

34. God is Working His Purpose Out

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: 31 January 2010

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Well, do turn with me, if you would, in your Bibles to the passage we read there in Acts chapter 23, which tells us that God is working his purpose out, even when it might seem that he isn't.

Some of you will know the old Victorian hymn, which begins like this, God is working his purpose out as year succeeds to year. God is working his purpose out, and the time is drawing near. Nearer and nearer draws the time, the time that shall surely be when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

But we can sing that, and we can believe that, because it is the clear promise of Scripture. But we don't always feel it, do we? Because, as we did sing at the beginning of the service, God often moves in such miscellaneous serious ways to perform his wonders, that we are sometimes left wondering whether, in fact, he is in control at all, or even whether he cares about this world and about our lives.

And one reason that Luke writes the book of Acts is to give us a window into how the risen Lord Jesus does go about working out his purpose in this world.

[1 : 20] How it is that the gospel shall be proclaimed in all the world to the very ends of the earth. That it will be so is certainly not in any doubt.

Remember Acts begins in chapter 1, verse 8. It's absolutely unequivocal, says Jesus, you will be my witnesses even to the very ends of the earth. Now the Holy Spirit was just as clear in Paul's own personal life that he must go to Rome.

Remember the last verse of the story last week, the Lord appeared again to Paul in chapter 23 and verse 11 and said, you must testify also in Rome.

And so we're asking ourselves, well how is God going to work that out? Well Paul himself doesn't know. Except that, as he said back in chapter 20, wherever that path takes him, the Spirit does assure him it will be a path of imprisonment and of affliction.

And he knew that as the apostle to the Gentiles, he had a unique personal role in God's plans. And yet he also knew that that was far from being a unique pattern among Christ's people.

[2 : 44] The suffering. The imprisonment. Remember back in chapter 14, he went all round the churches encouraging them and saying to them, through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

And he knew that it's in this way, in the way of much affliction and many adversaries, that they would also testify in all the world to the kingdom of God. And that they would also win others in the world for that kingdom.

Because Jesus had promised that himself. You will be hated by all for my name's sake, said Jesus. But by your endurance, you will gain your lives.

That is your eternal lives. Luke chapter 21, verse 17. And what Luke is showing us here in these later chapters of the Acts of the Apostles is how God's clear purpose for witness to the ends of the earth is being worked out through this man's ministry.

A ministry that Christ had sovereignly purposed would reach and must reach Rome, the very centre of the world. Now of course, Paul's apostolic ministry is in many respects, many of its particulars, it's unique.

[3 : 57] But of course, it's far from unique in its pattern. Remember, Paul wrote that to the Philippian church a little bit later on. It's been granted to us, he says, to all believers, that for the sake of Christ we should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Well, you see, many times you could have looked at Paul's personal circumstances and concluded, as many did, even believers, that God has deserted this man now.

Many times it seemed that way to many people, that either God was not working his purpose out any longer, or that Paul somehow had got himself out of God's will, wasn't any longer under the hand of God's blessing.

Because of the many dire situations that Paul found himself in often. And people said that, well, surely God wouldn't treat his true servant in a way like that.

He must have deserted it. That's a very common attitude. We still have that attitude sometimes, don't we? We think, well, God isn't blessing there at all.

[5 : 14] Look at all the problems that they're facing in that place. Surely, surely there's no smoke without fire. Surely it's all their fault. Surely God can't bless them. And we can think that of ourselves, can't we?

In the midst of many troubles, or trials, or times of disappointment. And that's why we need our Bibles. To remember what people said about, well, Job.

Remember his friends? In his calamity? And they were wrong. And of course, what people said about Jesus. God was working his purpose out there, even when it seemed like he wasn't.

When it seemed the very opposite in Jesus' trials, in his scourging, and even in his crucifixion. And that's what Luke's story is showing us once again right here, for our encouragement and for our strengthening.

How does God work out his sovereign plan and purpose for witness to the ends of the earth with his name? How does he do it through his people? And how will he work that purpose out through us, through our own personal lives?

[6 : 25] Well, we're to look at the example of the Apostle Paul, and we're to ask ourselves, this God of Paul, this God who is also my God, how is he working his purpose out here?

What is his game plan? What are the kind of moves that God makes? Can I get a hold of the tactics that this God of mine loves to use? You see, we need to get an instinct for this.

An instinct that can tell, as another hymn says, that God is on the field when it seems like he's most invisible. And that he is working his purpose out, even when it seems to us like he isn't.

So Luke says, look at Paul, and see what God is doing. See Christ's provision. And see his plan.

And see his patience. And you'll see that his purpose is unfolding, just as he promised. So Luke then first at chapter 23, verses 12 to 35, and see the effortless provision of Christ for his servant.

[7 : 37] These verses are all about plots and politics, but also about the providence of God. And what Luke is reminding us is that never can the worst plots of man or the wily politics of the world ever pose a threat to the infinite resources of our God's marvelous providence.

He can provide, and he will provide, effortlessly for his servants. Look at verse 12. The first thing we see here is the plot against Paul.

Plots weren't new for Paul, of course. They were a constant feature of his ministry. Real plots against both his message and his life. Remember back in chapter 20, verse 3, he had to change his travel plans because of plots of the Jews.

They were relentless. They were very real. They were very painful. Remember he spoke in chapter 20 about the tears of the trials that he endured constantly because of the plots of the Jews.

And this plot in verse 12 was deadly serious. Look, it was a vow for the death by more than 40 men. And they went to the chief priests and the elders for their support.

[8 : 52] That rings a bell, doesn't it? If you looked at Luke 22 or chapter 23 in Luke's first volume, the same chief priests, the same officers, involved in the plot to kill Jesus.

It's extraordinary power, isn't there, in religious bigotry and hatred. And we know that in our world today. But notice, and this is very important, notice when we use that word religious as if all religions were the same as people do today.

They are not. Nor is all religious zeal the same. There's all the difference in the world between the hatred that these men showed and the true martyr spirit of a Christian.

Paul, what did he say? I am ready and willing even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm willing to lose my life to make his name known, to make the truth about Jesus known.

But these men, they said, we're willing to do anything to kill so as to silence the name of Jesus. We need to be very clear about that today, don't we, when people just used that language of religious

fundamentalism as though it was all the same.

[10:06] It's all the difference in the world between a zealous Christian martyr who died for his faith in Jesus that others might live and the Muslim zealot who will kill for his loyalty to Muhammad.

The one who's willing to lose his life if necessary to kill others out of deep, deep hatred. Whereas the other is willing to give his life to save others motivated by deep, deep love for Christ and for other people.

Well, I guess these Jews here are rather like the fanatical terrorists we have today. Not men of peace but men of murder. Verse 15. We are ready to kill.

That's their watchword. And we are brothers and sisters in Christ that we pray for regularly who face plots just like these today just in the same way as Paul did.

This is not fiction. But this passage reveals a lot to us about politics as well. Look at verses 23 to 25.

[11:15] When he hears about the plot the tribune, Claudius Lysidus, his chief concern is to make political capital out of the situation for himself. No doubt he's still rather nervous about the fact that he had Paul in custody.

He had nearly very badly mistreated a Roman citizen which could have been a capital offence for him. But now, fantastic, he has a great opportunity to turn everything to his own advantage.

He can get rid of responsibility for Paul. He can dump the problem on Felix the governor. And at the same time he can buff up his own CV. He can boost his own promotion prospects.

And he paints himself, doesn't he, in a wonderful light in this letter that he writes. I am the perfect tribune, he says, acting with speed and alacrity to keep the Pax Romana.

What better could you get than that? Look at his letter, verse 26. I mean, this guy could really give Alistair Campbell a lesson or two in sexing up a dossier, couldn't he? This man was being lynched, he said, and I came upon him with my soldiers and I rescued him because I knew he was a Roman citizen.

[12:24] Oh, what a load of absolute rubbish. Yes, he'd rescued him but he'd put him in chains. He'd nearly had him stretched out for flogging. Of course, nobody would find out that anymore.

What a gift to get his retaliation in preemptively, as they say. And to be the hero. I discovered this plot. I'm such a vigilant, diligent tribune, you see.

And most excellent Festus, I send this man and his accusers to you, committed as I am, to the simple sword of truth and the trusty shield of Roman fair play, as somebody once said.

Well, he's a politician, isn't he, Claudius Lysius? He's milking this for all it's worth. Although that kind of rhetoric does sometimes come back to haunt, as we know. But plots and politics, that's the order of the day.

And it seems like Paul is just a pawn caught up in the midst of much bigger things, much more significant things. The tides of religion and the establishment and governments and lawmakers and so on.

[13:34] And so often, it's true, isn't it, that does seem how the cause of the gospel is today in our world. And we find ourselves asking, how can the gospel survive?

How can it grow in a world of such hostility, of violence, of such vested interests among men and nations? Increasing violence to Christians all around the world is something that's becoming so plain today.

I was just reading in the Release International newsletter about terrible oppression in North Korea and in Eritrea and in other places, Central Asia. Patrick Sugdeo of the Barnabas Fund was just writing last week of what he called the worst catalogue of anti-Christian violence over recent months that he could ever remember throughout his whole life.

And we ask ourselves, how can the gospel survive in this world? In our own nation, it's not yet physical violence, usually, but there is vehement opposition all the more aiming to squash the gospel under a steamroller of our government's secularizing agenda.

Biblical faith faces a relentless onslaught in the media and among politicians and among the lobbyists. Now, we know that today that the specific place of attack is, of course, in the realm of sexual ethics.

[14:59] So, for example, if you had the radio on a toll this week, you'd have been bombarded, as I was, by the BBC announcers going on and on gleefully telling us that now, whereas just 20 years ago more than 60% of our population regarded homosexual practices wrong, now it's only half that.

I wonder if you noted the language that was used. People now, they said, are more liberal, tolerant, sympathetic. They're all very nice words, aren't they? You don't want to be illiberal or unsympathetic or intolerant.

But those who take the Christian view still, although they're in a smaller minority, they are restrictive, disapproving, said the researcher.

And, of course, politicians are just like Claudius Lysias. They're quick to sense which way the wind's blowing and sniff out the votes of these particular lobbies. So we had Nick Clegg, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, just last week stating that his party's policy would be to force all the schools in our country, even faith schools, that they must teach children that homosexual practice is not only normal, but harmless.

And that's just a piece of political opportunism, just as false and as cynical as the Tribune's rewriting of the truth here in his letter in verse 27. But it's all around us.

[16:21] It was then and it is today. We can thank God for that defeat in the House of Lords on Monday, that latest piece of sinister oppressive legislation designed to stop Christian churches having freedom.

But we can be absolutely sure that it will not be long before such things are before the Parliament again. And so we ask ourselves, can the Gospel survive in a world of such hostility, of plots, and of the politicians, the politics of men?

So often we see, we feel, we're just like pawns in a great big game where we have no real earthly power, no real influence over the tide that is moving so steadily against us.

Can the Gospel survive in this world so hostile to it? Well friends, the answer that these verses gives us is an unequivocal yes.

the Gospel will survive and God's purpose will go on and it will do so effortlessly in the hands of our God.

[17:32] Because no plots and no politics can ever threaten the endless resources of God's great providence to preserve his saints and to provide for his cause.

In fact, as though to make that point unmistakably, God deliberately turns this whole situation around in a perfect demonstration of how even the weakness of God is stronger than man.

He shows us the way that he delights to use the weak things of this world to shame the wise and to use what is low and what is despised to bring to nothing things that are.

He foils this murderous plot of more than forty armed men by the mouth of one little child. Verse 16. The son of Paul's sister who came to the barracks to Paul and then to the tribune.

Verse 19. He takes the wee boy's hand and listens to his talk. Forty armed men bound with an oath to the very death, determined to murder in a suicide attack if necessary.

[18:42] Now what would we do? We'd call for the army, the police, the SAS, and the CIA and NATO. But God says, oh, are we boys all I need to do that?

There's a kind of a pattern there, isn't there? Remember Gideon? Just a few motley old crew against hordes of armed Midianites. Or Joshua?

Just a bit of a praise march around and around the walls of a great city that collapsed in their presence. Oh, Mordecai? The old Jew sitting at the gate, brought to nothing Haman's wicked genocidal concerns.

Remember a baby just born in the shed, the backwoods of Judea. Who is this nephew of Paul? I've no idea, neither of you, we never hear of him again. Don't know where he came from, don't even know if he was Christian. Maybe it was just a vestige of family loyalty, they didn't want to see their relative killed, but he was there.

[19:55] That's the point. God put him there with his ears open to do something for him. Just like I heard this week that he put somebody on a plane reading a Christian book, sitting next to somebody who was just thinking about the meaning of life.

When they saw this book being read and asked what it was, he gave it to that person and said, here, take it, here's my card. Later on, when she read the book and thought, I must find out more about this Christian faith, she rang him up and said, what do I do?

He said, well, you need to go on Christianity Explorer. There's a church where you live called St. George's Tron and they do a course. When she phoned up, we just happened to be starting the next course.

just the effortless provision of the risen Lord Jesus Christ for his servants, even in a world where plots and politics make us just feel like pawns in a game that we can't control.

Look at verse 35 where the chapter ends. Felix commanded Paul to be guarded in Herod's praetorium.

[21 : 10] The Jews were plotting, they wanted Paul's death. God provided Paul's deliverance, guarded by the armies of Rome. Who could be safer than that? The tribune was politicking, he was angling for his own performance, but it was Paul who was installed in one of the most magnificent palaces of the ancient world.

It was a palace that Herod the Great had built for himself at Caesarea. The effortless provision of Christ for his servants. And friends, God has not changed. He seems to relish giving the bookies a hammering, always.

There's a saying, you know, that they have, don't bet against the USA. I can't vouch for that. But what Luke is telling us certainly is don't bet against the Lord Jesus Christ, not ever.

You will never, ever win. in the end, he will always overturn the highest odds whenever his kingdom is at stake.

And we've seen that even in our own lifetimes. Like I said to some of you, I heard just the other week at a meeting that when Mao came to power in China, it's reckoned that there were about one million Christians in that land.

[22 : 23] now, after 50, 60 years of relentless oppression and all the missionaries thrown out, there's a hundred times that number at least. Don't ever doubt Christ's effortless provision for his gospel's advance.

But second, don't forget either Christ's established plan for his witness. Chapter 24 verses 1 to 21 are all about prejudice and perjury.

But they end up being about the proclamation of the gospel. And again, the point is unmissable. Man's prejudice and even perjury and false prosecution cannot halt the gospel of Jesus.

In fact, it does the reverse. It actually serves its proclamation, all according to the established plan of Jesus himself. Before we get carried away by the romance of Paul's escape here, let's not forget the reality of the stigma of an imprisoned apostle.

These things clearly unsettled the churches of the ancient world. Paul wrote later on from prison in Rome to the church of Philippi. He had to reassure the church that his imprisonment was really something that was happening for the advancement of the gospel.

[23 : 47] Because it seemed to them that it was the very opposite. of course it did. And many turned away from Paul as a result of that. Remember he wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1 that all in the province of Asia had deserted him.

Those people from the churches who walked and prayed on the beach with Paul at Troas and at Tyre, had they deserted Paul too? It seems so.

See it's not easy to be in the doghouse with public opinion and with the law and with the media and even with respectable church opinion.

To be portrayed as a fundamentalist extremist as no doubt Paul was even by some of those evangelical Christians that he had evangelized and taught himself that deserted him.

It's easy for us to be shocked that they would do something like that. But how would you react? Ask yourself this if one of your church leaders was imprisoned and accused of something desperately socially unacceptable.

[24 : 56] That's what Paul is being accused of. See verse 5 sedition against Rome. That was a heinous crime in the Roman Empire. Just as blasphemy and sacrilege against the temple was a terribly shocking religious crime.

I suppose our equivalent today would be something like child sexual abuse. You would find it a real challenge to your loyalty wouldn't you? If Bob or Edward or I were imprisoned accused of molesting children.

That's the kind of situation that we have here. That's the kind of situation Paul was in. But Luke is reminding us in the midst of that of two things.

First that this is an established pattern we ought to expect it. Go back later on and read in Luke's gospel about the plots and the trials of Jesus.

Jesus also was charged with blasphemy against God. Jesus also was charged with treason against Caesar and the state. And here we are all over again an exact repetition of that pattern.

[26 : 01] What did Jesus say? They hated me so they will hate you and do to you what they did to me. It's an expected pattern.

It's, if you like, it's the stamp of authenticity of the genuine article. A genuine servant of the Lord Jesus Christ is far more likely to find himself facing the world's accusations, however false they might be, than finding himself possessing the world's acclaim.

We should remember that. But second and even more pertinent perhaps is that this is the established pattern of Jesus for the very way that he will ensure his gospel is testified to in all the world.

Look back with me, would you, to Luke's gospel, to Luke chapter 21. It is worth us just looking at these verses here in Luke 21 verse 10 and following where he's telling his disciples what must take place after his resurrection and before his coming at the end of the world.

Luke 21 verse 10 He said to them, nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes and in various places famines and pestilences and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

[27 : 28] But before all this they will lay their hands on you. and persecute you. Delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake.

This will be your opportunity to bear witness. And you see, these things are no accident. They're not unanticipated. In fact, they're quite the reverse. Christ's established pattern for witness. Opposition and even organized legal opposition full of prejudice and perjury and false accusations, these things actually serve the established plan of God to testify to the truth of Jesus Christ in our world.

That seems so extraordinary to us. But it seems to be God's pattern. Remember what he said in Acts chapter 2. You crucified and killed Jesus at the hands of lawless men, yet you only did what was according to God's definite plan.

That's what we're seeing here with Paul arrested and arrayed with perjury and prejudice and false accusation. It's all Christ's established plan for witness.

[28 : 52] Now, their case, of course, is very weak. That's why they bring this professional QC to tell us, who gives this highly sycophantic speech to Felix and is totally hypocritical and smarmy in buttering him up.

Everybody knew the Jews hated Felix and Felix hated the Jews. But he lays out these charges of riots and sectarianism and blasphemy in verse 5.

Paul, by contrast, in verse 10, is polite to Felix, but not sycophantic, and he does lay out his defense. But his chief purpose is not notice to defend himself at all costs or to cut a deal, as he certainly could have done by appeasing his accusers or compromising.

Rather, he knows why he's there. He's there to testify. This will be your opportunity. And so he does testify publicly and clearly to the full gospel of the risen Lord.

Notice that. Verse 15. His message is all about Jesus and the resurrection, and therefore, about judgment, because the just and the unjust will stand before the risen Lord.

[30 : 07] And therefore, all people must have a clear conscience before God and man, as Paul himself, was able to say he did. He exposed their falsehood and lies.

Verse 19. Where are these witnesses you claim to have? And he asserts the whole gospel truth. Verse 14.

He says, this is simply the genuine truth of Scripture. This is biblical truth. Biblical truth, he says, proclaims the uniqueness of the risen Jesus and the universality of his judgment.

You see it again down in verse 25, as he speaks personally to Felix. The gospel of Jesus and faith in him is all about righteousness. It's all about self-control. It's all about the coming judgment.

There's no question at all about that.

And Paul was right to do as he did, to defend himself in public. Even though there are some rather falsely pious Christians who say, oh no, you should never defend yourself. Always just keep quiet.

[31 : 10] Well, Jesus says otherwise. Jesus says, no, this will be your opportunity for witness. As long as, of course, it is the priorities of the gospel that are up and missed in your mind, not preservation of yourself.

And that's Luke's point here for us to grasp. He wants us to see that God uses even such dreadful situations of prejudice trials, of perjury, of false accusations opinions as an opportunity for witness.

And that's how we are to see the many conflicts and the many episodes of opposition that we might face in our own lives. They're opportunities for witness.

And that's been a big challenge, a big help to me as I've pondered our own prison problems with the religious establishment of the Church of Scotland. Many of us who want to stand for the Orthodox faith and confess the unchanging apostolic gospel, we're on trial.

And we will be on trial repeatedly as our churches are. Trial in the press, in trial with the wider church. And we'll face temptations. One of them is to despair, to think that God really isn't working his purpose out among us anymore.

[32 : 29] Another is to capitulate, to resort to politics and pragmatism in order to compromise and keep the peace in our denomination. But perhaps we should rather remember Christ's established plan.

That when these things face us, it's our opportunity for testimony, to bear witness to the truth, the real truth about Jesus, who has power to save. Perhaps we're to see that God is working his purpose out in Scotland, not in spite of these things, but through these very things.

And likewise with the increasing opposition of our secular state and our government and the European Union. We're not to look for opposition, we're not to long for oppression, but we do need to remember, don't we, that when these things come, they're not outside God's power.

And it may be that they are his very plan. That it's our opportunity to bear witness. Perhaps get the kind of public hearing and listening that only a fearless martyr who's willing to lose everything for the sake of Christ will ever get.

And these things happen in our own experience. We'll be hearing from Scott Murray this evening, but just recently, as we know, we were praying for him as he had to face up to a committee of the hospital who were going to terminate his contract.

[33 : 57] But in actual fact, what happened was that he had opportunity to witness, isn't that right, Scott, in a way that perhaps you never had before. Perhaps that's how we're also to think about our own distressing personal circumstances that come to us at work or with family or whatever it might be, things that happen to us unfairly or falsely or bullying.

Perhaps we're to remember Jesus' words and remember his established plan that this is the way that Jesus' people will win the world for the gospel.

That'll change your perspective, won't it, big time, on the struggles that you're facing in your personal life, that we face as churches. It'll change our prayers, too.

We'll be praying much more like the church in Acts chapter 4. Lord, listen to their threats and allow us to keep on speaking your word. Keep on witnessing. Because that's what this is all about.

Our attitude will be a lot less doleful and a lot more cheerful as Paul seemed to be in verse 10.

Cheerfully making his defence. But finally, Luke points to us here in verses 22 to 26 to the extreme patience of God.

[35 : 23] The story of procrastination and profiteering. and yet really all about the pleading of God himself. Felix is the epitome of man's procrastination and also his corruption as he seeks to play with the gospel and to play with Paul in the hopes of earthly gain.

And yet his story only serves to highlight for us, doesn't it, the extraordinary patience, the great mercy of God in pleading with wicked and rebellious humanity. I think we may well come back to Felix because there's so much for us to learn from Paul's encounter with him.

But just notice for now what Paul's drawing us to see, what Luke's drawing us to see rather.

Because it's not just public proclamation of the gospel that's God's plan for this world.

It's not just public testimony that will be served by our distresses and difficulties. This is what Christ promised.

He'll send his gospel to the end of the world through these things but it's also a very personal thing. The personal persuasion of the gospel in the lives of men and women that that happens through in the most down to earth way.

[36 : 44] See God's plan is for the globalization of the whole gospel but not at all in the sense of depersonalizing it. That's what we see here. See Paul's held up for two whole years in Caesarea.

He's on his vital journey to Rome and he's held up. He's not suffering. Verse 23 is clear. He can see all his friends know that they benefit hugely from it but surely he's frustrated.

And Luke focuses us on this one man, Felix, and on his encounter with Paul. And it seems as though that seems to Luke to be in God's plan the chief reason for this delay.

This ruthless, pagan, immoral man that he should be met with the gospel in the mouth of the apostle Paul. He was a dreadful man. Drusilla was his third wife. She was age 16 I think when he stole her from another man when he fell in love for her. He was a horrible man.

[37 : 49] The historian Tacitus said that he exercised the power of a king with the mind of a slave. And yet God in his mercy brought the message of salvation into his very house.

And his extraordinary patience gave him the apostle Paul for two whole years to plead with him before the Lord Jesus Christ.

And all the time while he was just procrastinating not releasing Paul even though he knew him to be innocent because he wanted to keep a card to play a favor for the Jews.

And all the time he was just profiteering hoping for a bride from Paul because it seemed that he seemed to have access to all this money from the churches. All that time when Felix was profiteering and procrastinating God himself was pleading with his heart through Paul's witness. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Through all Paul's painful frustration and waiting came Christ's merciful pleading to this man.

[38 : 59] Not soft peddling, not carrying favor. Verse 25 is very clear. It was a straight gospel, a straight challenge to his heart. So challenging he said, go away, I can't stand anymore for the moment.

But on and on persistently, patiently for two whole years. Then, firmly disappointment. No happy ending. No breakthrough at all it seems, even with Paul as the evangelist. And verse 27, no release for good behavior.

Venal to the end, Felix departs and just leaves Paul in prison. It's like Joseph, remember? Faithful through all his time in prison, but forgotten.

And the devil's got their freedom. It's like Moses, went to aid and to serve his people that was left wandering in the desert for forty whole years. Has God forgotten how to help apostles and prophets and pastors and evangelists and faithful believers everywhere when all they see is frustration and delays and perplexity and apparent fruitlessness in the end?

[40 : 26] Has he forgotten them when he seems so silent and so slow? And when his purpose just seems to grind to a halt? And this is the Bible.

He's not slow. Not as we count slowness. But he is patient. Extremely patient. Amid the global march of his certain unstoppable kingdom, he will give time even to the felices of this world.

Time to be reached. The message of true mercy without which none can be righteous before the judgment of God. And friends, those that he calls to share in his mission of mercy need to learn to share in that extreme patience too.

I think Paul must have learned that in Caesarea. Because later on he wrote to the Philippians from another prison, I've learned to be content in all circumstances. I can do all of it through him who strengthens me.

And so can you. And so can I. That's what Luke is saying to us today. If we will learn what God is really like. And learn that he really does work his purpose out that way in this world.

[41 : 56] But yes, often we can feel and do feel just like pawns in the midst of plots and politics over which we have no control. And facing all kinds of prejudice and perhaps even perhaps even prosecution falsely on Christ's account.

And certainly facing plenty of perplexity and frustration as God seems so slow and so silent in not doing the things we long for him to do.

But that doesn't mean God is impotent or dead or that he's abandoned us.

It just means that our God is patient. That he's extremely patient as he pleads even the very worst of human beings.

And he has a plan. An established plan to give you and me opportunities to witness for his name as we also walk in his way facing the hostility, facing the shame, facing the scorn.

[43 : 02] He has a plan. And he will provide effortlessly and abundantly for the true safekeeping forever of every single one who bears his name.

You will be hated by all for my name's sake, said the Lord Jesus. But not a hair of your head will perish.

By your endurance, you will gain your lives. Because God is working his purpose out. Even it often seems like he isn't.

So let's remember that, shall we? Today. Let's pray. Lord, your ways are beyond our understanding, but your works are marvelous.

Help us, we pray, to see and to know the wondrous ways in which you work. That we also might be steady and faithful workmen and workwomen of God.

[44 : 11] as we follow you to the end. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.