

On Trial for Jesus (Acts 24-26)

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- [0 : 0 0] So, it's Acts chapter 24, verse 1 to 21. Five days later, the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of their elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor.
- When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix. We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought upon about reforms in this nation.
- Everywhere, and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this for profound gratitude. But in order not to worry you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.
- We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect, and even tried to desecrate the temple.
- So, we seized him. By examining him yourself, you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him. The other Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.
- [1 : 1 0] When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied, I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation, so I gladly make my defense.
- You can easily verify that no more than 12 days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone in the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues, or anywhere else in the city.
- And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the way which they call a sect.
- I believe everything that is in accordance with the law, and that is written in the prophets. And I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.
- So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man. After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings.
- [2 : 1 2] I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. But there are some Jews from the province of Asia who ought to be here before you and bring charges, if they have anything against me.
- Or these who are here should say what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin, unless it was this one thing I shouted that stood in their presence. It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.
- And that is the word of God. Thank you, Venus. Please keep your Bibles open to Acts chapter 24.
- And so today we're looking at three chapters. So I will try and summarize as we go along. But if you haven't read the passages, I'd encourage you to read them through the week.

Or if you've been journeying along as well on the Bible reading plan, you will have read them all already. How about we pray? Let's ask God to speak to us through this part of Scripture.

[3 : 25] Gracious Father, we could not imagine what it's like to be like Paul. Imprisoned, suffering for Jesus.

Some of the sufferings that he has had to face already. Lord, some of it is just beyond our imagination.

And yet, thank you for these words. Thank you for this part of your word. Thank you that here Paul, though innocent, persistently proclaims your son Jesus. And so help us to learn from him, our brother.

Help us to learn and to obey what you have for us today. Father, we thank you. We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. In high school, one year, our English class teacher decided to take us through a movie to study.

It was called Shawshank Redemption. Who's watched this one before? Okay, a few. All right. It was released before most of you were born, I'm guessing, or some of you. It was actually a pretty incredible movie.

[4 : 31] It was R-16, so probably not all of us will have watched it. But it's pretty dark in some places. There's a lot to grieve about. But at the heart of the story, if I can try and explain it, there's this powerless prisoner.

Okay, he's a guy on the left. Tim Robbins plays him. And he's been arrested, put into maximum security prison for a crime he did not commit. And this powerless prisoner actually ends up to be the smartest person of them all, right?

He's vindicated. He finally experiences a redemption. So it's a pretty incredible story. And I think this is precisely how God loves to work through the Bible, right?

He uses powerless people and brings about incredible redemption. Think about it. A slow-to-speak Jewish man.

He leads an oppressed people out of slavery. Or think about it. A crucified craftsman, right? He's crowned as God's chosen king.

[5 : 34] Think about it. A bunch of losers asked to follow some carpenter or so on. They become the boldest ambassadors of the risen Lord Jesus, right?

God loves to choose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. He loves to take weak people and shame the strong. And here in Acts 24 to 26, we see Paul, right?

He's now in his 60s, okay? It's been a while. And here he is despised as weak and foolish, all right? In these chapters, he is a traitor to his Jewish opponents.

He's seen as a madman, you know, to the Gentile authorities that are questioning him. And yet, Luke takes the time to record not just once, not just twice, but three different times that he's on trial for Jesus.

Why do we need to know this? Why do you and I need to know this? I mean, unless you've been to law school or you're in law school, or if you're a fan of shows like The Crown or West Wing, like a lot of this legal mumbo jumbo, you know, it's probably some stuff that you'd probably read through your scriptures and go, oh, thanks, but no thanks.

[6 : 48] And yet, in these scenes, right, we see a brother in Christ who persistently proves his innocence before his opponents, who takes any opportunity to testify to the gospel of God's grace.

And that's a task the Lord Jesus has for you and me, right, to live blamelessly before others and to boldly point others to Jesus.

So I think there's a lot we can learn from Paul, our friend, our powerless prisoner. So I'll just give a bit of a recap from things from last week.

Last week, if you were here, sorry, I'm a bit loud on here, if you can turn me down, yeah. Pastor Rowan, he traced for us, right, from Acts 21 to 23. He showed us how a gospel grit produces gospel growth, which brings gospel pain, for which we need gospel wisdom to apply gospel tactics.

And after Paul's pretty tactical move, at the end of the trial, he, sorry, at the end of his encounter with the Jews, he kind of splits the Jewish leaders against each other, if you remember that from last week.

[7 : 59] And there's a bit of a riot, pretty much. And it's Gentile soldiers that take and personally escort Paul to safety. And so that's how chapter 24, which we just read, begins, right?

But you've got to imagine Paul, he's a prisoner, he's kept under guard, and now he's been taken to the city of Caesarea Maritima, okay?

Caesar's city by the sea. If this place sounds a little bit familiar to you, well, it should be, right? We've actually been in Caesarea before in the book of Acts. So this was where the occupying Romans would rule over Judea from the time of Herod the Great.

And actually, in this city, this is actually where Pilate, the governor who oversaw Jesus' execution, he ruled from this city as well. And it was in Acts 10 as well, if you remember Acts chapter 10, where Peter, in the city, personally witnesses the Holy Spirit come upon the Gentiles for the first time.

Remember Cornelius, remember his household. So we've been here before. This is familiar territory. And the difference now, of course, is that Paul's back in Caesarea, but he's here as a prisoner.

[9 : 19] He's here as a prisoner. He's ready to be bound. He's ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus. And in God's strange but good providence, right, he's here.

And there's three trials. So chapter 24 focuses on a trial for Felix, the governor at the time. And then chapter 25, there's another governor, Festus.

And then later on, right, in 25 and 26, there's another trial for Agrippa, a king at the time. And look, we could spend a lot of time on each of them, but I think today I just want to summarize, right?

I want to summarize what Luke, I think, wants us to realize from these three chapters. And it is this. The big idea of these three chapters is this. Paul is an innocent prisoner who persistently proclaims the risen Christ.

Paul, even though he's innocent, he persistently proclaims the risen Christ. And so we'll just take that sentence in two parts. Firstly, let's think a little bit about Paul, the innocent prisoner.

[10 : 26] Another movie that we watched in school was The Matrix. This was year 13. I think it was thinking class. And someone said, let's think about The Matrix for a bit.

And so the teacher was very nice. We ended up watching The Matrix. And halfway through the movie, there's a guy called Morpheus. He's kind of been captured. And then Mr. Smith, he's a computer-generated agent.

And he says, do you know what I think you are? I think you're a virus. And that's actually precisely what Tertullus, here in the Bible, begins accusing Paul of.

Have a look at chapter 24 again. It's a bit of sweet talk. Tertullus, he's buttering up Felix. And then he starts to accuse Paul. And what does he say in verse 5? We have found this man to be a troublemaker.

Actually, the word here literally means plague. If you have a King James, it will say a pestilent fellow. So here is someone accusing Paul, not of being COVID positive, but trouble positive, as it were.

[11 : 28] Right? What else is Paul accused of? What else is Paul accused of? He's a stirrer, right? Verse 5. He's stirring up some riots. He's disturbing the peace. What else?

He's a ringleader. He's a ringleader of the Nazarene sect. He's accused of leading this splinter group. Someone that's not going to be authentically Jewish.

And he even accuses them of trying to desecrate the temple. Right? This beautiful temple where people go to worship if you're a godly Jew.

Well, he's accused him of polluting it by bringing in non-Jewish people. These are the kinds of accusations that Paul is up against.

All right? And actually, two years later, in chapter 25, again, many serious charges are made by the Jews before the governor Felix.

[12 : 25] We can see that in chapter 25, verse 2. And then later on, before King Agrippa, again, the Jews again, the Jewish community, they've been petitioning them about Paul and Jerusalem.

They're not letting up. They're again and again accusing him of all these kinds of things. But what we need to know is this. Are these charges actually true?

Is Paul really guilty of all these things? And Paul himself, in chapter 24, he gets to speak. And we get to hear him speak. Right? Have a look at verse 10.

And here, he gets to address the governor Felix. And basically, he defends himself. He says, no. I'm not a stirrer. Okay? I've actually visited the temple in a very culturally appropriate way.

And actually, I have a good reason to be in Jerusalem. Okay? I have an excuse to be here. I'm here to worship. In fact, I'm here to bring gifts to the poor. This is what he defends himself with here in these verses.

[13 : 30] And actually, there's no proof that he's stirred up crowds in synagogues or anywhere else in town. Okay? That's all just made up, fake news. And he's, you know, in terms of the accusation that he's brought Gentiles along into the Jewish temple, no.

That hasn't happened. Verse 18, he says, He says, He says, He says, He says, He says, He says, He says, What Paul's trying to say here is that he believes everything written to his ancestors through the law and the prophets, the Old Testament.

That's what we call it. And he says that all that, all those promises, I believe and I know they're fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Messiah. You see, friends, the Christian faith is not just some breakaway random thing.

It's not broken off from Judaism. It's rooted in the same promises that were made to the Jewish people. And so Paul is trying to say, look, I am a true Jew.

You can't accuse me of not being a true Jew. In fact, I'm the truest Jew there is here. Rather than leading them away from God, he's actually returning his Jewish brothers and sisters to their roots through the person, through the work of Jesus Christ.

[15 : 20] In the next chapter, when he appears before Festus, the next governor, he's more succinct, but he says the same thing, right? 25 verse 8, he says, I've done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar.

And even before Agrippa, it's the same defense. These Jews, they've known me for a long time. They can testify. I've been blameless. I've lived a zealous life even as a true Jew.

Three times, Luke records that Paul tells everyone he's innocent. He's not a public menace. It's clear to us as readers.

It was clear to the Gentile authorities too. In fact, actually, when these people who listen, they actually admit, well, I think Paul's right. I don't think he's done anything deserving of death.

That's what Festus says. Later on, Agrippa agrees. Look, this man, he could have been set free, right? All right? If he hadn't appealed to Caesar. Where have we heard of someone who's innocent being accused before?

[16 : 29] Does that ring a bell for some of us? If you're sensing a little bit of déjà vu, a feeling you've been here before, then you should be right. Anyone know of a Jewish rabbi?

Who's taught about the kingdom of heaven, faced false charges against his kinsman, who was even declared innocent three times, right, by the authorities, and yet treated as guilty?

See? That's right. It's Jesus, right? Our Lord and Savior. In God's providence, Jesus was the innocent one whose wrongful death brings God's rescue to our world.

And now, 30 years on from that important day, Paul is now the innocent one whose wrongful imprisonment brings the message of God's rescue to the whole world.

So that's the first half of Acts 24, 26, just seeing Paul as the innocent prisoner. The second thing I think we want to see and observe is that Paul just keeps talking about Jesus, right?

[17 : 39] He just persistently proclaims the risen Lord Jesus. Actually, in each of his defenses, what is repeated is not just Paul's innocence, right? I don't think that's what he cares most about. Rather, every one of his speeches in Acts 24 and 25, 26, he gives his testimony.

He gives his hope and his belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Let me show you. To Felix in Acts 24, 21, he says, It's concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.

And then before Festus, Festus, he talks and he summarizes what the case is. Festus understands Paul to be arguing about a dead man named Jesus and claiming to be alive.

And then, before King Agrippa in Acts 26, Paul proclaims the Messiah would suffer. And as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.

Can you see the pattern here? Every opportunity, right? Every time he gets to speak, he is talking about the risen Lord Jesus.

[18 : 51] His faith in Christ, dead and risen, is what has put him in prison. Why do you think he repeats himself so much? Is it just for fun?

Well, I think there might be a few reasons. One of them could be this. Perhaps. Remember, Acts was written to a real person, right? In a real place. Anyone know the name of the person who was addressed at the very start of the book of Acts?

Anyone want to ring a bell? This guy called Theophilus. Does that ring a bell? Yep. Okay. Theophilus. He's named in the very start of the book. Perhaps he and whoever else was reading it needed this repetition so that they could understand what was going to happen to Paul.

Okay. So some people do argue and suggest that Theophilus was probably perhaps someone in Rome and trying to help Paul along. Okay. So Paul's going to eventually get to Rome. And then all this background is going to help Theophilus and his friends to support Paul in some way.

Okay. To understand the situation behind why Paul's in prison in the first place. So there's that. But I think for a church like us, we just need to repeat the basics, don't we?

[20 : 03] We just need to repeat the basics too. I think we need the repetition as well. We need to be reminded again and again, what brings us together is not music.

It's not what we wear. It's not the nice food we have. What brings us together is our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Yes, we are not all alike. Yes, we come from different families and upbringings and situations. But what must our confidence, our identity, our unity be rooted and grounded in?

It has to be the thing that Paul repeats. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For us. This gospel truth is what we have to go back to time and time again, right?

Because Jesus was dead and now alive, I know he can forgive my sins. I know he has the power to do that. Because Jesus was dead but now alive, I know that there is power through him to live differently.

[21 : 11] Change lives. Because Jesus was dead and now alive, when we talk about him, it's not pointless. When we talk about him and we believe in him, it's not in vain.

Everything we do counts because Jesus is alive. So the end of year functions are coming up at work, aren't they?

There are long-awaited overseas trips booked. Look, wherever God takes you this summer, I wonder how you can make the resurrection of Jesus Christ the main thing, like Paul did.

I wonder how. Maybe it could start with asking your work colleague, your non-Christian relative. Can I ask you, who do you think Jesus is?

Is he just some guy in a dusty old book? Or is he who he claims to be? God's chosen king. Born to die. And yet his heart is still beating right now.

[22 : 11] His grave is still empty right now. And he is worthy of your trust and your worship. Because there is an eternal life to come. Either in heaven or in hell.

Now, as Paul points out, right, the message of the risen Lord Jesus, it wasn't just whispered in a corner. Alright? Hundreds of people have met the risen Lord Jesus up to this point.

They have eaten and have drunk with him. And they were willing to die for the truth that Jesus is alive. The resurrection of Christ is Paul's theme song.

Okay? It helps him to keep going, as we see, trial after trial. Despite being rejected. Despite the mixed response that he gets to the gospel.

I wonder if you remember, when Paul met Jesus on the Damascus road in Acts chapter 9. He was told that he would become God's chosen instrument to carry his name to the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.

[23 : 17] And the remarkable thing is that now here in Acts 24 to 26, this is exactly what happens. Luke is telling us everything that God promised has come true, is coming true.

Right? And I think that's another reason why Luke takes the time to record three different kings, as it were, listening to the message of Christ.

Alright? Have a think about each of these three. Right? Acts 24. There's fearful Felix. Alright? Felix was a governor over Judea at the time. He was married to a Jewish woman named Drusilla.

And yet I wonder, as Paul was speaking in verse 25 about faith in Jesus Christ. I wonder when, as he was talking about righteousness and self-control and the judgment to come.

It says here that Felix became afraid. Nervous. Historians tell us that actually Drusilla wasn't his first wife. So maybe Felix was feeling a little bit confronted about his marriage.

[24 : 20] Or maybe he was convinced about Jesus and the way, but he's got a plumb position. Okay? He's got a good job and he doesn't want to lose it. Instead, perhaps thinking that Paul is kind of well off.

Okay? I think Felix is like, wow, you're a prisoner, but all these people love you and give you stuff. I want a piece of that action. So it says here, he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe. So he sent for him frequently.

Frequently. Keep coming, Paul. I want to listen to you. And by the way, will you give me some money? No? Okay, alright. Keep coming next time. Paul refuses, though, to buy into that trap.

Okay? Our goal as followers is not just to preach the word, right? But to live wholly distinct lives. Paul is doing that at a big cost. At a big cost. I'm sure he would have loved to be out of prison.

And then there's Porcius Festus. Yes, that's his full name. His first name actually does mean pig in Latin. Look, he assumes the Roman governor role after Felix.

[25 : 20] Okay? So, and as soon as he takes over, he actually inherits quite a tricky situation. Right? In the form of Paul. This is someone, you know, a man still imprisoned.

And Felix actually kept him there deliberately for two years. Right? As a favor to the Jews. With no plan for release. Okay? It's a little bit like a, I don't know if you know, Guantanamo Bay is like a place where people get imprisoned and they don't get released.

Yeah? It's kind of like that for Paul. Well, Festus hasn't even finished unpacking his moving boxes before the Jewish leaders in verse 25 approach him and they present the charge against Paul.

And they say, come on, come on, let's get rid of him. We need to get rid of him. And so, Festus listens to Paul. Gives him another trial. And an important move, actually, Paul, at this point, now this is gospel tactics, he uses his privilege as a Roman citizen to say, I appeal to Caesar.

Right? He does this so that he doesn't have to get taken back to Jerusalem and get assaulted on the way and killed. And while Festus makes this move possible, as you read his story, as he listens in to Paul's testimony, he doesn't seem to cross the line into faith either.

[26 : 30] Because his last recorded words, we find in verse 24 of chapter 26. And he's listening, he's listening. Paul says, I'm here and I'm telling you that Jesus suffered, he rose again, and he's proclaiming light to his own people.

And at this point, verse 24, Festus interrupts Paul's defense and says, you're out of your mind, Paul, he shouted. Your great learning is driving you insane.

Friends, we should not be surprised when people tell us, you're out of your mind. What do you believe? That sounds insane.

It's not a news story. You and I can and might be mocked for what we believe, made fun of, no question. But we don't stand alone. And then finally, there's amazed Agrippa, right?

Agrippa, he's kind of, it's a hard situation to describe, but he's like the puppet king of the Jews. So the Romans are the ones really in charge. And then it's like, all right, we'll let you have your own Jewish ruler.

[27 : 33] His name is familiar because there are a lot of Herods in the Bible, right? In Acts 12, we heard about his father who was persecuting the early church. And then Herod's, then the grandfather of that person was the one who built this magnificent temple in Jerusalem.

And yet notice how freely, actually, when you read his testimony, how freely Paul speaks to Agrippa and Bernice, his sister, and all the other gathered officials.

You look at it. They gather a whole bunch of people. And yet, Paul is not scared. He's not fearful. He just tells them about Jesus. He takes that opportunity, right?

He takes his shot. And we don't have time to go through it. It's all there in chapter 26. An interesting thing when he talks to Agrippa, right, is how he tweaks his message.

To Felix and Festus, he's arguing about the Roman law, right, and why he's innocent for the most part. That's going to give him the best gospel impact. But to Agrippa, who's a fellow Jew, he tweaks his message.

[28 : 39] He starts arguing about their common Jewish background, right? That's great gospel tactics, building up a rapport. I know your situation. I can relate to you. And after giving his lengthy backstory, okay, we hear about his early life as a Pharisee, to his Damascus Road experience where he meets Jesus, and to now his purpose and message today.

Eventually, this is how he challenges Agrippa, right? Acts 26, 26. He says, King Agrippa, King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.

That's a great line, isn't it? That's a great line. And the amazed Agrippa, he responds like this, do you think that in such a short time, you can persuade me to be a Christian?

That's all we hear from Agrippa. Did he cross the line? Did he become a follower of Jesus? We don't know. But reflecting on Agrippa's account, the great preacher, Charles Spurgeon, he once said it this way, a man who has almost been persuaded to be saved.

God will at the last still be altogether damned. Being almost convinced will be of no conceivable service to him. It seems so grievous that the life of God and the light of God and the heaven of God should glide by some of you.

[30 : 01] That you should be almost persuaded and yet should miss them through not being a Christian. So firstly, can I plead with you today?

Firstly, don't just be almost persuaded about Jesus. It's not enough. If you're not a Christian today, if you're on the fence today, if you're about to walk away, I beg of you, I'd love to persuade you.

There are brothers and sisters here who would love to persuade you to become, to stay, to follow Jesus. To do everything the same as us. To repent from our sins and believe in the Lord Jesus.

Don't be almost persuaded. Don't be almost persuaded. And for some of you, the rest of you, who want to follow Jesus like Paul did, maybe you're tired.

Maybe it's hard. I get it. Can I leave us with two other encouragements from this section of Scripture? One is, don't waste your calling.

[31 : 09] Just keep faithfully proclaiming Jesus where you are. We're all called differently. Some of you get to be in a workplace where none of us can be in. Some of you are in a school or you're at a uni where you're going to meet people that I will never see.

Don't waste your calling. Just keep proclaiming Jesus faithfully. With your life. With your words. You see, the question, right, that Luke tells us and shows to us is not whether we successfully convert someone, right?

Three chapters and not a single conversion, right? You wouldn't put that on the stats board outside. I think the point is this. Conversion, people getting over the line, that's in the Lord's hands.

What you and I are called to do is just to be faithful. Just to be faithful. The question is always this. Are you going to faithfully and persistently talk about Jesus?

Live for Him? The question likewise is not, are we going to grow our numbers to X amount, to X amount, to X amount. I think the question for us as PCBC is, are we going to just keep faithfully and persistently proclaiming Christ?

[32 : 22] Preaching the word in season, out of season. Look, most of us won't get to speak before prime ministers or MPs like Paul did. But we all have a calling.

We all have a situation that God's placed us. Don't waste it. So many of you are in families, unique places where you have a message to proclaim to them.

And if the risen Christ is in your heart by His Spirit, then He's with you. He has empowered you. You can go wherever He gets you to go. I mean, think about it.

Paul's in prison. He might be in chains. Who are the people you're chained to? Have a think about it, right? I mean, I got chained 15 minutes with my hairdresser earlier this week, right? Just gave me my hair cut.

How about you? Who are the people that you get chained to? Who do you sit next to on a bus, right? You're chained to them for a while. Make the most of that opportunity. I get hours with my family, right?

[33 : 20] I'm chained to them too, in a good way. How can I use that opportunity to show them the love and the joy of following Jesus? And maybe Paul's final prayer, right?

Here in the end of Acts 26 can be our prayer too, right? He says to Agrippa, Paul says, verse 29, Short time or long, I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am except for these chains.

Right? Except for these chains. Paul is very aware that he has been suffering a lot. And so my final encouragement to you is this.

In your suffering, don't give up. In your suffering, don't give up. Trust that your trials and struggles are purposeful. Don't give up.

Trust that your struggles right this moment are purposeful. If I asked you, does suffering make you more or less faithful as a Christian, how would you respond to that?

[34 : 23] I'm sure some of us, if we could wish it, we would want to wish some of the struggles we have in our life away, right? I mean, we live in a world where struggle and suffering is actually something to run away from.

Okay? Take some medication to solve it. Okay? Change your situation to avoid it. Whether it comes from worried parents or rich influences.

That's the message, right? We live in a pain-pleasure society. How much pleasure can I have in this life? How much pain can I run away from in this life? But by this point in the book of Acts, I hope it has become absolutely clear that suffering is not a barrier.

In fact, suffering, God uses time and time again to bring the gospel to people and places that would have been impossible any other way. I mean, think about it.

How do you get an opportunity to speak before three different kings, right? It was because he was a prisoner. If he was a free man walking around Caesarea, later on into Rome, he may not have had that chance to speak boldly about Jesus before these people.

[35 : 36] When he reflects later on, he tells the Philippians, what has happened to me, right, this imprisonment, has really served to advance the gospel. We've got to have that view, friends. Okay? What has happened to me can really help to serve and advance the gospel.

Can we view our suffering in that way? Paul can. With eyes of faith, actually, we can see a few threads come together. Think about it.

All right? Because Paul is in prison, right, he gets to speak of these amazing people that would otherwise never have heard about Jesus. Actually, because Paul is in prison for several years like this, maybe that gave Luke and all the people he interviewed time to put together this very book, right?

We wouldn't even have been reading about the early church if Paul wasn't in prison, perhaps. Can you see? Suffering can be purposeful. And later on, we will see that God's promises through suffering are fulfilled.

Paul truly does bring the gospel all the way into Rome. So, friends, it is right. It is okay to pray that your struggles will finish.

[36 : 44] It will end. And you know what? In the new heavens and earth, they will. And yes, there is sometimes pain that we inflict on ourselves. Sometimes there is pain we should avoid. But what if the greatest trial in your life right now is precisely what God can use to bring about the greatest transformation?

Refining you to be like Jesus, the man of sorrow, as we sang about. Friends, remember, your suffering is purposeful. So don't give up. Don't waste that suffering either.

Find a really special, powerful, transforming purpose for it through the gospel. Because that's what Paul did. He was innocent.

He was in prison. And yet he was able to use that time to persistently proclaim the gospel. Thanks to him, we have a model today. What it looks like to suffer well for Jesus.

And to talk about him freely, boldly, without fear. And so my prayer, my encouragement is that we can faithfully live that out as PCBC. So that everyone might know his name.

[37 : 55] Will you pray with me? Lord, even when we don't see it, you're working. Even when we don't feel it, we know that you're working.

And you never stop working in all our different situations. Father God, I want to pray especially for people who are hurting right now. Who are struggling. Lord, there is not much that I as one person can do to help.

But Lord, you are the way maker. You are the king of kings. You are the one who can bring light out of darkness. And so we ask that for every person's situation, you would comfort them, be with them.

For every people, person that feels in prison right now. Or that they are not able to see a way out. Would you show them the love of Christ?

Would you magnify your son Jesus to them? And through that, would you help each and every one of us boldly proclaim your name.

[39 : 04] To persistently do it. To not give up. To show how good Jesus is in our lives. Father, we thank you. We thank you for your word today.

And we ask that you are blessed in our hearts and lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.