

3. Called to Account

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 July 2012

Preacher: Andy Gemmill

- [0 : 0 0] So, on the next day, Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city.
- Then at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in, and Festus said, King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer.
- But I found that he'd done nothing deserving death, and as he himself appeared to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him.
- Therefore, I've brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after we've examined him, I might have something to write, for it seems to me unreasonable in sending a prisoner not to indicate the charges against him.
- So Agrippa said to Paul, you have permission to speak for yourself. Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense. I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I'm going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, especially because you're familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews.
- [1 : 1 8] Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently. My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews.
- They've known for a long time, if they're willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion, I've lived as a Pharisee, and now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day.
- And for this hope, I'm accused by Jews, O King. Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth, and I did so in Jerusalem.
- I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.
- In this connection, I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. At midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun that shone around me and those who journeyed with me.
- [2 : 4 1] And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.

And I said, Who are you, Lord? And the Lord said, I'm Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose. to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you've seen me and to those in which I'll appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.

For this reason, the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day, I've had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here, testifying both the small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass, that the Christ must suffer, and that by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.

And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, you're out of your mind. Your great learning is driving you out of your mind.

[4 : 26] But Paul said, I'm not out of my mind, most excellent Festus. I'm speaking true and rational words, for the king knows about these things. And to him I speak boldly, for I'm persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.

King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe. And Agrippa said to Paul, in a short time, would you persuade me to be a Christian? And Paul said, whether short or long, I would to God, that not only you, but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am, except for these chains.

Then the king rose, and the governor, and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them. And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, this man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.

And Agrippa said to Festus, this man could have been set free if he'd not appealed to Caesar. Amen. May God bless to us this reading of his word.

Well, please would you turn your Bible to Acts chapter 25. Over these weeks, we're spending just a few Sunday evenings in the less glamorous chapters of the book of Acts.

[5 : 41] A part of the book of Acts that's not that often read, not that often thought about, and almost certainly left out of your favorite parts of the Bible. But these are very important chapters indeed.

And without them, we will tend to have wrong expectations of what it is like to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in this world. I can't think of how many times I've heard someone say something like, oh, of course, back in the early days of Christianity, things were quite different.

In the early church, this. In the early church, that. In the early church, the other. Nearly always implying that things were much better back then.

more spectacular, more vital, more exciting, and that we've kind of lost something since that age. The flip side of that is the contemporary media image of Bible-believing Christianity, that it's full of wild claims and excesses and is totally out of touch with reality.

Christianity was in a better shape back then, and these days, well, it's just lost touch with how things really are. What I think we'll find is that the things we see in these chapters, far from being extraordinary, are everyday things.

[7 : 05] The things in these chapters are instantly recognizable to anyone with their eyes open. Consider for a moment a normal week's casual exposure to the TV news or the occasional newspaper.

Can you remember a week in which you personally did not hear about all of these? Political unrest in the Middle East, the corrupting effects of political ambition, human rights abuse, the difficulties of dealing with bureaucracy, and the uncomfortable relationship between politics and religion.

Is that not the stuff of everyday? When have these not been in your newspaper? Well, that's what we find in these chapters. All of those things. It's the stuff of everyday world news all the world over.

And this is the arena in which the gospel of Jesus Christ is the happening thing. And these are the difficulties that the messengers of the gospel have to negotiate all over the world every day in one form or another.

Now, if the book of Acts as a whole is about the advance of the gospel, from chapter 21 onwards, the story is about Paul the prisoner.

[8 : 32] Wonderful message for the whole world and an imprisoned messenger. These go together and it's very important that we get that, that these go together.

Wonderful message, imprisoned messenger. If we don't believe that they go together, we'll always be disappointed because we'll wonder what on earth is wrong with contemporary church life.

Why is the wonderful message making such little progress? But if we embrace the idea that these go together, wonderful message, imprisoned messenger, we will find that a tremendous relief because it's true to life.

Now, this evening we're looking at Paul giving a count of himself before these various officials. We'll spend most of our time in chapter 26, but it's important to get the drift of what's happened to this point.

So first, let me introduce you very briefly to the players in the drama from chapter 21 onwards. First, of course, the apostle Paul.

[9 : 38] He will introduce himself later on, so we won't give much time to him. He travels to Jerusalem in chapter 21 and is quickly arrested. He appears before a number of officials.

First, Felix, the Roman governor in Caesarea. He's governor from AD 52. We know from other sources. We meet him in chapter 24.

Second, Porcius Festus, his successor. He's known to have died in office in AD 60. We meet him in chapter 25. And that puts the events of these chapters somewhere in the AD 50s, around 20 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Third character, Herod Agrippa II, the last of the dynasty of the Herods. We meet him in chapter 26 along with Bernice, his oldest sister.

She was married to his uncle, but apparently lived with Agrippa, possibly incestuously, from AD 48 onwards. The history of the Herods is not a glorious one.

[10 : 53] These are real people in real history. Those are the characters. Now let me introduce you to the storyline in these chapters.

Paul arrives in Jerusalem in chapter 21. He is not flavor of the month in Jerusalem. Just turn back to 21-27, would you? Been there seven days.

When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, Help! This is the man who's teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place.

He even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place. He is not popular. And he's not popular because of his missionary work amongst non-Jews.

More of that later on. He's arrested and imprisoned in part for his own safety. In chapter 23, they move him from Jerusalem to Caesarea on the coast to take him out of reach of an assassination plot that they've heard about.

[12 : 04] In chapter 24, he's brought before Felix and the accusations of the Jews against him are read out. Felix is a typical politician.

He faces pressures on every side. Turn to chapter 24 and look at verse 25. On one hand, Felix is rather afraid of his prisoner.

As Paul 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'll summon you.

He's afraid of Paul. On the other hand, he wants to profit from Paul. He's looking for a bribe. Look at verse 26. At the same time, he hoped that money would be given him by Paul.

So he sent for him often and conversed with him. On the third hand, he wants to please the Jews. Verse 27. When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus and desiring to do the Jews of Eva, Felix left Paul in prison.

[13 : 17] Paul is not released. The problem is shelved. His successor can deal with it. He's a typical politician. And Festus, his successor, is just as much of a politician as Felix is.

He knows Paul isn't guilty of the charges against him. He wants to please the Jews in the same way. He tries to get Paul sent back to Jerusalem to undergo trial there.

But Paul says, no, no, no, no, no, no. This is Caesar's jurisdiction here. You are Caesar's man. I'm a Roman citizen. I'm appealing to Caesar. No way I'm going back to Jerusalem.

And let me say that all adds up to a very bad day at the office for Festus. If he releases Paul, he is going to have to face the wrath of the Jewish people.

If he sends him to the emperor without legitimate charges against him, he's going to have to deal with the wrath of the emperor. A typical politician's conundrum, that. In the nick of time, in the nick of time, King Agrippa rolls up on his doorstep.

[14 : 25] Agrippa, of course, is a Jewish king, but he's appointed to his position by the Romans. And so Festus has the opportunity to pass the problem on to somebody else.

What a relief that was, I imagine. And what we are looking at, therefore, is the encounter between Paul and Agrippa, the last of these three great encounters.

Now let me just step back from this storyline for a moment. Why do you think this slightly boring story of imprisonment and one trial and then another and then another?

Why do you think he gets so much airspace in this book? Isn't that a question? I mean, I've summarized it in five minutes. Why did the writer not summarize it in five minutes?

Well, I think it is because the charges against Paul are genuinely significant for the spread of the gospel. And of course, that's what this book is about, the spread of the gospel.

[15 : 27] Let's look at those charges again and look at chapter 25, verse 8. That's probably as good a summary of the charges as you'll find anywhere in this section. Here is Paul talking to Festus about what he's been accused of.

Paul argues in his defense, 25, 8, neither against the law of the Jews nor against the temple nor against Caesar have I committed any offense.

It seems that these are the three things he's been accused of doing. Teaching people not to keep the Jewish law. Disrespecting the temple in Jerusalem.

And offenses against Caesar. Probably this is to do with Paul being accused of as being a troublemaker. He seems to cause a riot wherever he does. He threatens the Roman peace.

Now, can you see that those are very damaging accusations if they can be made to stick? Is a Jewish person going to listen to Paul ever again if it becomes publicly known that Paul is against the law and the temple?

[16 : 41] It's going to be a problem that, isn't it? Is a Roman citizen going to listen to Paul if he gets the reputation for being anti-Caesar? No, probably not. Imagine respective Jewish and Roman parents sending their sons off to university.

Mr. and Mrs. Isaacson sending their son off to the university in Jerusalem. Whatever you do, don't go anywhere near those Christians, dear, says Mrs. Isaacson. that fellow Paul teaches people to disobey the law.

Is son Isaacson going to go anywhere near? No. Of course not. Or imagine Gentile parents sending their children off to the University of Ephesus to study there.

Don't have anything to do with those Christians, son. That Paul's a troublemaker. The empire will clamp down on anyone who follows him. Do you imagine that's going to help the spread of the gospel? Certainly not. If those charges can be made to stick and become public and endorsed, well, they're going to be problems.

They need to be answered. And with that in mind, let's turn back to chapter 26 and see how Paul answers these charges. Now, we haven't got time to deal with the whole of this chapter.

[17 : 59] So what I'm going to do is introduce you to the basic shape of Paul's defense just very briefly and then highlight three or four very important things about it.

So let me introduce you to the basic shape of the defense with a few short, sharp statements that he makes to King Agrippa. Number one, he says to Agrippa, Agrippa, you are acquainted with Judaism.

Verse three, you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. I'm glad about that. Number two, the Jews know, verse five, that I'm a Pharisee with a Pharisee's hope in the resurrection.

Verse six, you're acquainted with Judaism. The Jews know that I'm a Pharisee with a Pharisee's hope. Third, like the Jews, I used to oppose Jesus.

Verse nine, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. But, verse 12, Jesus appeared to me and in my darkness.

[19 : 23] And, verse 16, Jesus sent me to speak to others in darkness. Rise and stand on your feet. Verse 16, I've appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you've seen me and to those in which I'll appear to you.

Six, I did what I was told. Verse 19, I wasn't disobedient to the heavenly vision. And seven, verse 21, and that's why I'm here in front of you today.

It's a fairly straightforward argument. You're acquainted with Judaism. You know our controversies. The Jews know that I'm a Pharisee and I'm on trial for the Pharisees' hope.

Like them, I used to oppose Jesus. But Jesus appeared to me in my darkness. He sent me to speak to those in darkness. I did what I was told and that's why I'm here.

He just says what's happened and why it's happened. And he encourages Agrippa to make a judgment on that basis. It's a fairly straightforward argument.

[20 : 26] He just answers the accusations. That's the shape of the argument. Now, what are the main issues in this argument? I want to identify three characteristic marks of the genuine Christian messenger that spring out from this argument.

three characteristic marks of the genuine Christian messenger. Mark number one. He never says anything new.

Paul says that all the way through this chapter. He says, all I'm doing now is what God has always promised was going to happen.

And look at verse six. I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers to which our twelve tribes hope to attain as they earnestly worship night and day.

For this hope I'm accused by Jews, O King, the very ones who have the same hope. In other words, says Paul, there's nothing new about, newfangled about this resurrection idea that I'm talking to you about.

[21 : 40] There have been Jewish people in the past who look forward to that and there are Jewish people now who look forward to that, says Paul. What's new? Well, something's new.

Verse 15. The first man has now been raised from the dead and Paul has met him. Who are you, Lord? And the Lord said, I'm Jesus whom you're persecuting.

Again, look at verse 22. To this day I've had the help that comes from God and so I stand here testifying both the small and great saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass that the Christ must suffer and that by being the first to rise from the dead he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.

You see what he's saying? He says it repeatedly. I am only saying what the Jewish scriptures have talked about all along. There's nothing new about what I'm saying or doing.

Now this is a tremendously important argument. Right back at the beginning of Luke's first volume, the Gospel of Luke, Luke the writer tells the friend he's writing to that he's provided a carefully researched account so that his friend can know for certain that what he has heard is true.

[23 : 06] What a disaster it would be if Luke's friend Theophilus were left under the misapprehension that God's message has changed down the centuries.

Wouldn't that be a disaster? That this new Christian thing was something that Paul had dreamed up. Can I say today that people still say the very same?

When you get home, Google Paul invented Christianity and see how many hits you get. It is commonly believed that the Apostle Paul is the inventor of the Christian message.

The one who tweaked the events about Jesus into his own form of slightly anti-Jewish religion. Everything about Paul's argument here runs in the other direction to that.

God has always been saying the same thing. He said that to Abraham. He's always been promising what ended up resurrection at the end. He hasn't changed his mind.

[24 : 08] He hasn't changed his message. Now friends, there is something tremendously reassuring about that, is there not? That it doesn't matter where you cut the Bible story. The same promise is working.

The same message is working. The same hope is held out by the same God to everyone all the time. It's terrifically reassuring. If you take Christianity seriously, you're not buying into something newfangled that some bonkers Jewish zealot made up in the middle of his mental breakdown on a desert road.

That's what you'd have to think otherwise, wouldn't it? Isn't it? And I think this is a truth that needs to be stated again and again. There's nothing new in the Christian message.

It's the same message. So great is the tendency of organized religion to lose the message about Jesus that when people begin to see it for what it really is, it looks like a completely new invention.

I was brought up in the Church of Scotland. I was taken to church all my life until I was an early teenager. I don't think I really ever heard the good news of Jesus clearly explained in a sustained way so that I could understand it.

[25 : 26] When it began to dawn on me that Christianity was not about being decent and religious, but about being forgiven and coming to know God, it was quite important for me to be clear that I hadn't happened on something new and cultish here, but that I'd stumbled on what God had been saying all along, which of course I had.

God has been saying it all along, the same thing. First sign of a genuine Christian messenger, basically he's got nothing new to say.

The same thing that God has always been saying. And can I say that if you meet somebody who is offering you something that is new, something that's been secret up to now, but I've happened on and God has revealed to me, you can be quite sure it is wrong and you do not need to listen to it, which is a tremendous assurance really.

if it says it's new, just pay no attention with a good conscience and wander off. First sign of a genuine Christian messenger, he's got nothing new to say.

Second sign of a genuine Christian messenger, he says that all people are the same. In this case, that all people are naturally in the realm of darkness.

[26 : 49] I wonder if you noticed in this chapter the big dark light contrast that goes on all the way through. Verse 13, Paul is blinded by a bright light from heaven and he is sent to others who are in the same darkness, metaphorically this time, that he was.

Verse 17, delivering you from your people and the Gentiles to whom I'm sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light. Just as Paul, the zealous Jew, was in the dark about God, so all humanity is in the dark in relation to knowing God.

And so when Paul describes what he's done, he says he went to everyone. If everyone's in the dark, everyone needs to hear the message and that's what he says he did.

Verse 20, I declare it first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, and through all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, which basically means everybody everywhere. Now let me say there are many, many differences between human beings.

Rich, poor, low, high, powerful, weak, well behaved, badly behaved, rangers, Celtic, many differences between human beings. Too many to mention really, aren't there?

[28 : 11] But in the genuine Christian message, there is no distinction between people, in terms of knowing God. Everyone is in the dark, left to themselves.

And so, says Paul, my message is for everyone, without exception. And, verse 20, everyone has to respond the same way.

I declare to all these different people that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. Everybody has to do that, no matter what sort of person they are.

Now, can I just say that this is important in relation to the charges made against Paul. remember, Paul has been accused of teaching people to disobey the Jewish law. No, says Paul, I've always taught that everyone needs to turn to God from false things and show it in the way they live.

I'm not teaching disobedience, but obedience. And, he says, I teach that to everyone, doesn't matter who they are, because everyone's in darkness.

[29 : 28] Now, of course, that is why he's been arrested. Look at verse 21. He teaches everyone that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.

For this reason, the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. The reason that I was arrested in the temple was not that I didn't respect the temple, it's that the temple didn't respect God's message.

They seized me because of verse 20. In other words, they were angry, that I treated everyone the same. That's the problem that Paul gets from the Jewish people who oppose him.

They're angry that he treats everyone the same, Jews and Gentiles. Can I say it's very often the case that people who consider themselves privileged become very angry when treated like everyone else.

people. A couple of weeks ago here on Sunday morning, Dick Lucas was preaching. I've heard Dick talk about when in the early 1960s he started up the work that he's been involved in in London.

[30 : 40] He said that quite soon after he started his work in the city, he was on a train journey and overheard two business people talking about the work that he did.

Why is he in the city? What's he doing there? He should be in the east end with the poor, they need him there. Which is a way of saying we're different from them, we don't need what they need.

Our privilege delivers us from the message of this upstart preacher. Now that's exactly what happened to Paul here.

Paul says I haven't broken the law or disrespected the temple, I just treated everyone the same. And that's why I'm on trial. Now there are all sorts of versions of this privilege thing, all sorts of versions, again nearly as many as you can possibly imagine.

I've always been open and accepting of others, don't tell me that I need to be accepted by Jesus like everyone else. I've always tried to live an ethical life, don't tell me that I need to believe in Jesus to be safe.

[31 : 49] I'm a vegetarian, don't tell me that my need is as great as those eaters over there. I've always gone to church, don't tell me that I need to become a Christian. I remember one student in London telling me how proud he was to be a Welsh Baptist, but he seemed a long, long way from the knowledge of God.

We human beings have many things that we think of as advantages, and so easily we think of them as being advantages in relation to knowing God.

But in terms of knowing God we are all the same, all the same, left to ourselves, blind, deaf, dumb, stumbling around in darkness.

And the same response is demanded of all of us, that we turn around towards God. Start going his way rather than ours, and start trusting his saviour, Jesus Christ.

The authentic Christian messenger, he never says anything new, he says all people are the same, basically. And third, he really does believe it's for everyone.

[33 : 09] I wonder if you notice in this encounter with Agrippa, that it's not left at the, this is what I did, this is what people did in response, this is why I'm here.

It's not left at that level. Look at verse 26 following. The king knows these things, to him I speak boldly, I'm persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in the corner.

King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe. Agrippa said to Paul, in a short time, would you persuade me to be a Christian? Well, sure, all along, I don't care, but I would to God that not only you, but all he hear me this day might become such as I am.

You see, he's not prepared to leave it theoretical and distant and just a matter of his own defense. No, he's going to have a go at the king. Here is a person who believes his message.

Everyone is in darkness, everyone needs to hear the message, everyone needs to respond the same way, so why not the king? He's a person, is he not? So Paul has a go at him too.

[34 : 22] Now, of course, the king neatly sidesteps the challenge. In such a short time, would you persuade me to be a Christian? Oh, of course not. But the challenge is there, and it's a brave challenge, is it not?

It's a brave challenge. What about you, king? Says the prisoner. Caesar? In fact, so strong is Paul's conviction that he's already appealed to Caesar so that Caesar can get a listen too.

Now, bravery in front of people is, of course, a product of the work of the Spirit of God. All the way through this book, all the way through this book, there's a strong link between the Spirit-filling people and people speaking bravely.

But, at the human level, bravery in front of people comes from being really convinced that everyone is in the same boat.

The authentic Christian messenger is shown by the fact that he really believes the message is for all people, even the king. What does God do to take the message about Jesus to high officials in the ancient world?

[35 : 27] Well, he allows for a few riots to happen so that Paul is imprisoned. Paul may be in prison, but the message about Jesus is not. How else is the message about Jesus going to get to Roman governors and to the emperor?

How else? But through a prisoner. Here is the authentic messenger with the authentic message. He says, nothing new.

It's for everyone. And so it's for you too, O king. What are you going to do about it? Now, our time is gone. Let me make a couple of last reflections on this extraordinary chapter and this extraordinary speech.

First, let me reflect on the importance of making a reasoned defense. Don't you think it would be so easy not to bother to answer these accusations?

I mean, he's been in prison for more than two years, held by an unwilling to move bureaucracy. Don't you think he might get tired of saying the same thing to these people again and again and again and again with little hope that anybody's going to do anything very much?

[36 : 43] But you'll notice this is a careful and ordered defense of the charges against him. Why it is important to do that? Because the Christian message matters.

And one of the quickest ways to stop people listening is to allow incorrect information to be propagated.

Can I say that if you're having to give account of yourself and what you've done in front of others who are not that willing to hear, don't lose heart in doing that patiently.

it needs to be done and it matters. If you're leading your Christian union, you may have to give account to people in your school for what you're doing.

If you're in church leadership, you may need to give account for what your church has done to other people. Giving account might often feel like a waste of time, especially when there's this huge Roman bureaucracy which is just not going to budge much, or not quickly.

[37 : 56] But it's worth doing it, and Paul does it. It's worth doing it because the gospel matters, and because the reputation of the messenger matters for the spread of the gospel.

If you're having to give account, facing terrible bureaucracy, do not lose heart at doing that diligently and carefully.

It matters. Second reflection. Let me reflect for a moment on the wonderful truth that is the resurrection of the dead.

Paul is on trial here for the resurrection. Verse 8, why is it thought incredible by any view that God raises the dead? Verse 23, the Christ must suffer, and that by being the first to rise from the dead, he'd proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.

What a magnificent thing it is that the Christian hope is about resurrection from the dead. Think about it for a moment. Think of how devastating death is.

[39 : 09] Not just because it's sad and painful, but because it renders everything useless, pointless in the end. Death will get us all in the end.

I don't want to be morbid, just realistic. It's going to get me, it's going to get you, all of you. Think of your body. Think of how much effort you've gone to to look after your body all of these years.

Some of you have done it better than others. It's hard work, is it not, keeping it in decent shape? Is it getting any easier year on year? The battle against gravity and decay.

Let me assure you, as I assure myself, we will lose the battle in the end. The grave will swallow us and all the effort we've put into ourselves.

Think of all your hard work and your job and your career. It'll come to nothing in the end. Think of all you acquire. You won't own any of it in the grave.

[40 : 22] Neither will those who inherit it own it in their graves. Think of all you've achieved. Nobody will remember it very long.

Anybody remember your great-grandparents? Do you remember them? I don't think so. You probably don't even know what they did. So significant was it on a world scale.

Think of those you've loved, your husband, your wife. The grave will have them. Your children will be swallowed up in the end. Death wins every time in this age.

And it is therefore simply magnificent to read verse 22. I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass, that the Christ must suffer and that by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light, both to our people and to the Gentiles.

there is light on offer in this darkness. One has risen from the dead and holds out resurrection and life in a renewed world, in renewed bodies to all who trust him.

[41 : 45] It's magnificent. It's what God has always been promising from the very beginning. Everyone needs it. Rich, poor, high, low, powerful, weak, well-behaved, badly-behaved, Celtic, rangers.

The grave will have us all without exception. So what about you? What about you? Think you're different from anyone else?

Think you need resurrection life any more than any less than anyone else? Going to cheat death and judgment on your own, are you? What about you? You turned round from living without God yet?

Doesn't matter how long you've been in church, you turned round from living without God yet? Put your trust not in your advantages, but in what Jesus has done for you and holds out for you? What about you?

God? Let's pray together. Amen. I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass, that the Christ must suffer, and that by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light, both to our people and to the Gentiles.

[43 : 16] We thank you Heavenly Father for the example of the Apostle Paul here, we thank you that he had nothing new to say, simply restating all the things that you've always promised. Thank you that he considered everyone the same, and the message to be the same for everyone.

And thank you that he was urgent even with the King. We pray for ourselves, that we might not think of ourselves as different from anyone else in relation to you, in the dark, facing death and judgment without the work of Jesus for us.

And we pray that you'd help us with joy, each one of us, to turn around from the way we've been living, to turn towards living your way, and to gladly trust the work of Jesus for us on our behalf, without which we're left in the dark and facing disaster.

Thank you so much for sending him into the world, for his faithfulness to death on a cross. Help us please, not merely to come to know him, but to make him known to others.

For this we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.