life up to these hated Roman officials and now he's totally at their mercy. And he's alone. You know, now the die has been cast.

[26 : 22] There's no going back. There's nothing else that he can do. He's in their custody. He's not getting out. He's playing this, you know, he's got his hand of cards and this is all he's got. And I wonder if now that reality of what is happening to him was crushing in upon him.

sitting in a Roman cell. And this is the place where God meets him. Not in the moment of victory, not in the place of strength, but in the place of weakness, of fear, of being alone.

That's where God shows up. And I think that's how it goes, isn't it? You know, most of the times that I've seen God work most particularly in my life, where he has shown up in particular ways, have been in the places where I have felt most weak.

Where I've been, you know, at the edge of my, at the end of my rope. Where I haven't had any more good ideas. Nothing else that I could pursue. That I simply had to throw myself at his mercy.

You know, last year at this time, we had just come out of, the tornado had just run through this area. We settled into COVID.

[27 : 38] It was clear. Unlike what we thought, it was not going to be a quick six weeks and then done. We were settling into a long-term situation. And I remember having a conversation, even with some of you, you know, are we even going to be open at Christmas?

You know, what's going to happen? None of us had any idea what was going to happen. And yet, what we saw last year was in the midst of the most difficult year that any of us have faced, God was present with us.

God was powerfully at work. And I can tell you that for some of you, you found a deeper sense of community, a deeper sense of God's presence than maybe you have ever felt.

God met you in the midst of that. Not because you had it all together. Not because you knew what we were going to do. Not because you knew the outcome, but because He found you in your weakness.

This is where God shows up. You know, all you have to do is turn on the TV and the amount of fear in our culture is so high right now.

[28 : 51] Not just from COVID, but politics and culture and education and of course fear and health. COVID and health and almost at every turn people are terrified of all kinds of unknowns.

And they're trying all kinds of ways to try to figure life out for themselves. And what God consistently comes back to do is to say, I will comfort you in the midst of your fear and the place that I'm going to comfort you is not in your strength, is not when you figure it all out, is not when you have it together, but when you are at your weakest point.

If you feel weak, this is the time to look for Him. This is the time for you to stop what you're doing and to come to Him.

Some of you, you need a place like grace and peace. You need a place to connect deeply and find God's presence with these people.

Alright. A familiar comfort. Finally, a familiar hope. There's some hope that He gives us. Let's look at the end of this passage. Verse 12.

[30 : 09] When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

I love blood oaths. There's just something great about that. I'm not going to eat or drink until I accomplish this thing. That seems not wise. Verse 13. There were more than 40 who made this conspiracy.

They went to the chief priests and elders and said, We have strictly bound ourselves by oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul. Now, therefore, along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring Paul down to you as though you were going to determine his case more exactly and we are ready to kill him before he even comes near.

Now, the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush and so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. Paul called one of the centurions and said, Take this young man to the tribune for he has something to tell him.

So, they took him and brought him to the tribune and said, Paul, the prisoner, called me and asked me to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you. So, the tribune took him by the hand and going aside asked him privately, What is it that you have to tell me?

[31 : 27] And the young man said, The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him. But do not be persuaded by them.

For more than 40 of their men are lying in ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him. I think it's hilarious that that detail of neither eating nor drinking is repeated three times.

Anyway, And now they are ready, waiting for your consent. So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, Tell no one that you have informed me of these things.

Then he called two of the centurions and said, Get ready 200 soldiers with 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen.

Romans, do not play around. Don't mess with Romans. That's the moral of that story. 470 people to go against 40 essentially unarmed and famished Jewish dudes.

[32 : 28] Go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night and provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix, the governor.

Caesarea was on the coast of Israel and it was kind of the Roman provincial capital and so he was sending him to where the governor is.

And he wrote a letter to go with this to this effect. Read the letter. Claudius Lysias, to His Excellency, the governor, Felix, greetings. This man, meaning Paul, was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen.

And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. I found that he was being accused of questions of their law but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment. And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against this man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him.

So, the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris and the next day they returned to the barracks letting the horsemen go on with him.

[33 : 50] And when they had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they presented Paul also before him. On reading the letter he asked what province he was from and when he learned he was from Cilicia he said, I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive.

And he commanded him to be guarded at Herod's Praetorium. Okay, so it's setting up the next part of the story where there's going to be a hearing now before the regional governor of the Jewish accusers and Paul as the defendant.

But I want to look at this a little bit more closely to see the hope that we have that we see in this passage. So this plot was hatched, this blood oath and they were, you know, it's amazing that the Jews were willing to upset the Roman authorities.

They were willing to attack Romans to take this prisoner away from them and kill them. They're willing to upset the Roman rule in order to get this thing done against Paul.

I find that fascinating. You know? And they would have gotten away with it if it hadn't been for that meddling kid, the nephew of Paul's, Paul's nephew who somehow, some coincidence, overhears that this plot is happening and then goes and tells Paul.

[35 : 12] Isn't that fascinating? That this mundane coincidence with Paul's nephew becomes God's ordained means to bring about his ends of sending Paul to Rome.

I find that fascinating. If you ever listen to This American Life, you should go back and listen to one of their episodes. It's probably from 10 years ago now about coincidences and people just throw in all of their random coincidences.

It's amazing. One of my favorites, I'll just go ahead and tell you, one of my favorites was about this couple named Paul and Esther Gretchen.

They first started dating in this neighborhood of Chicago called Arlington Heights and they'd been out four or five times and Paul wanted to take Esther out to a dinner to kind of have a DTR, you know?

DTR, define the relationship, you know this? And they were going to, you know, be boyfriend, girlfriend or whatever. And so he went to a store that day to pick up some flowers, take her to dinner and as he was pulling money out of his pocket to pay for it, he realized that on one of the dollar bills it had the word Esther written on it.

[36 : 27] And he thought, that's funny. So he was like, that's cool. He stuck it back in his pocket and he went next door to another store, bought a frame, put the dollar bill in the frame and gave it to Esther at their dinner.

She got kind of quiet and just kind of didn't say much about it. She said, remind me to tell you something about that later. And he was like, fine. You know, months go by, they end up getting married and their first apartment together, they're unpacking their boxes, getting set up and Esther put the frame of that dollar bill on the wall and she said, I've been waiting to tell you this.

But a couple of years before we started dating, I was dating this other guy, I knew he wasn't the right guy for me and at work one day I was bored and I took \$12 out of the cash register and I wrote my name on those bills and I told myself that the man who returns one of these bills to me is going to ask me to marry him.

So they've kept the framed dollar bill in their house and they call it the Immaculate Dollar of Arlington Heights. I think that's amazing. But what we believe is that actually there are no real coincidences in the world.

What we believe is that God is at work in all things. God is at work in the very mundane things of a nephew overhearing a conversation about a conspiracy.

[37 : 50] Of all kinds of whatever is happening in our world, God is at work in. The creator of the universe, there is no part of this creation to which God does not have claim over, to which He does not have active involvement in.

even in the minutest details. We believe that this world is teeming with God's presence and His activity. What that means is that God is present with you now.

He will be with you this afternoon while you hopefully get a nap. He will be with you tonight when you get nervous about your work week. He will be with you when your child wakes you up too early tomorrow morning.

He will be with you when you are sad. He will be with you when you are glad. He will be with you always in everything. But it's not just in the coincidences.

There's more going on. At the end of this, Paul has appealed to his citizenship. I find that incredibly ironic that Paul's citizenship becomes his ticket to the Roman governor, to this whole next part of the story where he's going to get sent to Rome.

[39 : 05] Think about it. The irony that the Roman world which was, the Roman system which was the means of such incredible cruelty and injustice on so many people, Rome becomes the means by which God is going to bring His message of Christ to the world.

Going over Roman roads, on Roman ships, and because of Roman citizenship. Formal structures, the greatest power of the world, God is at this point subverting its very power.

And within not very long, the power of Rome would crumble at the feet of the truth of the gospel. Roman culture is going to get radically changed because of this.

Isn't that amazing? God is at work in the biggest parts of our world, in the biggest movements of society. He's at work in the minutest parts of our world. Look, we live in a world that is petrified right now of all kinds of things, fearful in all kinds of ways, and what we need to be reminded about is that we have hope that God has not left this world to its own devices.

There are movements in our society that can make you fearful. There are bad things out there. They are not the things that are in most power. There is nothing happening in your life or in the movements of history that are outside of the sovereign and gracious working of our God.

[40 : 50] And so, because of that, you can have hope in the midst of whatever it is you're facing. Friends, this passage is amazing.

It shows us that the problems that we all face, that we have always faced, of not wanting to believe in the centrality of Christ, that that actually, if we don't, if we don't see Christ at the center of everything, then we'll never be able to see the comfort that He provides us in the midst of our difficult times.

We'll never see the hope that we need to have to move forward in life, to have the courage to move forward. This passage is calling you back to the simple reality.

Jesus has come. You have no other trust other than Him. And if you trust Him, what you will find is that you have hope and comfort in this world.

That's what we need. That's what I need. May that be true of all of us. Let me pray and ask God to make it so. Father, we do ask that you would make that true of us.

[42 : 00] Thank you for these passages that we're tempted to just skip over because they're long and they're cumbersome and a lot of details. But Father, I praise you for them. We need them. We need to see the very real ways that you are at work in this world.

We thank you for it. Send your Spirit to be with us. Seal it to our hearts, we ask. In Christ's name, Amen.