

Acts 25:1-12

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[0:00] I invite you to open your Bibles to Acts chapter 24, begin in verse 1.

! Some of you are visiting from out of town, and some of you, well, we all need a reminder where we're at in the book of Acts as we continue our sermon series here.

So, here is where we are. This last section, the final act of the book of Acts, began in chapter 21 as Paul entered Jerusalem to preach the gospel there, encourage the saints there on his way for his last trip, his last missionary journey to Rome.

And just a quick outline of today's sermon. We're going to, this is actually a very straightforward passage. So, I will try not to confuse us in so simple a passage.

So, we're going to talk about, here's where we've been, right? Just like set the stage. We're going to read the passage. And it's pretty self-explanatory. So, we'll take some time to explain a few details, a few key moments, and then we'll consider what it might mean for us.

[1:21] And actually, that is going to be the thing where we see this very simple, very straightforward passage sort of multiply its implications for our lives. And I think that will be, overall, the main idea here is that God's word is endlessly deep and rich.

And has impacts on our lives that ripple outward over and over and over again. And so, without diving deeply into any specific one of those implications, what we're going to do is see how there's a cascade of implications for our lives.

And even this, a very simple, very plain passage of scripture. And excite our hearts, I hope, towards the whole of scripture. Seeing that God's word is so rich and so good for his people.

So, Paul has arrived in Jerusalem. And he has almost immediately fallen into the hands of violence. Some pilgrims from Asia Minor, where he previously was, they recognize him in the temple courts. They recognize that they don't like him because, well, they didn't like him in Ephesus either. And so, they grab him. They cause a riot. Claudius Lysias, the Roman prefect, the tribune there, who was responsible to keep the Roman peace in Jerusalem, took Paul into custody.

[2:44] And then he sets him before the Jewish ruling council because he doesn't understand what the outcry against Paul is from the Jewish people. And this is sort of where the high priests, their Jewish ruling council, takes sort of center stage.

They weren't part of the initial riot against him. But then, they're the ones who try him. And in fact, they are, Lysias has to remove Paul from them by force because they are starting to attack Paul, literally in their council chambers.

They then conspire with assassins to assassinate Paul. They then, as well, we're going to see them today, they're going to chase him 75 miles because Lysias has ordered that Paul be moved in the night once he discovers the plot of the assassins.

They follow to keep pressing charges against him. And that is what we're going to see today as we enter into Acts chapter 24. And so we read.

And after five days, the high priest, Ananias, came down, and we are now in Caesarea Maritima. We'll get there in a second. Came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus.

[4:03] They laid before the governor their case against Paul. 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 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.

The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so. When the governor had 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 twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem. 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.

[5:26] Neither can they prove to you what they now bring 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, make an accusation, should they have anything against me. 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. This is God's word for his people.

[6:41] Let us be thankful to him for it. I suspect that that was pretty straightforward to you. If there were a couple details that might help us get our heads a little bit more around what's going on, here they are.

First off, where exactly are we? Jerusalem was the capital of Israel, of the Jewish people. However, Rome, who was occupying the known world at this time, including Israel, they ruled over Israel from the port city of Caesarea Maritima.

It's on the Mediterranean coast. It's north of modern day Tel Aviv. And so, Lysias, the Roman tribune in Jerusalem, was not only sending Paul to Caesarea to get him away from the threat of assassins in Jerusalem, he was also kind of going up the chain of command.

This Felix, before whom they are having this trial today, he is the highest ranking Roman official in all of Israel. And so, this is going up the chain of command.

And who is this Felix? Well, like Lysias, who we saw in Jerusalem, the prefect there, Felix was a Roman official whose main job, again, just like all the Roman officials, was to keep the peace so that Rome could stay in charge, right?

[8:12] Rome kept the peace so that they could keep control. And where Lysias was responsible for Jerusalem and its environment, Felix, his superior officer, so to speak, now oversees the entire region.

Now, Felix is an interesting character. We know from ancient historians something of what his rule was like. He wasn't doing a particularly great job of keeping the peace.

There were numerous uprisings among the Jewish people and he resorted frequently to violent suppression of dissent.

And the Jewish people disliked him more than other Roman officials whom they disliked all of them. They were the occupying force. So, when Tertullus begins with these really flattering words, first off, they're not even true.

Like, they were not enjoying peace as he said. Like, this is false flattery. It's not even like a positive spin on something neutral. It's just flat out lies. One writer put it this way.

[9:23] Tertullus begins with some careful flattery designed to make a favorable impression upon the governor. Felix is praised for the peace that extends to the province and for the reforms which he had introduced, but that was simply propaganda.

In fact, Felix's administration had been characterized by unrest and the relations between Rome and the Jews had continued to deteriorate. So, Felix is charged with keeping the Roman peace in all Judea, and he's not doing a very good job of it.

And so, more than most Roman officials, he's paranoid about uprisings on the lookout for anything that smells like a disturbance, and he's been known to violently suppress dissent.

And so, now we see Tertullus' strategy here. Right? He's lacking any actual evidence. That's what Paul points out at the end.

They don't have evidence. They don't even have witnesses who were there. That's Paul's defense. Tertullus is building on the hope of exploiting Felix's paranoia.

[10:39] That's what's happening in this passage. That's the strategy. And Tertullus is a Greek name. Likely, the high priest hired a Roman lawyer to work in this Roman court.

One writer put it this way, Tertullus' endeavor was to put Paul on the same level as previous revolutionaries with the hope that in his insensitivity to the issues, Felix would act in his usual manner, simply on the basis of their testimony.

And his usual manner was to violently suppress threats of dissent. And so that's why Tertullus lays out the charges the way that he does here. And it's interesting what the charges are.

Look at verses 5 and 6. We have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world. That's number one.

Number two, is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. And number three, he even tried to profane the temple. Tertullus. And so what Tertullus is trying to do here, because their qualm against Paul, right, he hasn't done anything against Rome.

[11:57] Nothing that the Romans will care about. The high priests hate him because he's preaching Christ, which Rome doesn't care about. If they want Rome to kill him because they can't execute Paul on their own, being occupied by the Roman army, they need to show somehow to Felix that he's a threat to Rome.

Because Felix doesn't care about the temple. Felix doesn't care about the Jewish religion. And so what he's doing here, he says, oh, well, he's the one who stirs up riots. Oh, well, that matters to Rome.

He doesn't care about his theology. He cares about riots. However, he's not guilty of that crime and they bring no evidence of it.

They're simply playing on the hope of exploiting Felix's suspicions, his paranoia. And it's that that Paul replies against and says, sort of in a four-part response, says, there's no evidence of any of these things.

You don't need to suspect me. The structure of his reply looks something like, verses 11 to 13, I didn't make a disturbance. Verses 14 through 16, I'm not even violating the Jewish law because the way that I follow the way of Christ, that's the fulfillment of the Jewish law.

[13:25] I'm being more Jewish than these people. Verses 17 to 19, right, there was no temple desecration. I was there purified.

And finally, verses 20 and 21, there's not even proof here, just accusation. They don't even have witnesses who are there to begin. And so Paul hadn't even begun, right?

Like, when he gets to the temple, he's doing a purification ritual, he's helping some men fulfill their Nazarite vow so that he can ingratiate himself to the Jewish people and get a hearing for his preaching.

He hasn't even begun preaching. How could he then have been riling up people? It was someone else. It was Jews from Asia who began the tumult. And so Paul is pointing out not only that they are the only people who could be the witnesses, but they are in fact the people who should be on trial themselves.

themselves. So that's basically the explanation of a pretty straightforward passage. There's some historical context understanding who Felix is and what he's like helps us understand a little bit more of the strategy behind the accusation.

[14:48] What does this have to do with you and with me, with our lives? as I said, even in so simple a passage, and this is really the thing that I want us to recognize today, is that the application to our lives and the influence the Lord's word has over us multiplies and expands.

The more we attend to his word, the more we will see. And in a passage like this one, we see less taught explicitly to us. directly, but we also see here an example of so many of the wonderful principles of scripture brought forth for us to see.

It's a living example as the Lord leads Paul in his defense before a hostile world. And so this sets for us an example.

We'll start at the shallow into the pool and move our way towards the deeper end. How's that sound? First, we see an example, really a contrasting example.

The way Tertullus and the way Paul address Felix is really interesting and very, it's a huge contrast, right? Verses 2 through 4, that's where we see Tertullus address Felix with, we've already said it, this incredible false flattery.

[16:24] Since through you we enjoy much peace, which is not true, and since by your foresight, which he had none, most excellent Felix, which he wasn't, Caesar's going to remove him in just a couple years, and in fact, that's actually part of the next passage, is how Felix is removed for being incompetent.

Reforms are being made in this nation, no reforms. In every way, and everywhere, except in no way, and nowhere, we accept this with all gratitude, the Jews hated him.

But to detain you no further, I beg you, you in your kindness, hear us briefly. And again, he follows that up with zero evidence. His argument stands entirely on flattery and accusation, no substance. compare that with Paul's introduction. Verse 10. He simply says, knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense.

He begins with some respectful words and immediately provides substance. Right? And we see here the distinction, like these complete foils of one another, huge contrast between the flatterer and the simple plain-spoken truth.

[17:48] It reminds me of Proverbs chapter 26 verse 28 where we see a flattering mouth works in the land. Friends, let's not be those who would rest on flattery or manipulation of any kind.

Christians are a people of the truth and so let us rest on truth. That we indeed have great truth to proclaim. Like I said, we started at the shallow end of the pool.

Walk a little deeper. Look at verse 14. Paul says, this I confess to you, that according to the way which they call a sect.

Friends, this is, this teaches us how to read the Bible. I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the law and written in the prophets.

What is he saying there? He's saying that as he follows Jesus, he is not doing something new.

[19:05] As he follows Jesus, he is faithfully following the entirety of the Hebrew scriptures, which changes the way we open up the Old Testament and read it.

Because the Old Testament, the Hebrew scriptures, Genesis through Malachi, is Christian scripture because it points to Christ.

And in fact, Jesus Christ himself said that in John chapter 5. He said, if you believed Moses, you would believe me for he wrote of me.

Now, Jesus and Paul both know that the name Jesus of Nazareth, it does not appear anywhere between Genesis and Malachi.

how then can we say that it's about him? From the very first pages of scripture, the word is anticipating someone.

[20:19] Someone to crush the head of the serpent. Someone to be the seed of the woman. Someone to be the prophet after Moses. Someone to be the king who sits on David's throne.

Someone to initiate a new covenant. The whole of the Old Testament is there anticipating. Just as we enter in the season of Advent, is anticipating someone is coming.

Someone is coming to do all these things. He is going to make, forge for his people a great salvation. And Paul is saying, he's come.

He's come. And not only is it forward looking, the whole scripture, the whole of the Old Testament is looking forward to this one.

But everywhere we look, everywhere we read in the Old Testament, what do we see? We see a God of glory and holiness and grace.

[21:26] acting on his people's behalf. And that is precisely who appears in Bethlehem on Christmas Day.

And so, when we open up the scriptures from beginning to end, it is a book about not me, what I need to do, and who I am first.

But chiefly, it is a book about him. And so, this teaches us how to read our vinyls. Let's wait a little further into the pool.

There is an example here of Paul under duress. Last week, we said, Paul's having a bad week. He is under a lot of stress. This is not the fruitful, in his eyes, season of his ministry.

So, the Swiss reformer, Rudolf Gualther, observed this about this passage. So, Christ prophesied that these things will take place, that his apostle will suffer.

[22:50] So, that we would be less troubled if at any time, something similar happens to us too. As the apostles suffered all kinds of persecution and adversities, so they teach by their example what is fitting for us to do when we are tested by persecutions and temptations.

This is the chief use and purpose of all this present matter and of the entire story that follows. And we know, friends, that Christ promised, Matthew chapter 10, a disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.

It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher and the servant like his master. They've called the master of the house Beelzebul. How much more will they malign those of his household?

Christ has promised, if you follow him, there will be some suffering in your life on account of that.

But he has also promised that it's worth it.

Because even before he said that in Matthew 10, he said in Matthew chapter 5, Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

[24:09] Isn't that precisely what's happening to Paul here? He says, Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets and today we see the apostle who were before you.

Gualther's point here is saying that Christ has prepared us, not only by this prophecy but also by showing us examples like Paul, of faithful suffering for the cause of Christ.

Now he says it's the chief use and purpose of this episode in Acts, and I don't disagree with Gualther, it's a valuable implication of this passage as we mount up more and more, as we see, as we look, as we dive into it more and see, friends, scripture is rich, layer upon layer of meaning and implication for our lives.

even the great apostle Paul suffered, didn't win all his battles, so to speak, suffered for the cause of Christ, and here's an encouraging thought, the church was not undone, because here we are, and here's what's even more encouraging, Paul was not undone, he stands in glory today, and that's huge, great is his reward in heaven, and so will too be his people's reward in heaven, because our inheritance isn't streets of gold, it's Christ himself, so we see that Christ preserves his people and prospers his own purposes for their good and for his glory, and so we can suffer for Christ if necessary, after the example of

Paul. The Lutheran theologian, this is a good name, Wolfhard Fennenberg, it's a good theologian's name, asks the question, because I think we all ask the question, why does God allow this to happen?

[26:28] Here's a partial answer, he says, he keeps watch until the time of judgment, first he waits so that by his long suffering and patience he might call the sinful to repentance, keep that in the back of your head, we're going to revisit it soon, second, he might sift and purify the devout, showing them that a very different blessedness follows after this life than is found here on earth.

It's a partial answer to the question of suffering. but another thing we see modeled in this passage as we continue to explore its implications for our lives is don't suffer needlessly.

Christ does not desire that we suffer needlessly. We don't seek it out and we don't submit unjustly to it if we do not have to.

we see here by Paul's example that Christians may mount for them a solid defense and that's exactly what he does. Now I'm no historian of Roman legal procedure but those who are say that Paul gives a good defense here he demonstrates that they had no actual evidence just accusations and actually by Roman parliamentary rule apparently it should Felix should have immediately dismissed it on the basis that the actual witnesses were not there.

Not only that he's pointing out who in fact were the culprits it's a good defense strategy as well. So absolutely Christ promises blessings to those who suffer for his name's sake but he doesn't desire that we suffer needlessly.

[28:15] But in another wrinkle as Paul is eager to declare not guilty not guilty he does say guilty on one charge.

Because another point of application in our lives we see the example here of being bold to declare Christ. Right?

The charges are verses five and six we have found this man a plague one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world two is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarene in three verse six he even tried to profane the temple.

Paul defends against the accusations he says not guilty they did not find me verse 12 disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city.

Verse 13 not guilty neither can they prove to you what they now bring against me but then he does plead guilty verse 14 but this I confess I confess that according to the way which they call a sect I worship the God of our fathers and so while he is not guilty of the things they have accused him of he actually is guilty of one of them and he's eager to put that out in front are you eager am I eager to let people know about Jesus we see not only boldness wrapped up in that we see something else the fact that he's not guilty of anything else points us to this

[30:25] Paul is himself obedient to God's word and God's ways I'm thinking in particular of 1 Peter chapter 2 this is not just found in 1 Peter chapter 2 because 1 Peter wasn't written yet obviously but this it's a summary statement that we see of a principle we see throughout scripture in 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 12 Peter says keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation is that not exactly what Paul is doing is that not exactly the kind of life that he is living out and that they are falsely accusing him when they speak against

Paul as evildoers all that's here to see are Paul's good deeds because he's living for and he's living towards his God who is good!

I want to mention one last implication potential application of this as we again dig deeper and think more thoroughly friends I just I so want for you to see how scripture is endlessly rich and deep how even in a passage like this a very simple and straightforward one how we see even if it's not explicitly taught right because Paul's Paul's not talking to us he's talking to Felix but we see modeled for us so much of the

Christian life and so many principles of scripture and so much truth being lived out spend some time with your Bible meditate over it you will see things that you don't see on a first glance as we've been I don't like my analogy anymore shallow into deep into the pool but like as we've been going through this list and seeing application and implication multiplied to our lives friends God's word is good and rich and deep let's meet him there we could probably go on and on and on because my eyes are not clear enough to see everything

I want to leave us with one more and again this is not directly explicitly taught from this passage but we see it happening so let us consider it for our own lives!

[34:25] he doesn't care about Rome Tertullus hates Rome or at least the people who hired Tertullus we're not exactly sure who he is I said he's probably a Roman lawyer that's everybody's guess we don't know Ananias does not care about Rome Ananias doesn't like Rome Ananias would love if revolutionaries freed Israel right because then well the high priest should have even more power Israel would be free his people wouldn't be under the thumb of Rome they wouldn't be paying tribute all these things right they are not interested in Rome keeping control but in this moment

they use Rome and say oh yes yes we want to keep the Roman peace because it's advantageous to them to attack Paul they don't care if Paul has anything to do with Rome what they care about is that he is chipping away at their influence their power among the people of God but they attack him on this other thing because it's well it's what they have available to them now that might not seem like a thing that has very much to do with you and with me but it does how often not my marriage of course but maybe yours has one spouse been upset at another spouse why are you so upset this is not a big deal and you realize it's spillover!

From somewhere else mad about this thing making you pay for it with this thing that's exactly what's happening here because this is where they can hurt him they're mad about Christ but they can hurt him with Rome so that's where they'll go and how often do I do that and how often do you we should beware of this tendency in ourselves with our family members you know spouses or whatever but also people at work people at school who you know do you find yourself nitpicking at someone finding fault with everything because you don't like this one thing about them does it spill over into everything else that you do everything else that you think about that person if you have the eyes to see that right that we're kind of

Tertullus in this moment that we can be mad about one thing hurt about one thing and so hit somewhere else if we have the eyes to see that about ourselves we can be peacemakers! in a unique way and Jesus said blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God not that we earn adoption into the family of God by making peace with other people that's not how that phrase works in the ancient near east what it means is that you are someone who follows after the example of that person that's why Jesus said to the Pharisees you are of your father the devil not that they were literally his offspring but that they were walking in his ways and when Jesus says blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God that means that he's saying of us when we make peace we are walking after the God who makes peace and here's one tool in the we follow after the

God who makes peace and ultimately the God who makes peace is the exact opposite of Tertullus and that inclination like Tertullus in our own hearts the God who makes peace does not see something that upsets him and God is more righteously indignant over our sins than Tertullus was indignant over Paul or more righteously indignant over our sins than I am about somebody who bothers me and instead of striking us for the blow himself that is the peace making God we follow and so friends we follow after a

[39:30] God who loves to the utter month who makes peace and who gives us a rich word that in paying attention to it we might see layer upon layer depth upon depth testimony to his goodness and so friends let us be thankful to him let's pray our great God and Father will you shape in us a desire for your word and might by your spirit in us open our eyes to treasure your word that we might see you better and walk after you more faithfully for our good because that's how you've made us to be and for your glory that all the world might see that you are good and you do good through your people we pray this in the name of

Christ Amen Good morning for those of you I don't know my name is Dave I'm one of Shoreline's pastors and I get to open up to Acts chapter 25 with you today so if you will turn there with us we'll be getting to and I know we just hello I know we just prayed but I'd like to pray again because I just need the Lord's help this morning and so Lord as we open up your word would you guide all of our hearts would you guide my words and Lord might your word by your spirit be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path pray that in Christ's name amen we are in the final act of the book of Acts Paul has completed his missionary journeys and he has been imprisoned for quite some time now we have seen several courtroom sort of scenes where Paul is giving a defense for himself and today in the midst of what has seemed almost repetition to us we reach a pivotal moment in his journey it's a payoff that is actually years in the making at this point all the way back in chapter 19 verse 21 we saw that after these events Paul resolved in the spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem saying after I have been there I must!

Rome and when he arrived in Jerusalem at the annual feast of Pentecost not only the Jews but also the Jewish Christians were suspicious of him we read in Acts chapter 21 after greeting them he

related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry when they heard it they glorified God and they said to him you see brother how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed they are all zealous for the law and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs and so he is even being suspect by the church around him and so James gives him this advice what then is to be done they will certainly hear that you have come do therefore what we tell you we have four men who are under a vow take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses! they may shave their heads we talked about what ritual that was and thus all will know that there is nothing in what they say what they have been told about you but you yourself also live in observance of the law and it was as Paul was doing this very thing showing good faith among the Jewish people for among his countrymen that a riot broke out in the temple we saw that at the end of chapter 21 the Jews from Asia seeing him in the temple stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him crying out men of Israel help this is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place moreover he even brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place and so the Roman tribune Lysias runs in with soldiers to quell the riot! [44:40] They remove Paul from the but that backfires on him and the soldiers then nearly beat him until he lets them know that he is in fact a Roman citizen they can't do that to him they can't be interrogated that way and so Lysias brings Paul then before the Jewish council to try to figure out why is everybody rioting on account of now this guy that I have to protect as a Roman citizen and Paul then deftly manages that trial he both preaches the gospel I'm here on account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and he sets the parties among the Sanhedrin against each other and then this council itself turns to violence we saw in chapter 23 when the dissension between those two parties became violent the tribune that's Lysias again afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them the ruling council commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring them into the barracks and it was at that moment that

Christ himself appeared to Paul in chapter 23 verse 11 the following night the Lord stood by him and said take courage for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem so you must testify also in Rome and that reaffirms the plan that Paul had established in the spirit that he was to take the gospel now to Rome but it doesn't seem in the events that we've seen these last weeks as if that's happening does it right the way the Lord plans to take him to Rome is atypical right he will not travel by foot or by a hired boat as he has in his missionary journeys he's going to travel there with a Roman military escort not in honor but in chains because the final straw sort of lands now on Lysias' back he finds out about a group in Jerusalem that plots to assassinate Paul during a prisoner transfer and as far as Lysias is concerned then Paul is just radioactive and he gets rid of him that night overnight in the cover of darkness he called two of the centurions and said get ready 200 soldiers with 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen go as far as Caesarea the third hour of the night that is the march begins at 9pm and so they're moving him under cover of darkness to Caesarea and so he sent him to the Roman governor of the whole region Felix whom we met last week Felix couldn't find anything wrong with Paul either but in order to gain favor with the Jewish leaders the people he needed to work with to keep the peace he kept Paul in the final verse we read last week he kept Paul imprisoned for two years it doesn't sound like what he had decided in the spirit to go to Rome what

Christ had promised to him in that jail cell in Jerusalem that you will proclaim the gospel in Rome is coming to fruition he is sitting and he is rotting in jail two years pass between Acts chapter 24 verse 26 and Acts chapter 24 verse 27 Felix is removed from his role as governor over Israel for corruption and incompetence and he's replaced by Festus which is where we find ourselves today and we are going to see something new from Paul right when we have looked at all of these when we entered into this section of Paul defending himself before this person before that person before these we said we could kind of glaze over our eyes and say okay yep this again and again and again and again but if we have eyes to see these are not identical moments there are unique features of each of these defenses from

Paul and it is those unique parts of each that we are focusing in on because that's where each passage speaks uniquely and directly to us and today we see something new from Paul as we walk into chapter 25 throughout all the events so far other people have been acting and Paul has been reacting right the crowd tries to kill him so he responds with a speech Rome tries to flog him he appeals with an appeal to his citizenship the Sanhedrin tries to condemn him he responds by setting them at each other's throats assassins plot his death so he gets a message to Lysias Felix tries him again and so he responds with a it but no one else in that room would expect what [50:51] Paul does next and so we pick up the narrative in Acts 25 verse 1 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 again this is pretty impressive isn't it how much time has transpired two years the administration has changed right what conflicts were you having two years ago December of 2019 that's months before COVID hit months before a reckoning on race months before a contentious election and vaccines a lot can happen in two years are you still concerned with the same things are you still fighting the same conflicts in your life and how many of those things do you even remember the conflicts you were having two years ago how important do they seem to you now often time has a way of showing us that the things that we really care about and are really riled up about are very inconsequential in the end

I can't remember many of the conflicts that were going on in my life in December 2019 but these people they do they remember what was going on two years ago one of their very first official acts with the new governor is to hand over to them an innocent man now I'm sure that they discussed other matters with the new governor but the Sanhedrin you can imagine how big a threat he must have seemed to them that this was still one of their agendas chief agendas with the new administration now it's important for us to recognize this is not like anti-semitic we are talking about the leaders of the Jewish people here the ruling council they hated Paul we know that the common people in Israel what have we seen over and over again thousands of them were becoming Christians we learned in chapter two that the Christians had favor with all the people in chapter five that the people held them in great esteem in chapter six Luke reports that a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith what we're seeing here is not just a blanket hatred from the Jews there are some corrupt teachers who will use a passage like this and make anti-semitic remarks what this is is!

a continuation of that there are corrupt and wicked shepherds among God's people opposed to the God the very God whom they purport to serve and they continued to hold on to this wicked way and this hatred for Paul and his gospel for two years and incidentally speaking about two years something important in the life of our church happened exactly two years ago I think next Sunday in December of 2019 we held a congregational meeting and the elders kind of presented a path forward for this little church family which at that time was hang on four years old is now six years old right what it would look like for this little church plant which was now standing on its feet to walk forward in maturity as a congregation like what does it look like for Shoreline to be a mature church in discipleship and service and evangelism as a congregation as a whole and that was really well received by the congregation but then well 2020 rolled organizations and so lots of plans have been disrupted but stay tuned in the new year for us to pick up where we left off on those things just speaking of two years ago but back to

Paul who has been in prison these two years the Sanhedrin hasn't seemingly hasn't moved on seemingly can't move on from their hatred for him and they're willing to risk manipulating a Roman official which is a pretty serious deal and they're willing to risk murder to eliminate the threat of Paul and the threat of the gospel he preaches what they perceive as a threat to their position and to their power from there verse four fastest replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly so he said let the men of authority among you go down with me and if there is anything wrong about the man let them bring charges against him after he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days he went down to Caesarea and and he took his seat in

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. And so in these few verses,

[56:57] Luke condenses and summarizes that basically it's a repeat of what we've already seen before Lysias and then before Felix. And mercifully, he gives us this, you know, summary statement so we don't see the exact same thing again. And so what we arrive at again, we're seeing exactly the same things.

Serious charges with no actual evidence. Paul pointing out, hey, there's no evidence. And then the case again should be closed. But, verse 9, 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?

Why would he want to do them a favor? All right, he doesn't know these people. He doesn't owe them anything.

He wants to do them a favor because Israel was a notoriously difficult province for Rome to occupy. Rome, at this point, was controlling basically the known world.

But it was having very much trouble governing and ruling over, occupying this tiny little strip of land. Nearly all the rest of the world had a pantheon.

[58:26] So their worldview meshed with Rome in some respects. But the strict monotheism of the people of Abraham, Deuteronomy chapter 4, to you it was shown that you might know that the Lord is God.

There is no other beside him. That meant that there was no bending the knee to other gods. And certainly not to Caesar.

And the fact that the same God had promised, as we've actually heard today, an eternal king, specifically from David's line, 2 Samuel chapter 7, when your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. That meant that Caesar, purported to be a king over Israel, was despised among Israel.

It also made the Sanhedrin's cry before Pilate, we have no king but Caesar, that much more poignant, that much more sad. And the fact that this same God had already liberated Israel from the hand of previous world powers, from Egypt, from Babylon, plus numerous other enemies, gave this people an attitude of independence and liberation that was unique, and which made this tiny nation a terror for Roman officials to govern.

[60:08] And in their very recent history, just prior to Rome's rule, in the period between our Old and New Testaments, a Jewish priest, Judas Maccabeus, Judas the Hammer, led a revolt to overthrow the remains of Alexander the Great's empire, and reestablish a Jewish free state.

It was during that war that the events which Hanukkah commemorates happened. And in this present moment, consider the semi-political religious groups in the Jews, the zealots, whose goal was to topple the Romans, just like Judas the Hammer had.

Lysseus had initially confused Paul, if you recall, for one of these revolutionaries. The Pharisees, who thought that if the people would simply follow the law of God sufficiently, that God would make good on his covenant promises and remove Rome, or the Essenes, who were waiting patiently in the desert until the Lord rained fire on Rome.

They're very different in their approach, but all of them are united by a, we're getting rid of Rome, attitude. The whole of Israel was very against Rome.

And so, despite all of that, all of their differences, this people expected, and some were taking action on, getting rid of Roman rule.

[61:40] And so, among all the nations, Israel was a unique thorn in Rome's side. So, Festus wanted to do them a favor, not because he likes them or owes them anything, but because he knows that he needs the ruling council to like him.

He's starting a new position sort of in the hole, so to speak. Perhaps you've been put into a position where you're already behind. You can commiserate them with Festus in his circumstance.

Now, he probably doesn't know that they want to assassinate Paul during the prison transfer, but a change in venue would still certainly disadvantage Paul and therefore ingratiate Festus to a people that he would, you know, has to rule.

And again, they don't like him very much, so favor is go a long way. But, and here's that moment that we said is the unique moment in this passage.

Verse 10. But, Paul said, I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, and here he takes the reins, where I ought to be tried.

[62:51] 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. And Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, To Caesar, you have appealed. To Caesar, you shall go.

this is where Paul stops reacting and starts dictating his own terms. This is where he takes the initiative.

This is where he sets this, this is that moment that sets this passage apart from all the others, these scenes that we have already seen. And I think that this is that facet that speaks uniquely from this passage into our lives.

So first, a quick explanation of a few key details of what we just saw in verses 10 through 12.

Roman citizenship was a big deal. It was very hard to get in the ancient world.

[64:03] It's what capped Elysius from flogging Paul. It's then why Elysius had to protect Paul. And Roman citizens in this particular case, what we're seeing here, Roman citizens could appeal a verdict directly to Caesar himself, who at this point is the not yet insane Nero.

He will devolve into madness later in his reign. And Paul decides to exercise that right. Now, Festus has to confer with his counsel because actually no verdict has been rendered.

What is Paul appealing exactly to Caesar? and so he had to explain why I'm sending this person to you. What charge are they appealing?

And that's actually what next week, the whole scene, is about trying to figure out what are we going to tell Caesar about this guy. And so as Paul does this, he puts himself past the grasp of those who have been trying to assassinate him and he puts him out, he puts himself basically outside the jurisdiction of these corrupt governors who will just use him as a political tool and so he will take his chances with Nero.

And in so doing, he accomplishes what he set out to do five chapters ago and more than two years ago in chapter 19 where he resolved in the spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem saying, after I have been there, I must also see Rome.

[65:42] and he is bringing to fruition what Christ had promised him in Jerusalem. Take courage for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.

And from this act, what he's doing here, moving himself forward, we see set forth for us a principle of how the Christian life is lived in a scenario quite unlike our circumstances.

Let me see if I can draw it out for us and then apply it to our lives. As we've already mentioned several times now, God has set out a plan for Paul.

Paul would bring the gospel to Rome, but Paul doesn't sit passively waiting for God to drop tickets in his lap.

Here's your airfare to Rome. He took action on it. God had established a destination and Paul saw an opportunity to get himself there and so he took it.

[66:52] His basic legal argument is essentially I am appealing to Caesar because I'm being falsely imprisoned and by exercising that right to appeal to Caesar, he must then go to Caesar who is in Rome.

So Paul's not simply arguing his case, trying to get his legal situation settled. He's actually accomplishing the will, the plan that the Lord has set out for him.

And this is a recurring theme in the scriptures that God sets forth a path, a direction and then the people of God take responsibility for the next step, take action on the stated will of God.

Paul's doing it here. The Lord promised the land of Canaan to the people of Israel but they had to walk into it. How many of the patriarchs are in this Advent season as we read today? Elizabeth were barren and promised a child. All those conceptions people took action on God's stated plan if you catch my meaning. While we don't sit in a Roman prison the Lord expects us also to take responsibility for the next step, take action on his stated will for our lives as well.

[68:20] The Christian life is an active thing is yours. And so this is a timely passage because that's always a timely message.

We are all tempted towards spiritual lethargy by our own hearts, by the world around us, by our enemy. We are tempted towards distraction! spiritually. We are tempted towards the seen rather than the unseen. Towards that which this world around us celebrates rather than that which the Lord esteems. Towards inaction rather than action. Towards thinking that our spiritual growth, our spiritual life, our spiritual vitality is someone else's responsibility. God's, a pastor's, a mentor's, someone else. Friends, the Christian life is active, is yours. The Christian life begins in something that is entirely passive, the reception of the gospel, but then becomes very active once we have new life.

[69:33] Right? The gospel message is that there's nothing we could do. We were dead in our trespasses and sins. There's nothing that we could do to make right before a holy God.

That's why Advent is so important because he came to rescue us, to stand in the place of sinners so that we might be forgiven, to break death so that we might live. If you've never come to trust in the gospel of Jesus Christ, oh, would you? There's nothing for you to do. There is only for you to open your hands and receive. That is the gospel of Jesus Christ. And he will make you to be born again into a living communion with him once you are alive in Christ. Well, spiritual life lives. And the Christian life is an active thing. Once you are born again, once you have new life, you live.

[70:36] The Christian life is an active thing. Paul knew he needed to get to Rome, so he took steps to get there. I know that I ought, must, need, to do the work of an evangelist.

It's commanded of me in scripture. But it's a lot easier for me, when we were talking through the book Honest Evangelism in our community group, I said, it's a lot easier for me to pray. Lord, will you give me opportunities by which I subtly mean, give me completely painless, totally easy, simple opportunities that don't even include a pain line, as the author Rico Tice puts it, that I never have to cross any pain line at all. It's easier to pray for that and just wait for God to give me situations he's never promised me than to actually go ahead and do what the Lord has commanded of me. But friends, new life lives. It is an active thing. Think of all the action that is described, commanded for us in the new life.

[72:06] Flee temptation. Not in a killjoy sense, right? Not in a guilt you kind of sense, but in a run from that which is death, which saps your soul, which dishonors your Lord, which robs you of joy.

In an honorable sense, we are told, flee. That is an active thing, right? A very active thing. Or, the Lord has commanded of us, wisdom, seek it out. Proverbs chapter 2, make your ear attentive to wisdom. Incline your heart to understanding. Yes, if you call out for insight, raise your voice for understanding. If you seek it like silver, search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. The Christian life is an active thing. We rob ourselves of joy. We dishonor our Lord when we don't live it out, right? Think of the great blessing that is the fellowship of the church.

[73:30] If you have not experienced that vibrantly in your life, friends, I invite you to something we say frequently, quoting Jordan over there from his sermon in Ephesians chapter 2 when we were still meeting as a house church.

If you want to see God at work, throw yourself into the church. if you want that blessing, you must put yourself there.

You can't be blessed by the church if you don't hang out with the church. It's just not going to happen. Do you want to feel the vibrant sense of God alive in your life?

The scriptures say, draw near to God and he will draw near to you. It's an active thing. If you've been among Christians for a while, you'll know that there is a difference between a knowledgeable Christian and a mature Christian filled with the Holy Spirit.

You can know all sorts of doctrine without having and exuding peace, patience, gentleness, self-control, the other fruits of the Spirit.

[74:50] You can tell when someone is just close to God. Love and mercy and joy overflow from that person. Their breath of fresh air, even among other Christians.

Some people like that sit here today among this congregation and you are a blessing to us all. How did they get there? That's the question. They were very active in very simple things over a long period of time and the Lord has changed them.

How did they get there? They have sat at the feet of Jesus. And like Moses, whose face shone after descending from the mountain of God's presence, their spirit too radiates the goodness and joy of the King, in whose presence they have dwelt.

How did they do that? they took very simple action. Because the Christian life is an active thing. They have regularly knelt, spiritually speaking, at the foot of the cross.

They've confessed their sins and grown in humility and thankfulness that radiates from them. They look on, they meditate over the love of Christ's sacrifice and grow in grace themselves.

[76:20] They join with the saints to worship the Lord together and find their souls expanded. They take seriously his word and find conviction and comfort from the Holy Spirit who is its author.

They receive the Lord's supper with reverence and awe and find an indomitable hope rising in their souls. in all these very simple things they are being shaped by God infused with his gracious energies and built up into a people who overflow with peace and joy and love.

All this God does in them. They did not produce it themselves but he did it as they availed themselves of the means of God's grace in their lives.

Christians who don't take responsibility don't take action don't walk these paths they lose out on the means by which the Lord implants heaven in our hearts even today.

So perhaps today what you need to hear I don't know what step each of us needs to take.

[77:48] I hope that the Lord is bringing to your mind those places in your life where you need to take action where you need to live out your Christian life.

Perhaps it is in flee temptation perhaps it is in seek out wisdom perhaps it is in these simple things in which the Lord works in your heart.

Perhaps what you need to hear is that your next step is to get help to seek out a shepherd. It's time to have your wounds bound up with the comforts of Christ.

I and the other elders are ready and willing and excited to minister Christ's comforts to you or we can happily recommend other men and women in this congregation who will joyfully do that for you.

Or perhaps your next step is to learn that ministry of shepherding of binding up wounded hearts. Grow in your ability to walk alongside and comfort others.

[78:56] If that's you I'd love to talk to you. We'll get started on that. Are you treading water in your Christian life? Have you hit pause for some reason?

Are you waiting for something to happen before you walk forward? Are you assuming that the responsibility of your spiritual vitality rests on someone else?

Have you hit pause on the most important facet of your life? Your walk with Christ? Friends, the Christian life is an active thing. It's yours.

Paul took responsibility for the next step in God's plan. So he took action. The direction that God has given for our lives is typically much more general.

It has to do with putting off the old man. It has to do with putting on the new man. It has to do with investing yourself in your church family and offering grace to the world that does not yet know

Christ.

[80:07] And all of those things, all of those things, they're active. The Christian life is an active thing. It is yours. And I can't know where the next step lies for each individual here today.

But the Lord does. And perhaps he is now revealing it to you. Perhaps you've known it for a long time what that next step is and have been putting it off and been hiding behind excuses or simply ignoring it.

It took Paul two years before he could take this step. I invite you, friends, for the honor and glory of the Lord and for your great joy, walk forward in the light as Christ is in the light.

Let's pray. Lord, we are grateful.

Grateful seems too small a word. Lord, you've given us resurrection life in Christ. Christ. Oh, may we be thankful for it.

[81:31] Grateful for it. Grateful to you. And Lord, as we reckon with the fact that you have made us alive in Christ by your spirit, may we live.

Lord, will you reveal to each soul here today. what is that step, that next step in the walk of faith?

Lord, would you embolden us to take it? Would you help us, like Paul, to take the next, to take responsibility for your purposes in our life and walk forward in faith in the power of your Holy Spirit and to the glory of your name?

We ask that. In the matchless name of Jesus Christ, our King. Amen.