

Providence and Proclamation

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[0 : 00] But now we come to our Bible reading, so please do grab a Bible and turn to the book of Acts. Acts chapter 23. Later on in the service, Paul Brennan will be continuing our series in this momentous book.

All about the continuing acts of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus. So Acts 23, and we begin reading at verse 12.

Hear the word of the Lord. When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath, neither to eat nor drink, till they had killed Paul.

There were more than 40 who made this conspiracy. They went to the chief priests and elders and said, We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul.

Now therefore you, along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly.

[1 : 12] And we are ready to kill him before he comes near. Now the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.

Paul called one of the centurions and said, Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell them. So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you.

The tribune took him by the hand and going aside, asked him privately, What is it that you have to tell me? And he said, The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him.

But do not be persuaded by them, for more than 40 of their men are lying in ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath, neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him.

And now they are ready, waiting for your consent. So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, Tell no one that you have informed me of these things.

[2 : 31] Then he called two of the centurions and said, Get ready, 200 soldiers with 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night.

Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor. And he wrote a letter to this effect. Claudius Lysias, to his excellency the governor Felix, Greetings.

This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen. And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council.

I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment. And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him.

So the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by the night to Antipatris. And on the next day they returned to the barracks, letting the horsemen go on with him.

[3 : 52] When they had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they presented Paul also before him. On reading the letter, he asked what province he was from.

And when he learned that he was from Cilicia, he said, I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive. And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod's praetorium.

And after five days, the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul.

And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude.

But to detain you no further, I beg in your kindness to hear us briefly. For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

[5 : 07] He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. By examining him yourself, you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him.

The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so. And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied, Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense.

You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem. And they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city.

Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me. But this I confess to you that according to the way which they all call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the law and written in the prophets, having a hope in God which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

So I always take pains to have a clear conscience towards both God and man. Now after several years I came to bring arms to my nation and to present my offerings.

[6 : 34] While I was doing this they found me purified in the temple without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia, they ought to be here before you and make an accusation should they have anything against me.

Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council other than this one thing that I cried out while I was standing among them.

It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day. But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the way, put them off saying, when Lysias, the tribune, comes down I will decide your case.

then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.

After some days, Felix came to his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.

[7 : 40] And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, go away for the present.

When I get an opportunity, I will summon you. At the same time, he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him.

When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And as I and to do the Jews a favour, Felix left Paul in prison.

Well, amen. And may God bless to us this, his word. Well, please do have those chapters and acts open in front of you.

The second half of chapter 23 and chapter 24. We'll think about these this evening. Now, we can, I think, often wonder what is God doing?

[8 : 53] He has made amazing promises to his people. But looking around at the reality of our lives, we can often wonder what's going on.

And reading these chapters tonight, we can imagine Paul might have similar thoughts. What on earth is going on? You see, the Lord has promised Paul that he will testify in Rome.

The previous verse before our reading says this, take courage, this is the Lord speaking to Paul, he says, take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.

That's the end of verse 11 of chapter 23. The Lord has promised Paul that he will testify in Rome. And Paul does that. If you flick to the very last chapter of the book of Acts, Paul is there in Rome doing just that.

He is proclaiming the gospel as the Lord promised. But as those words were spoken to Paul in verse 11 of chapter 23, Paul was under arrest in Jerusalem, over 3,000 kilometers away from Rome.

[10 : 10] Humanly speaking, that seems like a very big ask, doesn't it, for Paul to go from that situation under arrest in Jerusalem and to somehow be proclaiming the gospel 3,000 kilometers away in Rome.

How would Paul manage that? How would he get out of this fix? Well, Paul didn't do it, but as we see in our chapters, we're beginning to see how the Lord does it.

And as readers, we're given the privilege of seeing the big picture, which Paul didn't see. He couldn't see what was really going on, but as readers, we're given the big picture.

We see how the Lord does work behind the scenes, delivering Paul to Rome as he promised. We see through these chapters, the Lord working sovereignly behind the scenes.

And it's a long journey, and the first steps towards Rome are made tonight in these chapters. There are some major twists along the way, but the Lord was keeping that promise to Paul.

[11:13] He would see to it that Paul would make it to Rome, the very epicenter of the ancient world, and start to proclaim the gospel there. Now, as we saw last week, these latter chapters in the book of Acts, they cover five defenses that Paul has to make before various governors and kings and authorities.

And we saw the first two last time, and tonight is the third of those defenses in the second half of our passage, chapter 24, as Paul makes his defense before Felix, the governor in Caesarea.

But how Paul ends up there is all rather extraordinary. And that's what we see in the second half of chapter 23. This is our first point this evening where we see God's providence at the end of chapter 23, God's providence.

Now, Paul, in these verses, finds himself whisked away to Caesarea in the dead of night with the protection of almost 500 soldiers.

That is pretty astonishing. Imagine 500 men on the road, and in the middle of it is Paul. And there were two main reasons for this, two reasons why Paul ended up being taken away by night under the guard of 500 soldiers to Caesarea.

[12:32] The first is a group of hungry plotters. So this is chapter 23, verses 12 to 22. Look again at verse 12.

So there's Paul, he's in prison in Jerusalem. Verse 12, when it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath, neither to eat nor drink, until they had killed Paul.

There were more than 40 who made this conspiracy. And they went to the chief priests, the elders, and said, we have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul.

Now therefore, you, along with all the counsel, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly, and we are ready to kill him before he comes near.

Now you wonder what degree did they keep their oath? As we know, they didn't manage to kill Paul. They'd strictly bound themselves to eat nothing until they had done so. They must have got quite hungry.

[13:39] I wonder when they gave up. Was it day three? Day five? After a week? But we do see the extent of the opposition to Paul in these verses.

You see, these opponents, they were not satisfied with Paul being arrested and dragged off to the Roman barracks and then questioned before the Jewish council. They want him dead. Not just behind bars, but dead.

And the extent of the religious hatred here towards Paul is exposed. It's unrelenting. It's vicious. It doesn't look good for Paul, does it?

There were 40 men out there in Jerusalem baying for his blood, willing to not eat until they had killed him. The fierce opposition is exposed here, but we also see the ease with which the plotters are foiled through a young, unnamed lad.

As it turns out, Paul's nephew, he hears about the plot, verse 16, and he runs off to tell Paul they're in the barracks, who promptly sends him on to the tribune.

[14:49] And the tribune, as we'll see in a moment, secures safe passage for Paul, rescuing him once again from the murderous intentions of the Jews in Jerusalem. The irony is wonderful, isn't it?

Here we have a Roman soldier delivering God's apostle from the hands of God's ancient people. And the key figure in spoiling that plot is a young lad.

He's not even named. All we know is he's Paul's nephew. God's ways are far beyond our understanding, aren't they?

That God would work in such mysterious ways to deliver his apostle like this. You see, despite their numbers and their rage, that mob in Jerusalem is utterly powerless because God's plan involves Paul witnessing in Rome.

And because ultimately, Paul's life was, as all of our lives are, in his hands. You see, God is sovereign. God had promised to Paul, you will go to Rome, and not even that great mob of 40 men who had the council on their side, they had this plot, they couldn't thwart God's plans.

[16:02] They couldn't overcome. God's sovereign intention to bring Paul to Rome. You see, God's purposes cannot and will not be thwarted, not even by a murderous mob like this, who were intent, they were dead set on killing Paul, but they couldn't do it, because God is sovereign.

But the Lord's sovereignty in delivering Paul is not just seen in this spoiling of the plot to kill Paul, but also through the self-serving tribune.

That's the second half of chapter 23, verses 23 to 35, the face-saving tribune. You see, Paul was very quickly becoming a major headache for Claudius Lysias, the tribune.

He had a very angry and volatile Jewish mob to contend with. It was his job to keep the peace in Jerusalem. Jerusalem. And ever since Paul arrived on the scene, things were getting messy.

There were riots, there was this mob of 40 men trying to ambush him and kill him. He had a Jewish leadership who were complicit in it all. There was that farcical hearing in the Sanhedrin we saw last week.

[17:18] Now this news that he receives here from Paul's nephew about the plot, that was a gift that he could not miss and he was going to milk it for all it's worth.

Here was his opportunity to get Paul not only out of Jerusalem but off his plate. Paul would become somebody else's problem and in doing so he enables Paul unwittingly to make his first step towards Rome.

It's pretty extraordinary isn't it? Look at verse 23. A small army is formed to escort one man, Paul, 100 kilometres up the road to Caesarea.

almost 500 men are gathered to ensure Paul's safe passage. That's a ratio of about 10 to 1 to those 40 men who are planning to kill him.

A 10 to 1 ratio. Clearly, Claudius Lysias did not want this to go wrong. There's been no mistakes. And as the letter to Felix reveals, he is somewhat massaging the truth.

[18:25] he's saving face here with all that's going on. But the Lord is able to use even these political maneuverings for his own purposes to bring about his aim of delivering Paul to Rome.

Just notice one of the details in the letter that shows that he is being rather economical with the truth. Look at verse 27 in this letter to Felix.

Claudius Lysias writes, this man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen.

Now, the reality was that the tribune only discovered Paul's Roman citizenship when he was about to be flogged in his own barracks. It was only at that point that he stumbled across that particular nugget of truth.

And in this letter, he's making out like he was some sort of magnanimous, generous protector of the Roman citizen. He had no idea who Paul was.

[19:29] It was only when he was about to have him flogged that he did. Now, you can sort of understand where he's coming from. He wants Paul away. He wants to look good. He wants to carry favor with those who are senior to him.

But regardless of the tribune's personal political motives, he does protect Paul and he does move him one step closer to Rome, just as the Lord had promised.

And knowing that gives all who read this account great comfort and great reassurance to know that the Lord can work through all sorts of people to do what he's promised to do.

He's promised to deliver Paul to Rome to continue that witness. And he uses in this chapter the powerless nephew of Paul, this young lad, he uses the powerful tribune who can command 500 men at a word.

He can use both in order to deliver his messenger from almost certain death and move him towards the very heart of the Roman Empire. Do you see what Luke is showing us in the second half of chapter 23 here?

[20:41] He's showing us the Lord's absolute sovereignty. nothing will stop God's plans coming to fruition. Nothing will stop God from doing what he's planned to do.

And he's planned, verse 11 of chapter 23, to bring Paul to Rome so that he can testify about the facts of Jesus. The plotters would not get their man because God had other plans for him.

the human forces at work can seem so strong and determined, can't they? The human forces arrayed against God's church today can seem so powerful. But God has other plans. What is intended for harm against Paul is used by God to move him, if not to Rome, but at least one step closer.

he leads them away out of Jerusalem and onto Rome. As one commentator writes, God's servants are immortal until their work is done.

[21 : 50] In one sense, Paul's days look numbered here. There are 40 men in Jerusalem out for his blood. But Paul's immortal. No one could touch him until the Lord had him finish his work that he had planned for him.

And that is true for you and I. We are immortal because God is sovereign until our work is done. Man cannot touch us until and unless the Lord says so.

That's greatly reassuring, isn't it? The Lord is with us. He has plans for each and every one of us in his great task to evangelize the world. And until we're finished, we are immortal.

Now that doesn't mean that we throw caution to the wind. It doesn't mean we behave recklessly. God's sovereignty sits alongside our responsibility, doesn't it?

We must do all we can to plan and prepare and think and make wise decisions. But there is so much that's outside of our control, isn't there? All through this section, Paul is not in control of his own destiny.

[22 : 59] He is not making the decisions. He's at the whim of these tribunes and other people. Paul's not in control, but the Lord is.

He's sovereign. And we can take great reassurance from that reality. Well, that's the first thing we see in our passage tonight, God's absolute providence and sovereignty.

He is in control, and he is going to do what he said he would do in verse 11. He will deliver Paul to Rome. Nothing will stop that. It's a great reassurance to us. But here's the second thing we see in our passage, chapter 24.

Yes, God is sovereign and providentially looking after Paul, but at the same time, there's a responsibility for Paul to keep on proclaiming when he gets opportunity, the gospel. And that's what we see in chapter 24, Paul's proclamation.

Paul arrives there in Caesarea, and he comes under the custody of the governor, Felix. And five days later, the hearing takes place once Ananias, the chief priest, has arrived from Jerusalem along with his entourage.

[24 : 10] And again, Paul has opportunity to testify both in that formal setting in the hearing, but also privately afterwards with Felix and his wife, Drusilla.

And in both cases, there is fundamentally nothing new that Paul says. There's nothing new in Paul's content. It's a new situation, but it's the same unchanging message that Paul keeps proclaiming. He keeps testifying to the facts about Jesus Christ. It is the message that Jesus intended his disciples to share wherever they went. At the end of Luke's gospel, here's what Jesus says to his disciples.

He says, thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

You are witnesses to these things. That was Jesus' instruction to his disciples, to go and do that. that is what Paul is doing, wherever he goes, including here.

[25 : 23] And two things in particular Luke records for us here in chapter 24. First is Paul's proclamation regarding the resurrection, and then second, Paul's proclamation of the necessity of repentance.

Now, if you've been listening to these sermons and Acts, you've been reading through, that is nothing new. That is the same message, repentance, resurrection, nothing's changed.

So let's look first at Paul before this hearing, where we see him testifying to the resurrection. Now, the prosecution sets out the charges there in verses 2 to 9.

They're appointed barrister, a chap called Tertullus. He lays out the case against Paul from verse 5. Three things he mentions. One, that Paul has stirred up riots.

Two, that he's a ringleader of a sect. And three, he's profaned the temple. Three charges. And Paul responds to them in turn from verse 10.

[26 : 26] And Paul's response is careful, is meticulous, as he addresses each of those charges. First, in response to the accusation that he stirred up riots, Paul makes the point that he's only been in Jerusalem a few days, hardly trying to stir up trouble.

Paul, he says in verse 11, that it is not more than 12 days since he arrived in Jerusalem. Now, by this stage, he's been five days already in Caesarea, so he maybe was only a week in Jerusalem itself.

And verse 12, when I was there, they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up the crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues in the city, neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me.

I was there a few days, no stirring up riots, nothing like that at all. In response to the accusation that he's a ringleader of a sect, Paul is having absolutely none of it, is he?

He points to the common heritage he shares with his Jewish accusers. Look down at verse 14.

[27 : 38] But this I confess to you that according to the way which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the law and written in the prophets.

We are of the same God, we read the same scriptures, this is no sect, this isn't some new branch, some new religion, this is orthodox, nothing new here.

I believe the same scriptures these folk claim to believe in. And in response to the third accusation that he profaned the temple, he points his whole purpose in coming to Jerusalem which was to bring arms, he was bringing financial support and aid to the Jerusalem church.

He'd been going around the Mediterranean collecting money to bring back to Jerusalem to support the believers there. And when he did arrive in Jerusalem, he went to great lengths as we saw last time to respect the Jewish believers in the city.

He actually purified himself before going to the temple. Quite the opposite of profaning the temple as they claim. Those accusations are groundless, says Paul.

[28 : 57] And he picks them off one by one. The real reason I'm here, says Paul, is the real reason. The real reason is at the end of verse 21.

This one thing that I cried out while I was standing among them, it is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I'm on trial before you this day. This is the real reason that I'm here before you, says Paul.

It's the issue that caused that absolute outcry there in the council in Jerusalem. This, says Paul, is the very heart of my ministry. It is because of the resurrection of the dead, it's because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ that I'm here to you today.

It is because of my commitment to testifying to that resurrection, says Paul, that I'm here. It is Paul's unfading, his determined priority to proclaim Christ's resurrection that's landed him with this problem.

It is his commitment to proclaiming the resurrection that he meets with opponent after opponent after opponent. He's been landed in prison.

[30 : 10] He's been close to death at points because he keeps on about the resurrection. Why has the message of the resurrection been so controversial?

why has it landed Paul in trouble time and time again? It's the message he proclaims everywhere he goes, where he's been and where he's yet to go.

It's what he's going to continue to proclaim. We'll see soon in chapter 26 as Paul stands before a gripper, he says the same thing. Just flick over the page to 26 verse 21 and we see here again Paul proclaiming the resurrection.

He says that to this day I've had the help that comes from God and so 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 have proclaimed light both to our people and to the Gentiles.

[31 : 29] So even after this hearing here before Felix at the next place before a gripper he's still testifying about the resurrection from the dead. It's just what Jesus said would have to be proclaimed.

We read that earlier from the end of Luke 24. The risen Lord Jesus that he rose from the dead after three days. And because he is risen, because Jesus rose from the dead he is Lord and King and he will one day stand in judgment.

That is the reality. And that's the reality for all of us because the message is there will be a resurrection one day for all and all will have to stand before him as judge. and the implication of that is profoundly personal for every single human being. Not just for this world here and now but for all eternity.

That is why it is so controversial. That is why Paul is under arrest and his life in danger. There is going to be a resurrection for all.

[32 : 43] The just and the unjust and all will stand before Jesus judge on that day. And so this reality of the resurrection, it calls for repentance.

That is what Paul proclaims everywhere he goes. And that's what we see in the last paragraph of this passage. You see the fact of resurrection, resurrection.

It's not just some interesting idea. It is an event that demands response. There are implications. The implication is repentance. Look on to this final paragraph where Paul has a private audience with Felix and Drusilla.

Here Paul spells out the implications of the resurrection for these two people, for Felix and Drusilla. Now these were quite the pair. They were not the sort of people that Paul would particularly relish having to spend time with or speak to.

Felix was known to be a violent and a cruel governor. According to historians who wrote at the time, he was a bloodthirsty leader. He was not a pleasant man.

[34 : 02] He was very quick to wield the sword. A fearful man. And his wife, Drusilla, she had some pedigree. She was part of the Herodian dynasty.

She was the daughter of Herod Agrippa. Her great grandfather was Herod the Great, the one who ordered the murder of all those baby infant boys around the time of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. That was the family she was from.

They were quite the couple. And there's Paul with them his opportunity to spell out the implications of the gospel.

And having been summoned by Felix, Paul lays out the implications of the resurrection for them. Here is what repentance will look like for you, says Paul.

And that takes quite some courage to do that, to speak these words, to these two people. Paul was not entering himself into some sort of interesting intellectual discussion here.

[35 : 13] He wasn't indulging in comfortable conversation about faith, but rather he was issuing a moral challenge. It was a disturbing forthright summons to repentance here.

And we need to remember that the good news of the gospel, it brings with it the bad news about sin. There's no point hiding the real issues. And so Paul takes those issues head on with Felix and Drusilla.

Look at verse 25. Here's the summary of Paul's time with them. He reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgments.

He is pressing home the implications of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and the implication of his resurrection and ours.

He says there is a coming judgment. There is a day when you will have to face him and give an account. And Paul's gospel, which must be our gospel too, urgently reminds men, it urgently reminds you that it will not be all the same in the end, whether you receive the gospel or not.

[36 : 33] It is either be saved with a real salvation that will transform the whole of your life, or be lost in a loss which is irredeemable and eternal.

Obey the call of the gospel and you enter into light in which there's no darkness at all or disobey and you will pass eventually into a darkness of which there's no light at all.

That is the stark reality, that is the stark choice the gospel presents for all of us. Paul's setting it out there to these two pretty fearsome people.

He talks about righteousness, self-control, the coming judgment. And Felix's response to that, he was alarmed in the middle of verse 25.

Felix was alarmed. And rightly so. And if you're alarmed at hearing about the implications of the resurrection, then that is the right response.

[37 : 54] You see, the reality of the resurrection proclaims that there is a coming judgment for all. All will stand before Jesus as our judge, the creator of the universe, and we will have to give an account of ourselves and specifically how we've responded to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Felix was alarmed by that. But we don't stop at being alarmed. we are not to stop at hearing the gospel and being moved by it.

There is an implication and we must repent and believe in Jesus or reject. Those are the options for us.

And Felix, it seems, Felix kept the whole thing at an arm's length. love. Look at verse 25.

He is alarmed, but he said, go away for the present. When I get an opportunity, I'll summon you.

[39 : 05] At the same time, he hoped that money would be given to him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him and two years elapsed. you see, Felix was on the fringes of faith, wasn't he?

He had heard Paul, he was alarmed, but he was conflicted, wasn't he? The implications for him of fully accepting the claims of Christ would have been costly, life-changing.

And the reality is that for some, the implications seemed too costly. Maybe that was the case for him. He was interested, he was alarmed, he enjoyed talking about it, but he never quite made that step of repenting.

And maybe that's you tonight. Maybe you're on the fringes of faith, maybe you're interested, maybe you're alarmed, but the cost of following Jesus, the cost of repentance, I'm just going to hold at arm's length here, I'm not going to go any further.

Listen to James Philip speaking on these words. He says, a conflict of interests raged within Felix.

[40 : 27] The word of God to his soul was urgent and compelling, but the claims of the seen and temporal proved too strong for him. And convicted of sin as he was, he let slip the opportunity of salvation for all we know forever.

are the ties to this world, the opinions of men too dear to you, I wonder?

Can you pinpoint what it is that's holding you back from truly repenting? And can I ask, is that thing worth it?

Is the thing you're clinging on to worth it? is it worth forsaking eternal salvation for? For Felix, it seemed to be money.

He wanted money, didn't he? That was the thing he was longing for. But that can't save you for eternity. That will be left behind. And for Felix, I think we're to draw the conclusion that he did cling to the loves of this world.

[41 : 38] What will it be for you? And for those of us here who do believe, we need to grasp hold of Paul's approach here.

He was bold, wasn't he? He didn't flinch from setting out the implications of repentance, the implications of the resurrection. Here he was with a man who could probably command his death at an instant, and he was fearlessly proclaiming the implications.

He was calling him to repent. You see, to follow Christ isn't a lifestyle add-on. It's not here to make our wellness programs complete.

No, it's a complete turnaround. It is to surrender all to Christ, to repent and follow him. And as we share that message with those around us, we can do so confidently that God is with us, as he was with Paul, because God was taking his unstoppable gospel to the ends of the earth.

He was with Paul, helping him, giving him the words here, the courage to speak truth, to call to repentance. repentance. And our God is the same as Paul's God.

[43 : 08] He is with us. We know that. He is in control. He is sovereign. And he will enable us to proclaim that gospel, to make those pleas to repent as Paul does.

So it's easy to fear men, isn't it? It's easy to fear what's going on. But take heart. God is with us. Well, let's pray, shall we, and then we'll sing our final hymn.

Let's pray. Our Father God, we do thank you for these words we've read this evening, and for the great confidence they instill in us, that you are sovereign, that you are in control.

And so would you help us to trust you. It's so easy to live in fear of what we see rather than by faith. So please help us to be a people who walk not by sight, but rather walk by faith.

A people willing to proclaim the whole gospel and to make that call of repentance. Help us, Lord. We need that assurance, we need that help.

[44 : 31] And we ask it so that you will be glorified. And we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.