

# Acts 24:1-25:12

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- [ 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 out more by visiting [gracepeacechurch.org](http://gracepeacechurch.org). That's not bad, right?
- And this is courtroom drama. So very appropriate that we've had my favorite attorney just leading us in prayer just now.
- Because this is courtroom drama. And I am going to dare to read the whole thing to you because the two hearings that we hear before two different Roman governors, both of them have themes that are going to show us a lot about how to speak truth to power as followers of Jesus Christ, who is the King of Kings, who has all power, and who is the way and the truth and the life.
- So please hear with me the Word of God. Is it your custom to stand when you hear the Word? Sometimes. Sometimes. Eddie says sometimes. Do you have the stamina for 39 verses?
- [ 1 : 2 0 ]     Stand. All right. Let's hear God's Word. This is a great story. And I'm not just saying that because God the Holy Spirit gave it to us through Luke.
- But it is a great story. So listen to this drama. After five days, the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus.
- They laid before the governor their case against Paul. And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation in every way and everywhere, we accept this with all gratitude.
- But to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.
- He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. By examining him yourself, you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him.
- [ 2 : 4 1 ]     The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so. And when the governor nodded to him to speak, Paul replied, Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense.
- You can verify that it is not more than 12 days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem, and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city.
- Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me. But this I confess to you, that according to the way which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the law and written in the prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. Now, after several years, I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings.

While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple without any crowd or tumult, but some Jews from Asia, they ought to be here before you to make their accusation should they have anything against me.

[ 4 : 17 ] Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them.

It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day. But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the way, put them off, saying, when Lysias the Tribune comes down, I will decide your case.

Then he gave orders to the centurion that Paul should be kept in custody, but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.

After some days, Felix came with his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he, Paul, reasoned about righteousness and self-control and coming judgment, Felix became alarmed and said, go away for the present.

When I get an opportunity, I will summon you. At the same time, he hoped that money would be given him by Paul, so he sent for him often and conversed with him. When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

[ 5 : 42 ] Now, three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea, and the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him, asking as a favor against Paul, that he summon him to Jerusalem, because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way.

Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea, and that he himself intended to go there shortly. So, said he, let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there's anything wrong about the man, let them bring their charges against him.

After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea, and the next day, he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove.

Paul argued in his defense, neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar, have I committed any offense.

But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?

[ 7 : 05 ] But Paul said, I am standing before Caesar's tribunal where I ought to be tried. To the Jews, 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. Then Festus, when he conferred with his council, answered, to Caesar you have appealed, to Caesar you shall go.

This is God's word. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Let's pray together. Father, this is a rich text.

It is about events that happened long ago and far away, but we can already tell from hearing it that it's about issues of justice, issues of truth that are very much alive in 2021, about how we operate as followers of Jesus in the midst of the government system in which you placed us and how Christ can be glorified in the way his people conduct themselves.

[ 8 : 27 ] So, Father, we pray that your spirit who breathed out these words through Paul's colleague and friend Luke would apply your word to our hearts. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, as I said, this is a courtroom drama. Some of you, I can tell by the little bit of gray in your hair, I have gray in my beard.

Some of you remember Perry Mason. Yeah, not so many. More of you remember Law and Order or Bull or whatever your favorite courtroom drama is.

This is courtroom drama. Paul is having two hearings before two successive Roman provincial governors, Felix and Festus, and the issue really that comes out is speaking truth to power.

You sometimes heard that expression. It's a risky thing to do to tell people in control truths they don't want to hear. Just ask the Belarusian journalist.

[ 9 : 26 ] I have to read his name. Roman Protasevich, whose flight was deflected and forced to touch down in Belarus.

You've heard that story. Or the Russian opposition leader, Alexei Navalny. Or ask members of Congress who are now being shunned as traitors to their party for speaking their perception of what happened on January 6th.

Or ask whistleblowers in the marketplace who spill the beans about guilty secrets that their supervisors or maybe even the CEO doesn't want anybody to know.

Or just ask, say, John the Baptist a few thousand years ago. John the Baptist sent to prepare the way for Jesus, but John also confronted Herod Antipas.

You may remember that story in the Gospels because Herod had stolen his brother Philip's wife, Herodias, and John kept saying to him, it's not legal for you to take your brother's wife.

[ 10 : 33 ] And Herod put him in jail. And Herodias wanted John dead. But Herod protected him because he knew he was a holy man. And Herod loved to listen to him.

And at the same time, he hated to listen to him. It's a great, great, what a mixed up guy he was. Speaking truth to power. Pretty risky. Pretty risky.

And for Christians, for followers of Jesus, it involves a delicate kind of balance because actually the Apostle Paul at this point has already written his letter to the Romans.

And in his letter to the Romans, he says, I'm going to come eventually. He didn't quite fully know how he was going to get to Rome. Acts shows us how he's going to get there. But he says, I want to come to you, but I want you to know that you need to honor those who are in government over us, the king and those who report to the king.

Honor them. At the same time, Paul is not reluctant to call those in office, in authority, to recognize they are accountable to God.

[ 11 : 38 ] and that's, in fact, what he does, especially with Festus, where he finally says, I've got to appeal to Caesar. If you won't give me justice, I've got to appeal to Caesar.

You are authorized by God to exercise power and to administer justice, yes, but you're accountable to God for how you conduct your stewardship of power.

So you see, these courtroom dramas that are before us here really do present issues that are very much live issues in our own time. And I want to look at, actually, the three participants in these dramas and see what we learn about each of them.

I want to look at Paul's prosecutors, the district attorneys, as it were, who are laying charges against him. I want to look at the judges. Those are the governors, Felix and then Festus.

And then I want to look at how Paul himself conducts himself in this situation. The prosecutors show us, illustrate dramatically, how to speak untruth to power, how to speak lies to power.

[ 12 : 55 ] Especially, beginning of chapter 24 here, you see Tertullus, who, the Greek term, actually, that is translated spokesman here is the term rhetor.

You know rhetoric? He's a speaker. He's a professional orator. And in this case, obviously, he is a legal representative of the Jewish authorities as they large their charge.

And he is a master of communication. He's a master of flattery. He's the master of name-calling and baseless accusations.

And he's a master of spin. That's what they called it in the first century. No, no, no, no. 21st century. Spin. Flattery. You see how he starts.

This is always the way you need to start when you're presenting a case. The communications professors of the ancient world called this *captatio benevolentiae*.

[ 13 : 59 ] I know we've got classical education kids here. You know that I've probably slaughtered the Latin, right? To capture the well wishes, to capture the appreciation of the judge.

And how do you do it? You flatter him. So Tertullus says, Oh, Felix, we've had such peace during your reign.

And you've instituted many, many good reforms. So we're just overwhelmed with thanksgiving for your rule. Well, historians tell us it wasn't that way at all.

In fact, Felix was notorious. Actually, one of our good commentators, I think Benji and I have interacted and I think he's mentioned probably John Stott before, a great pastor in the last century.

It was written on Acts. And he says, In reality, Felix had put down several insurrections with such barbarous brutality that he earned for himself the horror, not the thanks, of the Jewish population.

[ 15 : 09 ] In fact, you heard, Felix was removed from office about two years after the first hearing with Paul. He was called back to Rome, called to answer for a bloodbath in the streets of Caesarea that he had authorized to keep the peace.

Police brutality justified by allegedly keeping the peace is not a 21st century invention. He goes way back.

So that's just plain flattery. But after the flattery, then Tertullus gets on to the name calling. We've found this Paul a plague, a pestilence.

It's a term that actually appears hardly anyplace else in the New Testament. It talks about somebody who spreads a dangerous infection. It's as if he were to say, Paul is, to Roman society, what the rats on the ships are as they travel from port to port around the Mediterranean Sea spreading the Black Death, which Rome knew and was terrified about.

He's that infected. He's like somebody who knows that they are positive for COVID-19 and still goes to the birthday party, doesn't wear a mask, doesn't keep social distance, and the party becomes a super spreader event.

[ 16 : 31 ] That's Paul. That's what he's like. He stirs up riots everywhere he goes. He's just a troublemaker. And you know, when you accuse somebody before a Roman governor of stirring up a riot, that gets the governor's attention.

One sure way to get the attention of the folks in Rome is for a governor to go soft on somebody who stirs up civil unrest unrest because Rome liked peace in the provinces.

Everything mellow in the provinces. That's probably why Felix thought he could get away with ordering that bloodbath that would take place a bit after this hearing. Now, you've been traveling with Benji.

You've been traveling with Paul for a while, right? Through Cyprus, up into what is now Turkey, across the Aegean Sea into Macedonia and Athens. Have you ever heard about any civil unrest connected with Paul's ministry?

Is anybody going to nod to me? Of course! Of course there was civil unrest. But who caused it? Who caused it, right?

[ 17 : 50 ] Typically, it's maybe the leaders of a Jewish synagogue who are getting jealous because people are starting to follow the Jesus whom Paul preaches rather than to adhere to all the law and all the regulations of the synagogue.

Or maybe it's Gentiles, pagans, who are really bummed because they're losing money. Remember the two guys who owned the slave girl in Philippi?

She was demon-possessed, so they exploited her, making her tell fortunes. And when Paul cast the demon out of her, they couldn't make money off of her anymore and they stir up the trouble.

Oh, we're Romans! This guy's preaching against our Roman customs. Or later on, in Ephesus, the silversmiths who were making the little trinkets, little, you know, come to the temple of Artemis, one of the great wonders of the ancient world, and bring a souvenir home, a little model of the goddess.

And people started believing in Jesus and weren't so interested in Artemis, and those guys saw their prophet was gone. They're the ones that caused trouble, not Paul.

[ 19 : 00 ] And of course, we're going to hear that in Paul's defense in a minute. And of course, also, Tertullus here accuses, and this is another baseless charge, accuses Paul of defiling the temple.

Just a few weeks ago, I think you were at that point when Paul was first mobbed in the temple because some Jews from Asia saw a fellow, a Gentile, Trophimus, from Ephesus and thought Paul had brought him in, a fellow Christian had brought him into the temple courts.

Paul hadn't. But they said he had, and so the whole riot began. And Paul never defiled the temple. Not at all. He hadn't brought Trophimus in, although he would have good fellowship with Trophimus as a brother in Christ outside the temple.

So, baseless charges, name calling, and finally, spin. I love the spin. You see what Tertullus says here? Paul was trying to profane the temple, but we seized him.

So peaceful. We just took him into custody. Seriously? If you were here a week or two ago, you know what actually happened.

[ 20 : 16 ] Yeah, they seized him, all right. They dragged him out of the temple. They started to beat him up. They tried to kill him, and they only stopped beating him when the Roman tribune and his forces came down and stopped them.

Tertullus kind of forgot that part of the story, that spin. When you magnify what your enemy does wrong, and you kind of minimize anything that you've done wrong.

You just downplay it, right? Now, here's an interesting question. Do you ever see those features in combination or individually in our public discourse today?

Any flattery of people in power? Any name-calling of the people you don't like? Any baseless charges and accusations?

Any spin that makes you look good and everybody else look bad? I see a few smiles out there. When you hear that, when you see that, on social media, in a news conference, alarms should go off in our minds.

- [ 21 : 31 ]    Something is wrong here. Because this is a classic example right here of how to speak untruths to power. Okay, let's talk about the guys in power now.
- Let's talk about Felix and Festus. They're a mixed bag, actually. They do some good things, and they do some other things that are not so good. And they kind of show us how we should be praying for our leaders to avoid the bad and to uphold the good.
- What did they do right? Well, they asserted their legitimate authority in order to protect an unconvicted prisoner. You see, in that first trial, Tertullus lodges charges, all of his colleagues say, yeah, he's right.
- Paul issues his defense, and then Felix says, hmm, you say one thing, you say another. I need to consult the arresting officer.
- Isn't that what he's doing? I will hear you when Lysias, when the tribune comes. I need more information. He's not going to be pressured into a verdict. That's a wise thing.
- [ 22 : 45 ]    He's not going to, at this point at least, follow in the footsteps of his predecessor, Pontius Pilate, who, when the Jewish leaders brought Jesus to Pilate, accusing him, Pilate caved in, didn't he?
- He was terrified of a mob and a riot, and he caved in and said, I don't think he's guilty, but you go do to him what you want to do to him.
- Not Felix. I'm going to get more information. That's a good thing. That's a good thing. And I like Festus, too, on this, because Festus says when he comes in, new sheriff in town, right, new governor in the province, and he lands at Caesarea on the coast, but then he comes to Jerusalem.
- It's a courtesy call to the leaders of the Jewish people there, and they say, we have a lot against Paul and you need to bring him to Jerusalem so we can try him. And they're looking at each other and they're saying, this time we'll get him.
- This time we'll assassinate him. The last time we were foiled when our plot was revealed, but this time we'll get him before he gets to the council chamber.
- [ 24 : 05 ]    And Festus simply says, no, no, no. No, this is not going to be on your home court. This is going to be on Rome's home court. He's in Caesarea, that's the capital. I'm going there soon.
- You present your charges before me there, not here. Now, yeah, maybe he's a brand new governor. Maybe he's showing them he's not going to be a pushover.
- That's possible. But he's also doing the right thing in protecting his prisoner. I suspect, no record in Luke, but I suspect that he's read Paul's case file.
- And he's seen that letter from the Tribune reporting the assassination plot two, two and a half years before, where guys promised that they would not eat or drink until they'd killed Paul.
- Now, it's been two years, so those guys have either died of starvation and thirst. I like when Benji said, why would you do that? I watched his sermon last week, right?
- [ 25 : 07 ]    Why would you promise never to eat or drink again until he's killed this guy? Either those guys have died or else they decided maybe that was a rash vow and they'd go ahead and eat and drink. I don't know. But perhaps Festus still suspects that they have foul play in mind.
- So he says, no, not on your home court but on ours. That's a good thing. And both Felix and Festus respected the rights of Roman citizens. You notice when Felix recessed the trial, he gave some instructions to the centurion.

He said, keep calling Paul in custody but give him some freedom and let his friends come and interact with him. That's respect for a Roman citizen. And of course, to Festus, when Paul immediately says, when Paul says, I appeal to Caesar, Festus takes a look around at those who advise him and says, that's where you're going.

I know that's your right. Now, okay. Okay. It's in the best interest of these governors to respect the rights of a Roman citizen.

Yeah? Because not everybody, in fact, most people who lived under the Roman rule were not citizens. Citizens had very important rights. That's what made the magistrates back in Philippi so nervous that he had beaten Paul and Silas without knowing they were Roman citizens.

[ 26 : 29 ] And that's what made the tribune so nervous when he was about to beat the truth out of Paul in Jerusalem. So these guys want to be careful. people. But they do grant Paul's rights as a Roman citizen.

Let me say one more word in their defense before I go after them on the other side of things, okay? It's about Felix in particular. Did you notice that when he adjourned or recessed the trial, he then, with his wife, came back to Paul and said, I want to talk to you one-on-one.

And Paul talked to them about faith in Messiah Jesus. Something about Paul's courage, Paul's confidence struck a chord with Felix and he wanted to hear more.

In fact, he heard from Paul more than once. Now we're going to talk about how his reaction was to Paul in a second, but that was a good thing. Something good was happening maybe at the beginning at least of Felix's response to the gospel.

But these guys didn't do everything right, okay? First of all, you notice perhaps exactly the same phrase in a description of a decision by Felix and one by Festus.

[ 27 : 52 ] Felix, when he was removed from office, after two years, left Paul in prison because he wanted to do a favor for the Jewish leaders. Festus, even though at first he pushed away the thought of changing the venue of the trial from Caesarea to Jerusalem, he wanted to do a favor for the Jewish leaders and he eventually said to Paul, let's go back to Jerusalem and hear this, wanting to be in good with the people that he ruled.

Have you ever known a political leader who is captivated by popular opinion? No. Seriously? Who may compromise on what they know is right because they know they won't get re-elected?

Now, governors weren't re-elected, but they were not the power and frankly, the Jewish people more than once had raised objections to governors and kings that Rome had appointed and Rome, because it wanted peace, would remove the lower level bureaucrats if they got in trouble.

So these guys were like politicians everywhere. They're decisions driven by public opinion. And then, of course, there is the issue of complete self-interest on Felix's part.

Yeah, he wanted to hear more from Paul about faith, kind of, but he also wanted a bride. I mean, after all, Paul had brought a large offering for needy, you know, major disaster relief for starving Jewish people.

[ 29 : 31 ] Paul had paid the price, the expenses for the brothers who had kept a vow, made a vow and were keeping it in the temple.

Paul obviously had some resources somewhere, so Felix wanted that. So there was that. You've probably never known a politician who was motivated by financial gain, so I won't even mention that anymore.

Thirdly, notice that both of them at a certain point made a strategic decision to postpone a decision that would be risky. They were in a tight place.

They couldn't convict a Roman citizen without clear evidence, but if they let Paul go, they didn't know whether that was going to be the spark that blew up revolution among the Jewish people.

And so they just put it off. Felix says, I'm going to wait until the tribune comes. I need more evidence. Now maybe, as I said, maybe that was a good thing to gather evidence, but two years?

[ 30 : 35 ] Really? He never brought Paul back for trial in two years. He talked with him offline, but he didn't talk to him in a trial setting for two years, and he left him in prison just postponing.

And Festus, well, Festus' proposal for the change of venue back to Jerusalem, that was a kind of a delaying tactic as well.

So, again, a delaying tactic. But you know, I think the most strategic, no, let me put it this way, the most tragic thing about these governors, governors.

You see it in our text, in Felix. Next week, you'll see it in Festus. The most tragic thing is that they avoid what they know is going to be a life-shaking decision for them.

You see it in Felix here, when he comes with his wife, Drusilla, who is Jewish, and wants to hear from Paul. Let me tell you a little bit about their marriage.

[ 31 : 44 ] Drusilla was about 20 years old, according to the historians. At this point, she's 22 when Felix gets called back to Rome. She was 16 when Felix seduced her to steal her from her first husband to become his third wife.

Hmm, yeah. And so Paul is talking about faith in Christ, free forgiveness, transformation of life, and in the process, Paul talks about righteousness, self-control, and coming judgment.

And Felix gets scared. What's the word here? Alarmed. Yeah. He's terrified. And he says to Paul, we'll talk about this another time.

Because suddenly, you know, Paul is not just keeping with the legal matters of the case. He's pushing home the claims of King Jesus on this man in power.

And Felix is terrified. You'll see, you'll hear Festus doing kind of the same thing next week in the hearing before Festus and King Agrippa, his consultant on Jewish matters.

[ 33 : 16 ] See, Felix was afraid that if he heard too much more about Jesus, Jesus was going to start meddling in his life. I know a couple of you here.

Well, I know that family in the back row, and I met a few of you others. I don't know. The rest of you, whether you have been here every single week and whether you know and love the Lord Jesus, or whether you're kind of attracted to what you're seeing at Grace and Peace, but you're also a little nervous that if you actually let down the boundaries and the barriers and let Jesus take over, he might change you.

He will. He will. But, oh, you need that change. Don't be Felix. Don't be Felix. Felix.

Well, that brings us to Paul. And Paul shows us how a servant of King Jesus speaks truth to power. First, you notice Paul's defense here before Felix in verse 10.

He opens with not quite a compliment, certainly not flattery, but he does capture the goodwill of the governor because he says, I know you've been ruling a long time here.

[ 34 : 30 ] For many years you've been a judge over this nation, so I cheerfully make my defense. Notice, he's not saying, you've been the greatest governor we've ever had. We're so grateful for the peace.

He's just saying, I know you've been around long enough that you should be able to weigh the evidence with wisdom. Luke actually tells us that Felix knows some things about the Christian movement, about the way.



Paul doesn't even mention that. He just says, I know you've been ruling here. So, honest respect for the governor, for the office that he holds appointed by God.

And then notice Paul's calm self-defense. That's verses 11 through 21. You've heard it, 11 verses. It's a big long speech. But here are the main points, right?

Paul says, I came to Jerusalem just a few days ago. I came to bring disaster relief to my Jewish kinsmen, the Jewish community, and to offer sacrifices in the temple.

[ 35 : 33 ] I never started an argument with anybody or attracted crowds in the temple, in the synagogues, on the streets. I was ceremonially pure when they found me in the temple.

The witnesses who accused me back then aren't even here, so you can't hear from them. But I will confess to this.

I worship the God of our fathers with a clear conscience. I believe the law and the prophets that God gave to our people many centuries ago.

I belong to the way. I follow Jesus. They call this a sect. I call it really the fulfillment of all of our hopes and our dreams. I embrace the hope of the resurrection and so do some of them.

Now you may remember there was a big argument in the high council among the Sadducees who denied the resurrection and the Pharisees who believed the resurrection and said hey, Paul's okay, he's just affirming what we believe.

[ 36 : 36 ] But Paul says some of these guys believe in the resurrection too. Of course Paul believes it because the risen lords appeared to him on the road to Damascus. That's part of it. But you see, Paul, there's no theatrics, there's no name calling, there's no exaggeration, there's no spin or shading of the truth.

His point is simply Jesus, the Jesus I proclaim is the fulfillment of Israel's ancient scriptures and he's the fulfiller of all of our hopes and longings.

So what's the problem here? It's a calm self-defense. But Paul carries it a little further. He gets personal.

Beyond the issue of the legal rang he presses home the claims of the king of kings because he's more concerned for the spiritual survival of the judges who are going to pass a verdict on him than he is about his own safety and freedom.

He's more concerned for them than he is for himself. And that's why when Felix and Drusilla invite him to talk about faith in Christ Jesus, Paul does it.

[ 37 : 48 ] and Paul talks about how that applies in their lives and in their relationship with one another because Paul longs for people to come to know the joy and the forgiveness and the fulfillment and the freedom of becoming servants of Jesus, the king of kings.

You'll see this again next week in the hearing before Festus and Agrippa where Paul goes way beyond what he needed to do to defend himself and start pushing home to King Agrippa who knew the Old Testament.

King, you believe the prophets, right? And Agrippa's saying, whoa, whoa, you're trying to make me a Christian in no time? And Paul said, oh yeah, I want you. I don't want you in chains but I want you to be like me, free in Jesus.

That's what I long for. That's what I long for. What can explain why Paul is more concerned for them than he is for himself? I think several things.

Some of these you've already encountered here and we're going to rush to the finish line here but you've got to hear them. First of all, he knows that he's going to get to Rome. Jesus told him that.

[ 38 : 58 ] When he was in custody back in Jerusalem, Jesus had appeared to him and said, you need to testify about me in Rome. Paul's going to get there one way or the other.

father. Now, think what would have happened if some of the human actors in this drama had made other decisions than the ones they made. What if the tribune Lysias had ignored the rioters who were beating Paul to death?

Paul's not going to get to Rome. What if the tribune had ignored Paul's nephew when he brought the report of the conspiracy that he'd heard about? Paul would have been assassinated.

What if Felix had rendered a just verdict promptly and released Paul? Well, Paul might get to Rome somehow or other, but he wasn't going to get to Rome the way Jesus planned to get him to Rome.

What if Festus, who first said to the Jewish leaders, not in Jerusalem but in Caesarea, but then kind of turned around and said, no, let's go back to Jerusalem.

[ 40 : 08 ] What if Festus had stood fast and said it's going to be Caesarea or nothing? I pronounce him not guilty. What if that had happened? Paul might have gotten to Rome, but not the way Jesus planned.

All of those things fall into place, and then Paul is compelled to appeal to Caesar, to use his right as a Roman citizen to have his case heard by the emperor himself.

You see, a lot of people made decisions here, but they were all making the decisions that the divine director of Paul's life had ordained.

And so, as you will hear in the next couple weeks, Paul gets to Rome. There's a shipwreck ahead, by the way, spoiler alert, but you have to come back and hear somehow or other, Ben should cover the shipwreck.

I don't know how he's going to do that, but anyway, Paul knows his life is in Christ's hands, so he can relax. That's part of it. But it's more than that.

[ 41 : 10 ] Paul knows that by grace he's been united to Christ, that Christ has taken him in because he's trusted in Jesus. And so he knows that his trials echo Jesus' trials.

And that's actually true. John Stott pointed that out, Benji alerted me to that one, and so I went to Stott's commentary. Sure enough, five trials of Jesus at the end of Luke's gospel, five trials of Paul at the end of Acts.

Jesus is tried before Annas the high priest, the whole Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod Antipas, and Pilate. Paul is tried essentially by the crowd in the temple courts, the Sanhedrin, Felix, Festus, and as you'll hear next week, Festus along with Herod Agrippa II.

Five and five. And even in a bigger way, if you look at the trajectory of the last two-thirds of Luke's gospel, and the trajectory of the last roughly half of the book of Acts, you see in the gospel, Jesus fixing his face to go to Jerusalem, announcing to his disciples, I'm going to suffer there.

I'm going to die. I'm going to rise from the dead. Starts at 951. That's the verse I just quoted to you. In Acts 19, Paul begins to say, I need to go to Jerusalem and then to Rome.

[ 42 : 44 ] And over and over in those chapters, as Paul is moving toward Jerusalem, he keeps hearing the word, you're going to suffer in Jerusalem. But Jesus says, but you're going to get to Rome.

So there's that echo, both of the trials and the whole trajectory, the whole trend. Why is that? Because Paul belongs to Christ.

He's following the walk, walking the trail that Jesus walked through suffering to glory. In fact, there's a beautiful union between Paul and Jesus, and it's true of you if you belong to Christ.

There's a union between you and Christ. He suffered for you, so you are credited with the benefits of his suffering. But he also counts your suffering as his own.

Isn't that what Paul heard when he first was heading for Damascus with those arrest warrants in his satchel? Jesus said, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Saul couldn't get his hands on Jesus.

[ 43 : 50 ] Jesus was enthroned in glory at the right hand of God the Father, but he was after Jesus' people. Jesus says, you harm my people, you harm me. Now Saul is one of his people, so he suffers.

And that will be true of you. Mildly, more severely, brothers and sisters in the world today are suffering in horrible ways because they belong to Jesus.

and it's because of those things, because his life is in Jesus' hands, and because he knows that he's called to follow Christ even when it hurts, even when it costs, that Paul really does care more about the people that he's speaking to, even the people in power, even the people who have the power to render a verdict that could condemn him.

He cares more about them than he does about his own safety. When he gets to Rome, he's going to write a letter back to the church in Philippi. That's up in Macedonia, northern Greece. And they've been worried about how things are going for him.

And he says, oh, it's going great. This captivity is great. I'm waiting for Caesar to hear my appeal, but it's terrific. The whole Praetorian Guard, the Imperial Guard, they all know that I'm here for Jesus.

[ 45 : 09 ] Other brothers and sisters throughout Jesus because they see me in prison. It's going great. And as I look toward my trial, I know that as you pray for me, I'm going to be delivered.

Now, that's a verse that leads New Testament scholars to argue all over the place. Oh, Paul knows that he's going to be released and set free. But a few verses later, he says, actually, I don't know whether I'm going to live or die.

I think I'm going to live because you need me, but I'm not 100% sure. But Paul says, I know I will be delivered from this, that when I appear before the emperor, I don't want to be ashamed of Jesus.

I want Christ glorified in my body, whether I live or whether I die. I want to be delivered from that fear and that shame. And I know as you pray for me, that's going to happen to me.

I will be delivered. I will be able to speak of Christ with boldness. And that's what we learn from the freedom that Paul has in Christ.

[ 46 : 09 ] That we learn to care so much about the eternal destiny of everybody, even people in power, whose decisions affect our paychecks or our reputations or our very lives.

We care so much for them that we want them to share the joy and the life that we've received as God's free gift by grace through faith in Christ. Well, as we go to the Lord's table, let me lead us in prayer for just a moment.

Father, we thank you that our lives are in the strong hands of Jesus. And we thank you that whatever justice or injustice we receive in this world, that he is our defender and he is our protector from the justice we receive.

We deserve from you, but he bore it in our place. And we thank you for this supper that he has ordained to assure us that his death for us has brought us forgiveness and welcome at your table.

So now, Father, do meet with us in the supper. We pray in his name. Amen. The Lord's Supper was established by the Lord Jesus on the evening before he went to the cross, as you know.

[ 47 : 25 ] And the bread and the wine represent the body and blood of Jesus given in sacrificial love to cleanse our consciences and to make peace between us and God and to set us free from the control of the evil desires inside us.

As we receive these simple everyday elements, trusting in the Savior they represent, the Holy Spirit seals to our hearts the assurance that Christ's obedience and sacrifice have secured for us the benefits of full forgiveness, joyful reconciliation, and warm welcome by the Heavenly Father.

Now the supper is a family meal for those who become God's children through trusting in Jesus. You don't need to be a member of Grace and Peace or the Presbyterian Church in America to partake with us today. If you're trusting in the Lord Jesus alone for salvation, if you've been baptized into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, if you're part of a congregation that embraces the good news of salvation by grace that we've heard here, then you're welcome to join us in this celebration.

It's not for people who have cleaned up our lives enough to be worthy to be here. It's for us who know the seriousness of our sin, but the sufficiency of God's Son, that nothing less than his death and resurrection could make us fit to come into the Father's presence and nothing more is needed than what Jesus has done for us.

And so we come to the God's table, we come hungry and thirsty for what Christ alone can give us, for forgiveness and the Spirit's power to free us from sin's death grip, to spend ourselves in loving and serving him and serving others.

[ 49 : 16 ] In your bulletin on page 5, God bless you.