

Acts 24

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[0 : 00] You turn your Bible into Acts chapter 24. Acts chapter 24, page 933.

We'll be one of the new Bibles. Continuing our series through the end of this book, Paul on trial, defending himself.

And after five days, the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman. And 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. The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so.

[1 : 22] And 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, 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 and to 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.

[2 : 47] 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 he 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 is Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.

And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was 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 Portius Festus.

And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison. So this morning, we see the Apostle Paul hauled into court before a self-serving judge, slanderously accused by a clever lawyer, framed by powerful leaders who want to get him executed.

[4 : 04] Now, for some Christians in the world today, Paul's situation is not hard to relate to. In Pakistan, a Christian woman known as Asia Bibi is facing the death sentence for violating

blasphemy laws.

Six years ago, she was picking berries with some of her neighbors. She was thirsty, so she got a drink from the well nearby. And the women said, As a Christian, you are unclean.

Don't drink our water. An argument ensued. At some point, she said, My Jesus Christ died for me. What did Mohammed do for you? The women then accused her of insulting Mohammed.

A mob came to her house and beat her and her family members until the police rescued her and her case was brought to court where she was sentenced to death for blasphemy. Her family has gone into hiding because of death threats.

Two Pakistani politicians, one a Christian, one a Muslim, who publicly advocated on her behalf were assassinated. Many human rights groups worldwide have organized petitions calling for her release and recently, the Supreme Court of Pakistan has agreed to review her case.

[5 : 11] Now, this is an extreme example, but many of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world face these kinds of realities and possibilities. Now, for many of us, that kind of situation, the situation of persecuted Christians, feels far away from our daily lives and struggles and our ability to help is mostly limited.

And we can pray, and we surely should. We can sign the petition online or donate to a Christian ministry like Voice of the Martyrs or Hanum Assad's ministry to refugees fleeing from ISIS.

But I think sometimes simply being reminded of the struggles that our brothers and sisters face around the world is helpful because it lifts us out of our self-centered tendencies and our preoccupation with our own worries, which can seem small by comparison.

But this morning's text is not only for persecuted Christians who are hauled into court. It has a message for all of us who have been wrongly accused or personally attacked.

Now, maybe you have been legally charged for an offense that you did not actually commit. Or maybe you were the victim of a crime and the perpetrator escaped without consequences.

[6 : 25] Or maybe you've been maligned on the internet. It's not a legal court, but the accusations against you are just as accessible as a Google search of your name, and there's nothing you can do about it.

Maybe people have judged you by the color of your skin or by the clothes you were wearing. Maybe the accusations and attacks have come from closer to home, from a family member or a close friend, and it hurts deep inside.

The Apostle Paul was accused personally. He was also accused specifically in his role as a Christian. Now, I know for some of you, your work environment can feel like a spiritual battleground. Maybe it's full of cursing and gossip and grumbling, and you feel like you're constantly being asked to work twice as hard to make up for other people who are cutting corners.

Or maybe you work aside accomplished and gifted and successful people who have big egos and want big money. Maybe you work with scholars who assume that no intelligent person in their right mind in New Haven, Connecticut would really believe what the Bible says.

[7 : 37] Perhaps someone makes a passing comment about Bible-believing Christians as if they all lived long ago or far away, back in the 17th century or down south. And you wonder, is it even safe to identify myself as a Christian here?

Or maybe you feel like an outsider in your family. Maybe you weren't raised in a religious family and they just can't seem to understand, why do you need to go to church every Sunday and spend so much time with other church people?

I mean, we raise you with good moral values. Isn't that enough? Like, is this a cult or something that you're getting involved with? Or maybe you were raised in a different religious tradition.

Maybe you've been accused of being a traitor to your family and your heritage. Or maybe your family is also Christian, but for one reason or another you feel spiritually distant from them.

Perhaps you've sought to make decisions based on biblical principles and they just don't seem to understand. Now, there's all kinds of examples. Sooner or later, all of us will face accusations and attacks of one kind or another.

[8 : 44] And this morning, I want us to look at Paul's response to the accusations he faces and what we can learn from his example. This morning, we'll look at our text in three sections. First, the lawyer's accusations.

Second, the apostle's defense. And third, the governor's verdict. Now, incidentally, the structure of the chapter reflects the common pattern of ancient Roman legal proceedings from beginning to

end.

But first, we have the lawyer's accusations. Verse 1 through 9. Verse 1 tells us that the prosecutors, the temple authorities from Jerusalem, hired a lawyer, Tertullus, to speak on their behalf.

Now, in principle, lawyers are paid to make sure that everything can be said, everything that can be said on one particular side is said. And if the system works well, lawyers will present both sides of a case in turn, an impartial judge, will make a well-informed decision and justice will be done.

But as everyone knows, the system doesn't always work quite that way. Sometimes people with money and power, both in the ancient world and in the modern world, pay expensive lawyers in order to win cases.

[10:00] And from what we see here, Tertullus seems to have been a skilled, shrewd, and experienced lawyer. Tertullus began not by launching into his accusations against Paul, but by praising the governor for three whole verses, verses two to four.

Now, in the Roman culture, it was common to begin with some respectful comments in order to establish a rapport and gain the goodwill of the judge. But Tertullus didn't just make some general respectful comments.

He said exactly what Governor Felix wanted to hear. He flattered him. He praised Felix. Through you, we enjoy much peace.

You're a ruler characterized by foresight and wise reforms. He appealed to Felix's kindness, verse four, and he promised to be brief.

Now, in reality, Judea was not at peace. It was on the brink of civil war. And Governor Felix was notorious for brutally suppressing potential uprisings and turning one group against another to solidify his own power.

[11:11] His rule was characterized not by kindness, but by harshness. But, of course, the truth didn't matter very much to Tertullus. He just wanted to get Felix on his side and set the stage for his accusations against Paul.

Verse five and six, he outlines his accusations against Paul. First, Paul's a troublemaker, a plague, a pest, stirring up riots, spreading contagious disease all around the empire, all this violence and unrest.

He's a threat to peace. He's dangerous. Second, he's a sectarian. He's a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. Now, in some context, the word sect just means a religious group or a particular school or tradition within, in this case, Judaism.

But here, but it can also have a negative connotation. I mean, it's sort of like the word cult today.

There's a technical way that scholars use the word cult to just talk about a practice of worship.

But if somebody comes to you and says, is that a cult he's part of? You know it doesn't mean is he just going to, you know, is he just going to church on Sunday or is he going to a temple?

[12:22] Is it just a sort of respectable religious practice? It's a negative term. A divisive, dangerous, deviant sect leading people astray following a Nazarene and Tertullus might have reminded the governor that this Nazarene, Jesus, was crucified under Roman law under an accusation of treason claiming to be the king of the Jews.

So, Paul is a troublemaker, a sectarian, and a violator. He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. Now you might say, why does that matter? Well, the Romans gave a lot of authority to religious groups in the ancient world to be in charge of their own temples.

And temples were seen as sacred, holy spaces. You don't violate them. In the temple in Jerusalem, there were large plaques, prominent signs, and they said this, no foreigner is to go beyond this point.

Whoever is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his death, which will follow. And the Romans supported the Jewish temple leaders in enforcing this law. So, basically, Tertullus is saying, Governor Felix, you have brought us peace.

You are a man of foresight. You are for this nation. This man, Paul, is a threat to everything that you have done for us. He's a threat to peace and order. He's a threat to our temple and to our nation.

[13:51] And you should deal with him in the same way that you deal with other dangerous deviants. Get rid of them. Paul is facing some pretty intense accusations here.

Now, take a moment before we go ahead into Paul's defense. How do you feel and what do you think when you are accused or attacked? I can remember one time not too long ago when I was the object of verbal accusations that felt fairly intense and these were some of my responses.

First, I was furious. I was stewing in my mind about all the ways I could justify myself and all the accusations I could throw back at the other person. Second, I became dejected, moping around, unproductive, unfocused, gloomy.

Third, I just wanted to run away. Maybe you've been there. It can be intense. Well, let's consider the Apostle Paul's response. I want to consider three aspects of his response.

First, Paul didn't let his anger or frustration get the best of him. He maintained his integrity. Second, Paul didn't become despairing or dejected. He maintained his courage.

[15:07] Third, he didn't run away. He remained steadfast. Integrity, courage, and steadfastness. First, integrity. Paul respected the governor, but he didn't flatter the governor.

Verse 10, Paul begins his speech by saying, knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense. Paul respected the governor's authority.

He didn't despise it, but he didn't cower in fear of the governor and desperately try to gain his goodwill by resorting to flattery and half-truths and over-the-top compliments.

Now, if you're in a position of authority or leadership, you may encounter some people who always seem to think that you're the greatest, who always compare you favorably with other leaders, who never criticize any of your plans.

be careful that you are not overly drawn toward those people because they always agree with you and always affirm you and always tell you what you want to hear.

[16:14] Some of the most valuable people in your life may be the ones who respect you and encourage you but don't flatter you. The ones who know you and love you well enough to say things that you don't want to hear because you may need to hear them.

If you're under authority, don't despise people who are over you, even if, like Governor Felix, they are deeply flawed. Don't try to undercut them or avoid their oversight.

Respect their role as Paul did, even if their character and performance leave much to be desired. At the same time, don't flatter people who are in authority out of an excessive desire to gain their favor.

The Apostle Paul had very little power in this situation. He had no lawyer to represent him. He was facing accusations from the head honchos in Jerusalem who had hired and probably trained and experienced and perhaps an expensive lawyer.

He had very little power but he maintained his integrity. So that's the first thing we see about Paul, his integrity. Second thing we see about Paul is his courage.

[17:22] Paul courageously defended himself against the charges made against him one by one. Verse 11 through 13, he says, I'm not a troublemaker.

He says, less than two weeks ago, I was up in Jerusalem. I wasn't disputing with anyone. I wasn't stirring up a crowd. There aren't any accusations, there aren't any evidence to prove what they're saying.

It seems that, interestingly, it seems that because of how tense the situation was in Jerusalem, Paul avoided getting into public debates and discussions during his time there.

Now in many other cities, Paul held daily discussions and he sometimes faced quite a bit of opposition and he continued publicly preaching and publicly discussing with people about the Christian message.

But when he was visiting Jerusalem, it seems that he deliberately chose not to do that. There's a time to engage in public debate and discussion. There's a time to listen and let your deeds speak louder than your words.

[18:27] And Paul had some discernment in that case. So he said, I'm not a troublemaker. Second, I'm not a sectarian. Verse 14 to 16, the way, now that was just a name for the early Christian movement.

He says, the way isn't a dangerous deviation from faithful Judaism. I'm not a maverick religious leader sort of making it up as I go along and just trying to get more and more people to follow me. I worship the God of our fathers. I believe everything laid down by the law and written in the prophets. In other words, I believe the Hebrew Scriptures. I have the same hope in God as these men in the resurrection.

And as a result, my ambition is always to keep a clear conscience before God and before human beings. Paul says, I'm not inventing stuff here.

I'm worshiping the God of our fathers, believing the Scriptures, and seeking to maintain a clear conscience. Now, do you see what Paul does here? He doesn't just say, I'm not one of those

sectarians.

[19 : 34] I'm not one of those dangerous cult leaders. He actually takes that opportunity to present positively what he is, who he is as a Christian. Sometimes out of fear, when we feel accused or misunderstood, we can sort of go into a defensive mode and never say anything positive about what we actually believe or practice.

When I was in college, I applied and interviewed for an RA position. And during my interview with the dean and master of the residential college, they said something like, we know you're very committed to your faith and we know you're a leader in one of the Christian groups.

Do you think that would cause any challenges for you or limit your ability to be a resource and a counselor to a wide diversity of students? And I felt a little nervous and I said, oh no, certainly not. Like, it certainly wouldn't cause any barriers for me. But you know, later on I thought, I missed an opportunity here because I could have said something positive.

I could have said like, being Christian, I find helps me to be a resource and a counselor to a wide variety of people. It teaches me to see every person, Christianity teaches me to see every person, even people who are very different than me, as someone who bears the image of God.

[20 : 56] Christianity also helps me to be realistic and self-critical because it teaches that all of us have profound limitations and deep-seated flaws. It also teaches me that a person's worth isn't determined by their accomplishments.

I wouldn't have to say all those things, but I could have said one of them. I could have said something positive instead of feeling like I only had to say what I wasn't.

So, not a troublemaker, not a, what's the second one, sectarian. Third, not a violator. Verse 17 to 21. Again, he doesn't just say what he wasn't doing.

He says what he was doing. I came to Jerusalem to bring gifts to the poor and present offerings. I was purified in the temple. I was showing my respect for my Jewish brothers and sisters.

And then he says, but some Jews from Asia, and here, the sentence actually breaks off. It's an incomplete sentence. Paul doesn't finish his sentence. You might say, why doesn't he finish his sentence? He's testifying in court.

[22 : 00] Well, in Jerusalem, if you remember, some Jews from Asia, Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, had accused Paul of violating the temple by bringing uncircumcised Greeks into the inner courts.

That was the original accusation that provoked the riot and brought him to trial before the Sanhedrin. But here, Tertullus has slightly changed the accusation.

He doesn't accuse Paul of actually violating the temple by bringing Greeks into the temple because it wasn't true. He accuses him of attempting to violate the temple and he says, we stopped him just in time.

The original accusation had been dropped and the original witnesses had no showed in court. Now, Roman law actually harshly penalized witnesses who made criminal accusations against someone, got someone arrested and then failed to show up in court.

And Paul's standing in the court and he looks around and he realizes, none of my original accusers who accused me of actually bringing these Greeks into the temple, they're not here because they realized the accusation wasn't true.

[23 : 12] And Paul says, the only accusation that the Sanhedrin could agree on is that I believe in the resurrection from the dead. Paul courageously stood his ground. He didn't back down.

He maintained his integrity and his courage. Now, the Apostle Paul was falsely accused and unjustly attacked and he courageously defended himself.

But many times when we are accused or attacked, it's not quite so simple. We can't assume that we are always right. A few years ago, Tim Keller, a pastor in New York, wrote an article about how to respond to harsh criticism.

And he said, the greatest danger of criticism is not to your own public reputation but to your own heart. You feel the injustice of it. You feel sorry for yourself and attempts you to despise not only the critic but the entire group of people from which they come.

All this can make you prouder over time. He says, as a Christian, how should we respond to harsh criticism? He says, first, we should look to see if there is a kernel of truth even in the most exaggerated and unfair criticisms.

[24 : 32] He says, there is usually such a kernel when the criticism comes from friends and there is often such truth when the disapproval comes from people who actually know you. So look for what you may have done wrong.

Identify your own shortcomings. Repent in your own heart before the Lord for what you can and let that humble you. It will then be possible to learn from the criticism and stay gracious to the critic even if you disagree with much of what he or she has said.

Now he says, if the criticism comes from someone who doesn't know you at all, he says this is often the case on the internet, it's possible that the criticism is profoundly mistaken and completely unwarranted. When that happens, it's even easier to fall into smugness.

Perhaps be tempted to laugh at how foolish your critics are. And he says, don't do it. Even if there is no truth at all in what the critic says, you should not mock them in your thoughts.

He says, first, remind yourself of examples of your own mistakes, your own foolishness, your own cluelessness, times when you really got something wrong in the past. Second, he says, pray for the critic that he or she grows in grace.

[25 : 42] It's challenging. It's challenging to maintain integrity and courage in the face of accusations, to have the humility and honesty to be self-reflective even when you feel hurt.

So the Apostle Paul maintained his integrity, his courage, and he remained steadfast. He didn't give up. He didn't blow up. Now, third, we come to the governor's response, verse 22 to 27.

And, you know, in the normal course of a Roman trial, there's the summons, there's the prosecution, there's the defense, and now, we're waiting for the verdict, and the verdict doesn't come.

Paul displayed integrity and courage and steadfastness. Governor Felix displayed the opposite, hypocrisy, cowardice, and indecision. First, hypocrisy, verse 22, he stalled.

When Lysias, the tribune, comes down, I'll decide your case. But if you look back at chapter 23, verse 33, Felix had already received a letter from Lysias, the tribune, who was actually in Jerusalem when the whole incident happened.

[27 : 06] And Lysias' letter says, is quoted in chapter 23, verse 26 to 30, and in verse 29, chapter 23, verse 29, he gives a very clear conclusion.

I found that he, Paul, was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment. Lysias had a pretty clear conclusion.

And when Lysias did show up, nothing seemed to change. Felix kept Paul in prison for two years. It was just a stalling tactic. Obviously, Felix recognized there wasn't a good basis on which to convict Paul.

That's probably why he gave him so much liberty in verse 23. But he didn't want to release Paul either. You might say, why? Verse 26 gives one reason. It says he was hoping for a bribe.

Perhaps he heard Paul's comment, I came to Jerusalem to bring gifts to the poor and present offerings. He thought, ooh, money. Paul must have a stash of cash somewhere.

[28 : 10] Or he must have some powerful friends. Or at least he should be able to, you know, go to those people that he gave the money to and said, hey, you know, I scratched your back, you scratched mine. Like, we can make a deal here.

Of course, Roman law prohibited governors from receiving bribes, but that didn't matter to Felix. Other governors did it too. Felix wasn't hindered by the letter of the law.

Verse 27 gives another reason. When Felix was recalled from his position and replaced by someone else, it says he left Paul in prison because he wanted to do the Jews a favor.

Now, Luke doesn't explain the background, but anyone who was reading Acts, when Luke wrote it, would have known that Felix was not popular among the Jewish population, particularly those in Jerusalem.

And the reason why Felix was relieved from his position is that there was a dispute between Jews and Syrians in Caesarea where Felix had his headquarters, and Felix responded by killing and plundering many of the Jews.

[29 : 17] And he would have been punished. The only reason he wasn't punished is because his brother had a high position in Rome and was a good friend with the emperor. So his brother got him off the hook.

But as Felix was leaving, he thought, well, I'll throw him a bone. Keep this guy in prison. So we see Felix's hypocrisy, we see his cowardice, we also see his indecision.

Verse 24, Felix sent for Paul because he wanted to hear him. Perhaps he was curious. Felix knew something about the way, the Christians.

Now one of their premier spokesmen was in his custody. Hey, it sounds like something interesting for the governor and his wife to do on a date night. Right? So they listened to Paul, but again, Paul did not flatter them.

He didn't just say what they already agreed with and what they would have wanted to hear. He spoke about faith in the Messiah Jesus. In particular, he spoke about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment.

[30 : 22] Now we can't know exactly what Paul said on these matters, but each of them comes up in sequence in Paul's most famous letter, the letter to the Romans, which he would have just written a year or two before this.

In the book of Romans, Paul begins by arguing that all human beings, Jews and Gentiles alike, are unrighteous. That is, we've disobeyed God's law.

We've exchanged God's glory for idols. We've indulged our own selfish desires. We are sinners. And we can't justify ourselves. But then Paul said this in chapter 3 of Romans.

He says, but now the righteousness of God has been manifested. The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. That through Jesus' atoning sacrifice, unrighteous people can be put right with God.

Well, after talking about righteousness, Paul goes on to talk about self-control. For example, in chapter 12, he says, I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God.

[31 : 33] You've died and risen with Jesus. So don't live for yourself anymore. Present yourselves as an offering to God. Self-control.

And then in Romans 13, Paul speaks about the judgment to come. In these words, Romans 13, 12, he says, the night is far gone. The day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

One day the world will be flooded with the light and glory of the risen Lord Jesus. And so Paul urges us, let us now walk in the light. Walk in the truth.

And walk in love. And walk in holiness. Righteousness, self-control, the judgment to come. Felix was listening. He didn't like the message.

Because it was evident that Felix's life was not characterized by righteousness and self-control and he was not prepared for a judgment to come. Felix wanted money.

[32 : 37] He was willing to take bribes. Felix wanted power. He was willing to throw other people under the bus to maintain it. Felix wanted sex. He was willing to take another man's wife to get it.

His wife, Drusilla, had been previously married to the king of Amessa. Felix saw her and wanted her and persuaded her to divorce her husband and marry him. And there they were sitting in front of Paul.

Felix wasn't ready to face the judgment to come. And most likely that's why he became alarmed. What if all that Paul is saying is really true?

What if I will one day face the judgment of Jesus? Felix's alarm could have been the first sign of his repentance. A sense that his own life was not right with God but instead of turning toward Jesus he ran away.

Go away, Paul. I'll call you back when I want to hear you. I'm in charge here. I'll summon you when I want to. Before we go on let me say this.

[33 : 43] If you can relate to Felix if you've begun to see your own unrighteousness or lack of self-control if you realize you're not ready to face the judgment of a holy and righteous God when absolutely everything will be brought into the light don't run away.

Don't cling to your fleeting power or your fleeting possessions or the fleeting pleasures of this world in denial. Instead let your fear drive you to Jesus and to the cross where there's forgiveness and righteousness and the power of the Holy Spirit to live a self-controlled life.

It's what Paul offered to Felix and yet Felix seems not to have received it. So Paul maintained his integrity and courage and steadfastness and yet nothing seemed to be resolved.

For two whole years he was sitting in custody periodically called before the governor perhaps he'll release me this time perhaps something will change and nothing did.

He was left hanging left waiting you might be asking what enabled Paul to stand firm to remain steadfast in his integrity and his courage even though it seemed like everything was up in the air and he had responded as well as he could to these accusations and attacks and yet he wasn't vindicated and everything just seemed still in the air.

[35 : 32] You might say how how can we how can I hold on to integrity and courage and steadfastness when I face attacks and accusations?

Well when Paul stood before Governor Felix there were two things that he knew. he knew that the Lord Jesus was his true judge and he knew that the Lord Jesus was his ultimate advocate.

In two of his letters 1 Corinthians chapter 4 he says with me it's a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court in fact I don't even judge myself it is the Lord who judges me. And in Paul's last letter written from prison 2 Timothy 4 he says at my first defense no one came to stand by me but all deserted me may it not be charged against them but the Lord stood by me and strengthened me so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.

If you're accused rightly or wrongly if you were attacked remember these two truths. Remember Jesus is my judge and Jesus is my advocate.

[36 : 47] Jesus is my judge who will one day bring everything into the light who will sort out the true and the false and who will establish his kingdom of righteousness forever.

Jesus is the one I should fear but also remember that Jesus is my advocate the one who's paid for all my sins the one who intercedes for me on my behalf who stands beside me and strengthens me Jesus is the one I can trust.

And that's where we get the power to live a life of integrity and courage and steadfastness is knowing that Jesus is our judge and Jesus is our advocate. advocate. No matter who you're called to stand before whether it's your boss whether it's a close friend whether it's a judge in court you can know that Jesus is the only one you need to fear and Jesus is the one that you can completely trust at the same time.

This morning we're going to celebrate communion and as we celebrate communion I want to invite us to meditate on those two truths and to spend time in prayer. As the bread and the cup are being passed out I encourage you to spend time in prayer praying that the Lord would purify us make us a people of integrity asking the Lord to strengthen us and make us a people of courage and asking the Lord to keep us strong and steadfast whatever we may face.

Let's pray together. Father we thank you for your word. We thank you for strengthening your servant Paul.

[38 : 39] We thank you that you filled him with your Holy Spirit. We thank you that your son the Lord Jesus Christ stood beside him and did not leave him alone so that we could know that you will never leave us alone when we put our trust in you.

Lord we pray that you would come and be present with us as we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Nourish us, strengthen us, equip us to be the people you've called us to be. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, as we prepare to celebrate communion, let me read the words of Paul from his letter to the Corinthians.

He says, For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread. And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body, which is for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also, he took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

[40 : 01] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again. When we celebrate communion, we remember what Jesus Christ has done for us.

We remember that he too was wrongly accused and attacked and crucified. But we also remember that Jesus willingly gave his own life.

He was not a helpless victim. He maintained his integrity and courage and steadfastness. He was perfectly faithful to the end. And he said, I've come to lay down my own life in the place of sinful people so that you might come and have life through me.

So that's what we celebrate when we pass out the bread and the cup, remembering Jesus' body and his blood that was shed for us. If you're here today, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, if you

