

# Back to Jerusalem (Acts 21-23)

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[ 0 : 00 ] Fantastic. So Pastor Ron's going to come up in a moment to explain God's Word and I'm going to read a portion of it. So today we're in Acts 21 to 23, so three whole chapters. I'm just going to read kind of like a little kind of Netflix trailer preview of it.

So please, if you can turn your Bibles on or open to Acts 21, I'm going to jump straight into verse 18. I'm going to read a section for us. So I'm reading for the NIV, but feel free to follow in your own translations.

This is God's Word. The next day, Paul and the rest of us went to see James and all the elders were present. Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul, You see, brothers and sisters, how many thousands of Jews have believed and all of them are zealous for the law.

They've been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. What shall we do?

[ 1 : 08 ] They will certainly hear that you have come. So do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. Take these men. Join in their purification rites and pay their expenses so that they can have their heads shaved.

Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. And as for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrifice to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality.

The next day, Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

But when the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting, Men of Israel, help us!

This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place.

[ 2 : 25 ] They had previously seen Trophimus, the Ephesian, in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area. The whole city was aroused and the people came running from all directions.

Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple and immediately the gates were shut. While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar.

He had once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains.

Then he asked who he was and what he had done. Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another. And since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks.

When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great that he had to be carried by the soldiers. The crowd that followed kept shouting, As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, May I say something to you?

[ 3 : 38 ] Do you speak Greek? He replied. Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led 4,000 terrorists out into the desert some time ago? Paul answered, I'm a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia,

a citizen of no ordinary city.

Please let me speak to the people. Having received the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic, Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.

When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. This is the word of our Lord. Well, thanks, William.

What happens next? We'll have to find out as we keep looking through this great catalogue of the way God worked through the Apostle Paul. Why don't we pray together before we start looking into this passage some more.

Let's pray. Lord God, today you know where our hearts are at. You know the things that are on our mind. The struggle that it is to keep putting Jesus first in our lives. As well as the great hope that we have of life that lasts forever.

[ 4 : 51 ] We ask that as we look at your word. That by your spirit and through your word you would shape us. You would challenge us. You would comfort us to make us more like your son. We pray this in his great name.

Amen. Well, I don't know if you've noticed that the world around us loves to talk about this idea and concept called unity. We love to talk about unity.

We've talked about it here, tonight. We've prayed for unity, which is a good thing. And we keep hearing this call from both our secular government and from within the church and people around to be united.

To unite around issues, around people or ideas. Now, at face value, the call kind of seems really warm and generous. And I'm sure it's got warm and generous intentions for us all.

But the call to unity is actually a call to submission. The call to unity is actually a call to submission. Every time we hear a call to unite, we're hearing a call to alter my beliefs and accept another's.

[ 5 : 59 ] Or for someone else to change their beliefs and to accept mine and come in line with my views. Recently, I was watching Netflix, as you do. And there was this series on David Attenborough and his kind of take on where we need to go as people on earth to see this earth sustained.

And he talks about how to care for the world and how we should respond. And at the end of it, he has this very strong plea. Sorry, I'm going to give you the punchline. You get two punchlines in one night. But it's worthwhile. He has this very strong plea.

He's like, what we need to do as a society is to eat less meat and have less children. And he literally says, like, we should only have two kids. The whole world, we need to not overpopulate the earth.

The earth can't take too many people. So there's this call to unite for the kind of purpose of unity and for the purpose of the planet. So no meat and only two children.

And I'm like, we've got four. What do we do now? The call to unity is a call to submission to someone's view.

[ 7 : 03 ] And the question is, how do we work out who we submit to? I don't know if you've ever thought about that. How do we work out who we submit to? See, all of us submit at all sorts of points in our lives.

We generally submit to traffic lights. When they're red, we should stop. If we don't, we can try to not submit. But generally, it will end badly if we don't do that. We submit to road rules, to laws, to our boss's requests.

And the question is, how do we work out who and how we submit? In society's quest for unity, where does God fit into this picture of unity?

If there is a God, and I think there is, how does submitting to the government around us fit in with submitting to Him? Well, in this section of God's Word, the Apostle Paul has been convinced that Jesus lived, that He died, and that He rose from the dead.

That Jesus is the King over all the universe, and He's the King over you and me. And if you're here today thinking about the things of God and what it means to be a Christian, this is one of the key points of Christianity.

[ 8 : 12 ] Jesus is the King. He's the one who made the universe. He's the one who sustains the universe. And that's a conclusion that Paul came to when he met the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus.

And we hear about that in the passage just after the bit that William read for us. And it's a conclusion that so many of us have come to here as well, that Jesus did live and die and rise again. That He is God the Son, and He's coming back to judge the living and the dead and to rule the world forever.

So how do you decide who will be King in your life? When David Attenborough tells you how to act, when your family and friends and different cultures tell you a certain way of doing things, when the government tells you you ought to do things, and yet you've got the true and living God who you were convinced is the ruler of this universe.

What happens when society and government disagree with what God has said? What happens when they make it hard for us? What happens when they make it easier for us? Should we accept the benefits that they give us?

As we get to this next installment in the story of Acts, we see a clash of worldviews, a clash of religions even, a clash between the sacred and the secular.

[ 9 : 22 ] So come with me. If you've got Acts there, you can keep it open. There'll be some verses on the screen. The first point I want to talk about is Paul's gospel grit, I've called it. Paul's gospel grit. Paul's just left Miletus.

He's following the, farewelling the Ephesian elders there and the church leaders that he spent the last three and a half years with, knowing he was heading to Jerusalem, knowing he was walking into massive persecution.

Look at Acts 21 verse 1. After we tore ourselves away from them, we set sail straight for Kos, the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara.

Finding a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we boarded and set sail. After we sighted Cyprus, passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria and arrived at Tyre, since the ship was to unload its cargo there.

We sought out the disciples and stayed there seven days. Through the Spirit, they told Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Now you get to this bit here and you're like, ooh, what's that?

[ 10 : 24 ] He's going through these places. He's doing God's work. He's taking the news of Jesus to the nations and the Gentiles, the non-Jewish nations around them. And we get this part where God speaks through the disciples by His Spirit.

And He tells them that Paul's going to suffer persecution. Knowing what is going to happen, knowing that the God, the Spirit, has spoken through these disciples, Paul decides to go anyway. It's weird. Often we think God will tell us things or reveal us things, and then we should kind of listen. He tells us there'll be great suffering ahead. He's telling us that so that we don't go into the suffering. But no, Paul. It doesn't seem that Paul changes the plans at all.

And the key thing to recognize here is just because God reveals something will happen, doesn't mean He wants us to avoid it. Just because God reveals something will happen, does not mean He wants us to avoid it.

It's going to become really important to understand. When Paul arrives then at Caesarea, Luke tells us that he stayed at Philip the Evangelist's house. And Philip the Evangelist, we're told, has four daughters who prophesy.

[ 11 : 35 ] And I think the intention of Luke telling us this is to show us that everyone is telling Paul what's going to happen when he gets to Jerusalem. It's not going to be good. He's going to face great suffering and persecution.

Everyone around him is speaking and prophesying and encouraging him. Paul, it's going to be hard. Paul, it's going to be horrible. And it's even God speaking through those that are around him that say it. Then we meet Agabus.

21 verse 10. Have a look with me. After we'd been there for several days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. He came to us, took Paul's belt, tied his own feet and hands and said, this is what the Holy Spirit says.

In this way, the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him over to the Gentiles. When we heard this, both we and the local people pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.

Now, the first thing we need to say here is that this is not the normal way that God speaks to people. Like, don't think that, you know, God is going to bring someone along one day at church or after church today you should go out because you've got a feeling about what's going to happen and you think God's telling you something.

[ 12 : 42 ] So you rip off your belt or someone else's belt, worst case, and you tie their hands and legs up and you say, look out, you know, Satan's trying to bind you or something like that. This is not normal. This is not prescriptive.

It's not telling us how we should act. But it's descriptive saying here what actually happened. Look at verse 12. When we heard this, both we and the local people pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.

They've heard this news that God has spoken through Agabus in some way and they've seen the persecution that's coming. But then Paul breaks out in a song.

Now, one of my favorite singers of all time is coming to New Zealand in December. Elton John. I really like him. I don't know if you're an Elton John fan or not. Is anyone an Elton John fan? Oh, small, small hands.

Don't tell anyone else. Yeah. Well, I found the original source of one of Elton John's songs. Have a look. Acts 21 verse 13.

[ 13 : 41 ] Paul replied, What are you doing weeping and breaking my heart? For I'm ready not only to be bound but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. Paul broke out saying, Don't go breaking my heart.

Right? Elton John wrote that. He said, Don't go breaking my heart. What are you doing weeping? I'm breaking my heart for this. For I'm ready not only to be bound but to die. Everyone's saying, Don't do it.

It'll be hard. Don't do it. It's going to help you. You're going to suffer. Paul says, Bring it on. For the gospel needs to be spoken clearly. The news of Jesus needs to go out.

He's so captured by who Jesus is and what he's done. He's so amazed at what is to come in the new creation. And that the most important thing in the universe is that people come to know Jesus. And for him to be glorified that he is willing to give up everything to be bound and to die.

Sometimes I'm too afraid to talk about Jesus with my friends who don't know him. Sometimes I pull back from sharing the news of Jesus with my family because they think it's a bit odd.

[ 14 : 48 ] Some of them. Not my parents but others. My friends I hold back on and I hear what Paul did and I'm a little bit ashamed. I don't know about you. But I'm ashamed that I see Paul's boldness to talk of Jesus no matter what the cost.

And I struggle myself to do that. If you are here today thinking through, man, is this Christianity thing real? Recognize here that this man was sane. He gave up everything to point people to someone he was convinced died and rose again.

The core of the news of the gospel is that Jesus really lived. He really died. He really rose. And people throughout human history have been willing to give up everything and not just a small amount of them. It's generation after generation after generation.

But for those around Paul, they display, well, a lack of confidence in what the gospel is doing. They put out a warning to Paul.

Maybe it was because of the warning sign that God had given them. But look at verse 14. Acts 21, verse 14. Since Paul would not be persuaded, those around him, we said, no more except the Lord's will be done.

[ 16 : 06 ] They gave up. They've been trying to convince him, don't do it, it'll be hard. But they're like, oh, well. But here's the thing. Look carefully at what it says. They recognize the Lord's will will be done. Just because God revealed the suffering that was ahead doesn't mean avoiding it was God's will.

In fact, the opposite. Luke shows us these things to show Paul knew what he was going into. He wasn't naive. He wasn't like, oh, I don't think there'll be much suffering. It'll be great. Surprise. Guys, God told him in so many ways through so many people and he displays such trust in God. He displays what I've called gospel grit.

That determination to stand for Jesus. To live like our master, sacrificially and wholeheartedly. Knowing the suffering that proclaiming Jesus will bring.

So Paul entrusts himself to God. It makes me ask, am I prepared to suffer for the spread of the kingdom? Just because Paul suffered doesn't mean we will every day.

[ 17 : 10 ] But it's interesting that in 2 Timothy, Paul says these words. In fact, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. If we're following one who they pin to a cross and crucified, we must not think we will be friends with the world.

But the world will love what we have to say. That they'll think, oh yes, this is great. There's another king whose name is Jesus and I want to serve him. No, that's not the reality of the world around us. And it never will unless God draws them to himself by his spirit and through his word.

Well, the second thing we see in this passage, is a great celebration of what God does through this gospel grit. I've called that gospel growth.

Gospel growth. Have a look at Acts 21 verse 18. The following day, Paul went in with us to James. And all the elders were present. Now this is James, Jesus' brother.

He's in Jerusalem. After greeting them, he reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard it, they glorified God and said, You see, brothers, how many thousands of Jews there are who have believed?

[18:23] And they are all zealous for the law. As a side note here, you see what happens when Paul comes in. They actually celebrate what's been going on. And I love how you guys today have celebrated these seven baptisms.

People giving their lives to Jesus, standing firm to say, Yeah, I serve him. I'm united with him. But I think sometimes we can be, well, our culture here in New Zealand is to hold back on celebrating. We value humility so much that we kind of rob God of his glory because we don't want to speak of the way God has worked in our lives. Though he's seen people come to know him and grow in him. And actually, being humble is actually quite arrogant.

Because if we think, I don't want to boast, well, we're thinking that it had something to do with us in the first place, aren't we? We're thinking, I don't want to tell her what God's done because it'll make me look good. We're like, God speaks through donkeys like me and you.

So no, we should celebrate because God deserves to be glorified. We should celebrate God's work, not ours. We should talk of what he has done and what he is doing and the hardships and growing us and changing us because he is an amazing God.

[19:28] And if we censor what we say, how is the world around us going to know who Jesus is? How are they going to see how amazing he is? Why would they want to live for someone we never speak of? The early church celebrated God's work in and through them.

Paul comes in, he shares what's been going on. Many thousands of Jews have come and trusted Jesus and they're all excited. So let me ask you, how will you keep celebrating God's work in and through you?

God wasn't only working through Paul, but also through many of the Jews, many thousands of Jews who've believed. But that provided a problem. When the Jewish Christians hung out with the non-Jewish Christians, they worked out that they were very different, that their cultures were different.

These non-Jewish Christians, they had all sorts of food laws and the way that they would work and the Jewish Christians had all sorts of ceremonial washings and things that they did. How do you kind of be in the same space and have unity?

How are you called brothers and sisters in Christ? I imagine that's something you as a church of many languages and cultural generations think through far more than I have.

[20:42] But Paul wasn't going around telling the Greeks to become culturally Jewish. He wasn't saying, stop eating suvlaki and come now and celebrate bar mitzvah with us all and that's what we'll do together.

He wasn't doing that. He was saying, no, you can keep eating your suvlaki, your lamb. It's great, brilliant. But there's a new king and you've got to see who this king is. That's not the gods of the nations around, the gods of fertility and the gods of great blessing that all of your national people bow down to and think are controlling the world.

There's one true and living God. But he also had to be clear as he was talking to the Jews that he wasn't saying, hey, we want you to be like these Greeks who've become Christians.

Jews, you've got to eat suvlaki to be a Christian. And stop all those old cultures that you have and those things and traditions of those ceremonies. You've got to get rid of all of them altogether. And so there's this clash of the cultures.

Look at verse 21. But they've been informed about you. This is those around about Paul. That you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to abandon Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or to live according to our customs.

[21:56] So here we have this clash of cultures. People are saying, you're telling them not to be Jewish anymore. So how do we act when there is this clash of culture? Well, we act with gospel

wisdom.

And that's my third point tonight. Gospel wisdom. Look with me at what happens in verse 23.

Therefore, do what we tell you. We have four men who have made a vow.

Take these men, purify yourself along with them, and pay for them to get their heads shaved. Then everyone will know what they were told about you amounts to nothing, but that you yourself are also careful about observing the law.

So what should we do when our cultures clash? We should shave our heads and we should get together then everyone will be fine, right? No. What was going on here? Well, these men were making what was called a Nazarite vow.

Saying, hey, we're going to abstain from a number of things to dedicate ourselves to God. It was a particular Jewish custom. And so they're saying, hey, what Paul's saying is actually show them that you're submitting to this Jewish custom, that you've not thrown that away.

[ 23 : 01 ] Verse 25. So here Paul acts with wisdom, not trying to change culture, but to live for Jesus.

These things aren't wrong, like eating food that had been sacrificed to idols. There's nothing wrong with it. There's no real God. It hasn't kind of tainted the food that is there.

But they were saying, hey, what you should do is, rather than cause a stumbling block for others, you Gentile Christians, maybe abstain from doing that. Keep yourselves from that so that others don't think, oh, they're worshipping idols.

And so verse 26. So Paul submitted to these Jewish customs and he brought these people with him to show that they were happy to do that as well.

Now naturally, I hate giving in. I don't know about you. I don't know if there's a stubborn streak in you as well. Probably not. It might just be me. But when I know that I don't, you know, there's nothing wrong with eating pork.

[ 24 : 20 ] But I'm around someone who thinks that there is. I still want to eat the pork because I love bacon. And I'm like, I want to stand on my rights to eat that bacon and not kind of cause them to stumble. And I think, that's just weak.

I want to show them that all foods are fine and clean and God was quite clear on that. And so my natural tendency is to say, no, it's fine. I'm going to stand on my rights and have what I can have to its fullness.

Part of suffering for the gospel means working out where we can deny our rights. Do you remember what Jesus did? Philippians 2, he didn't consider equality with God something to be sought after, but made himself nothing.

Taking on the nature of a servant, he emptied himself to the point of death on a cross. The creator of the universe allowed his creation to nail him to something he made. He sustained the heartbeats of those that were putting the nails in his hand.

Why? So we would not stumble in our sin. So that the solution for our rebellion against God could be placed on him that we could be forgiven.

[ 25 : 25 ] Jesus didn't stand on his rights and neither did Paul. And it's an encouragement for us as we work together for unity, not to need to stand on our rights, but work out what really matters. To love those around us, to be understanding of their cultural worldview and where it doesn't cause us to sin or them to sin, to be okay with that and not feel like, ah, I think it's wrong just because I don't like it or it's not what my culture or custom does.

And to not stand on my freedoms, but to look where I can lay down my life. In 1 Corinthians chapter 9, Paul says this and summarizes it really clearly.

Although I am free from all and not anyone's slave, I've made myself a slave to everyone in order to win more people. To the Jews, I became like a Jew to win Jews.

To those under the law, I like one under the law, though I myself am not under the law, to win those under the law. To those who are without the law, like one without the law, though I am not without God's law, but under the law of Christ, to those without the law.

To the weak, I became weak in order to win the weak. I've become all things to all people so that I may, by every possible means, save some. Now I do all this because of the gospel so I may share in its blessings.

[ 26 : 43 ] You get the complexity, but what he's saying is, I'll do whatever I can except sin so that people might hear the news of Jesus. I need to keep thinking more clearly and carefully about what

the Bible says is cultural and what is not and what things I'm just standing on because they're what I prefer or they're my cultures or customs.

At the same time, I need to make much of, not my culture and customs, but make much of the king who's died for me because that is the center of all Paul does. I do all this because of the gospel so I may share in the blessings, so I might see others come to know Jesus.

So he uses gospel wisdom to proclaim the truth of Jesus in the middle. But gospel grit that produces gospel growth, that's used with gospel wisdom, is going to result in what I've titled gospel pain.

That's the fourth point tonight. Because people naturally don't want to change. As Paul uses his wisdom in this instance here, people probably from Achaia come and they stir the crowd.

This Paul guy, we don't like him, we want to make it hard for him. They don't care about Jesus.

They just want their cultural norms to continue. They want stuff to look the same and to stay the same. And so they want Paul dead.

[ 28 : 06 ] They're willing to kill this guy because he's challenging the way they do stuff. We never think like that, do we? When people challenge the way that we think or they've got different customs, we don't go, ah, I'll just be dead to me.

Sometimes I do. But here they really wanted him dead. So they make up some lies about Paul.

They brought some Greeks into the Jewish temple, which he didn't.

It was all a lie, we're told. But what's interesting here is when Paul's about to be killed from the religious people, those who are supposedly Christians, supposedly Jews, it's the secular authority that God uses to save him.

That's odd. God is able to work through many ways. Now, Paul, he knows Jesus is king, but he also submits to the rulers and authorities. He knows Romans 13 that talks about that we're to submit to the rulers and authorities because he wrote Romans 13.

He knows it, right? It's not like he forgot it. Romans 13 verse 1, let everyone submit to the governing authorities since there is no authority except from God. And the authorities that exist are instituted by God.

[ 29 : 13 ] So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command. And those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. So Paul, in this instance, submits to the ruling authorities.

Look at what happens. Verse 37 of chapter 1. As he was about to be brought into the barracks, Paul said to the commander, am I allowed to say something to you? The commander replied, you know how to speak Greek?

Now, the New Testament's written in Greek. This is written in Greek. But Paul's probably speaking in Aramaic or Hebrew, one of those two. But here he said it in Greek. Am I allowed to say something to you? The commander's like, what?

This guy knows Greek. That means he might be Greek. This is odd. Aren't you the Egyptian, he says, who started a revolt some time ago and led 4,000 men of the assassins into the wilderness? Paul said, no.

Or in other words, I'm a Jewish man from Tarsus of Sicilia, a citizen of an important city. Now, this is big. He's a citizen of Rome. They can't do this.

[ 30 : 11 ] They can't beat and flog a Roman citizen. That's the law. Now, I ask you, let me speak to the people. And so here, Paul appeals not to God's authority. He could say, God is king over all and he says, whipping me is bad.

Don't do it. That's wrong. I'm going to push my view. How dare you push that on us? You shouldn't do it. No, he appeals to the authority of the state. He's wise. He recognizes what they do with him is up to their rules.

Oh, they'll be judged by it in the end when Jesus comes back as the true and living God and judges all our thoughts and actions and deeds. We'll all be held to account for how we've acted. But here and now, before the return of Jesus, Paul speaks to the government where it doesn't cause him to sin.

Verse 40. After the governor had given permission, Paul stood on the steps. They stopped biting him and bending him. He gets to speak to the people. He stood on the steps and motioned with his hand.

I don't know what the hand motion was. It might have been like, shh, or come in. I don't really know. We're not told. But there was a great hush. And then he addressed them in Aramaic. Remember, they're Jews.

[ 31 : 14 ] And so now there's this great guy who's been sharing the news of this Jesus. And they're like, we don't like this. You're ruining our customs. You're telling Jews to kind of come and trust Jesus, the true and living God. But then he speaks in their heart language in Aramaic.

Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense before you. When they heard he was addressing them in Aramaic, it became even quieter. This guy knows our customs. Using gospel wisdom to work out how he acts, he takes stumbling blocks along the way out and helps people to see who Jesus is.

Then Paul outlines his conversion story of who Jesus is. And he does it in Aramaic like a Hebrew. And right here, Paul's using all sorts of gospel tactics.

He mentions all sorts of things to help people to understand that this Jesus is the promised king, God's ruling saviour who will come and who's died and has risen again.

And it goes really, really well. They're like, this guy's Aramaic because it's lining up with all their stories and all their customs. They're like, this is great. Until he says, and God sent me to the Gentiles, the nations around that they might be saved too.

[ 32 : 19 ] Like, what? Them? We hate them. Let's kill you again. Friends, the world is fickle. The world around us don't think that they will think with logic.

It was so ingrained in them to hate the nations around them that they can't be part of the people of God. And so they get so angry that they want to kill him again. The secular commander brings him back to the barracks.

He's about to flog Paul to work out what's happening. And then Paul appeals to his Roman citizenship. Look at verse 25. As they stretched out Paul for the last, it's about to happen, right? Slow motion. He's about to get whipped. Paul said to the centurion who's about to whip him, is it legal for you to scourge a man who's a Roman citizen and uncondemned?

And the guy's like, in his head. He's like, no. When the centurion heard this, he went and reported it to the commander. So he stopped.

[ 33 : 15 ] He's not going to do it. Saying, what are you going to do for this man's a Roman citizen? Like, we can't whip him. We can't do it. This can't happen. The commander came and said, tell me, are you a Roman citizen? Paul's like, yes.

The commander replied, I bought this citizenship for a large amount of money. In other words, the commander had become a Roman citizen because he paid for it. He had heaps of money and that's how he got in. He paid for his citizenship. And Paul says, the classic words that trump them all.

I was born a citizen. Yo. None of this citizenship, permanent residence junk. I was born here.

So those who are about to examine him, verse 29, withdrew from him immediately. The commander too was alarmed because he can't do it. When he realized Paul was a Roman citizen and he had bound him, he's like, man, I have stuffed up here.

Notice Paul doesn't appeal to belonging to the king of the universe. He uses all sorts of tactics and differences to see the word of the gospel go out, to get himself in a position where he's going to be able to speak to the emperor in some ways and have a word into the secular world about who Jesus is and what he's done.

[ 34 : 31 ] And so at this moment, he then brings up a hot button issue amongst the crowd. He sees out there that some of them are Pharisees. That's there from Judah, from Jerusalem. And some of them are Sadducees who are from the northern parts.

They don't think the resurrection is a real thing, whereas those Jews that were Pharisees did. They had this big thing. That's why they called the Sadducees sad because they didn't believe the resurrection.

So they were sad, you see. That's the dad joke of the day. And so he turns them into an argument amongst themselves. They're going, Jesus rose. They're like, no, I mean, we're going to rise.

They're like, no, we're not. Yes, we are. No, we're not. They're like fighting each other and Paul just kind of quietly walks away. He has gospel wisdom and uses gospel tactics so that people might see who Jesus is.

It's really helpful to see the way he works here. The last point I want us to land on tonight is to understand these gospel tactics and the way we can think about doing what Paul did, pointing

people to Jesus no matter what the cost, no matter how hard the sacrifice is.

[ 35 : 33 ] There's a few things we can understand. Now, these aren't commands that are given to us in Scripture, but we can recognize the way that we interact with the world around us from the way that Paul has. The first thing is that we operate under the law before Jesus' return, not above it.

Where the law is not causing us to sin, we obey the law like Paul does. He asks for permission. He speaks and stands on some of the rights that he has that are given to him by birth, not by God, although God is in control of those authorities.

Some will say that because Jesus is king now, we ignore all pretend kings on earth, but that's not how Paul operates here. It's just not what goes on. He willingly submits himself to the authorities that God has put in place.

He trusts God where it doesn't cause him to sin. And God uses that to speak the news of Jesus, even though it's costly. But he's also shrewd.

He waits for the right moment to let them know he's a Roman citizen. He doesn't say it straight away. Oh, by the way, you can't even take me at all. He lets them take him, bound him, about to whip him, and then they're like, uh-oh, what have we done?

[ 36 : 40 ] And so now they owe him something. He's shrewd in the way that he acts. He thinks carefully about what he's doing and why. He knows the realities of what's going on with the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and so he turns them against one another so they've got a bigger argument and they forget about him.

It makes me ask the question, how committed are we to seeing people in the world around us recognize who Jesus is? Will we use the shrewdness that we've been given, not sinning by any way, shape, or form, but thinking wisely about how we can use the opportunities God has given us to point to him?

Opportunities at work, opportunities when things go bad for those around us. Will we actually go, hey, can I pray for you? When things happen in our family, in our families who don't know Jesus, can we offer to pray for them or offer to speak of the hope that we have and why we have it?

Will we look for those opportunities of cultural difference and speak about what really matters for us? Will we lay down our differences? Not just so that we'll have this unity where we all kind of hold hands and are happy, but so that people might see what is at the heart of our unity is Jesus.

It'll come with suffering, speaking for Jesus. It'll come with loss and hardship and pain. With a cross behind us, suffering is in front of us.

[ 38 : 05 ] We just sung that a moment ago, didn't we? And the reality is that's what we're called to. That's what Paul is called to. If you're a Christian, that's what we've signed up for. And our years on earth, we get so kind of caught up with this, you know, 70, 80, 90, 100 years at best.

About a blink of an eye in eternity, but we so often spend our time worrying about how comfortable we are here and now. That's what I do. Rather than how many people might hear the news of Jesus.

What opportunities can I take to speak out? That's what we need to recognize that God has us here for. You know, as Peter writes his letters to the church, and people are going, where is this return of Jesus?

Why hasn't Jesus come back yet? Is he actually going to come back? Peter tells us why Jesus hasn't come back yet. And do you know what he says? He has not yet come back because God is being patient, wanting more people to come to repentance.

Jesus' judgment hasn't come because God is waiting for more people to come and trust his son. The thing that is holding up the return of Jesus is that not enough people yet trust in him.

[ 39 : 17 ] So what are we doing with our lives and our time and who we are and the opportunity God has given us, but to be living for people to recognize the king. Gospel grit produces gospel growth, which results in gospel pain, through which we need gospel wisdom to live with gospel tactics so that Jesus might be central in all we do.

Why don't you join with me and ask God now to shape your life that you might live for Jesus and point to him. Let's pray. Father God, tonight as we see the way that you have worked through the Apostle Paul, that your word does its work by your spirit and even despite knowing of the suffering that's before you, Paul continued on to proclaim your word.

We ask that you would help us to live for you no matter what the cost, knowing it will hurt. You know the areas in our lives that we pull back from proclaiming Jesus, that we censor our speech, that we

fit in with the world around us rather than use the opportunities and time we have to speak of your son.

So we ask that tonight. As we go out into your world that you would challenge us by your spirit to live for you. You might encourage us to speak to one another and share where we feel like we're not putting Jesus central, where we could be trained and equipped and built up, where we could be able to speak the truth of who Jesus is more.

Tonight, Lord, we pray for those of us who don't yet know you. We ask that you would clearly show how amazing Jesus is, that Paul was willing to give up his life and the blessings of here and now for something that is far greater.

[ 41 : 03 ] Lord, we long for that reality to be in the lives of those we know and love who don't yet know you and so we ask you would send us into your world to have true unity in Jesus, that we'd be willing to lay down our lives no matter what the cost so that Jesus might be seen as he is, the King and Saviour of the world.

Pray this in his great name. Amen.