

35. With Respect to the Resurrection

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[0 : 0 0] And our title this morning is With Respect to the Resurrection. Coming back this week to Acts chapter 24 that we looked at last week, along with chapter 23, and I want to focus our attention on that statement by Paul in verse 21, where he sums up his mission and his message that is on trial before the Roman and the Jewish authorities.

It's with respect, he says, to the resurrection of the dead that I'm on trial. Now we've dealt with the long narrative of this story, but I want to narrow down a bit this morning and focus on this crux of Paul's gospel, which he says centers upon the resurrection, and which clearly has such huge implications in that it's led to endless and near universal opposition as he has gone about his ministry.

It's all about the resurrection, he says, and what the resurrection means. That's my ministry and that's what I'm on trial about. Now I want to think about that this morning, particularly because in some quarters in the church today there has been a very renewed focus on what the real message of the resurrection does imply for the church of Jesus Christ and for its message and for its mission.

There have been a number of prominent theologians who have written some major books on the resurrection, some of them magnificent works, very valuable indeed. And they've rightly included some very healthy correctives to some of the popular misconceptions of what Christianity is about.

Correcting sometimes what is a very individualistic approach, that Christianity is all about me, it's all about me and my relationship with Jesus, instead of the New Testament's great emphasis on the church and the corporate nature of our faith.

[2 : 0 4] Also reminding us of the cosmic nature of the gospel and God's plan of salvation. God's plan is not just a matter of the individual being saved for a kind of life in the heavenly afterlife that's to come.

No, it's not. It's about renewing the whole of this creation. Indeed, the whole of the universe, the whole of the cosmos. And it's a plan that will see God's people at last living with him in real resurrection, physical bodies in a real solid universe.

And to all of those things I, for one, will say a very hearty Amen. Because the gospel is about that mighty cosmic redemption that's in Jesus Christ.

But at the same time, I do have some concerns about where some of those who focus very particularly on these issues tend to lead on to.

I had a discussion not long ago with a young student who'd been very influenced by some of these writers in particular, and it did make me rather uneasy. Here's a quote from one of these theologians.

[3 : 1 8] He says this, God is rescuing us from the shipwreck of this world. Not so that we can sit back and put our feet up in his company, but so that we can be part of his plan to remake the world.

Again, I would say a hearty Amen to that statement. But it all does depend on what's meant when we say we have a part in remaking this world.

That's the question. What is our part in that plan? What is the church's great commission? Is it, as it seems to be clear in Matthew chapter 28, that we're to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations and teach them to obey what Christ has commanded?

Or is it something as well as that? Or is it something even more important than that? Something bigger than that, as it were? Does the message of the world's renewal through Christ's resurrection imply that our mission somehow is different to what the church has traditionally thought it to be over 2,000 years?

Well, some people would say to that, yes, indeed, it is. Here's another quote from the same author. If it's true that the whole world is now God's holy land, because Jesus is risen, then we mustn't rest as long as that land remains spoiled and defaced.

[4 : 48] That's not an extra to the church's mission, he says. It's central. And that means that, for those who argue that way, that the gospel becomes very much the public declaration of God's purpose to renew the whole world.

So that personal engagement with people, in order for their lives to be changed and renewed by faith in Jesus Christ and repentance, that becomes rather secondary to publicly engaging with society in order to bring about changed and renewed communities and societies and nations, and indeed the whole earth.

And so more and more, the church's gospel becomes, in that case, a call to political action in this world. More of that than a call to personal salvation from this world and for the world to come.

And that means that the church's chief concern will become more and more the former and less and less of the latter. Now there's nothing new in that, of course. That's what more than a century ago liberal theology led to.

And of course, so much of mainstream church activity in the West today is focused in these purely earthly directions. But is this renewed emphasis and this kind of language from various evangelical angles today built upon the premise of properly applying Paul's message of the resurrection is that that's attracted a lot of people.

[6 : 24] And as I say, it makes me wary. I have uneasiness about it. And so while we're here in Acts, I thought we have a perfect opportunity to look carefully at what Paul himself prioritised in his own words and in his own actions as he makes his own defence of what his ministry really is with respect, he says, to the resurrection.

What did it really mean that Paul was on trial about the resurrection? What were the implications of the risen Jesus Christ that caused such trouble that landed him in a Roman court?

Was it indeed a most political revolutionary movement threatening the whole Pax Romana? Is that why Paul was on trial? Well, I think this passage has a lot to teach us about making clear what the message of the resurrection really was for the Apostle Paul.

So look at these verses, will you? First of all, I think it's clear to us that the resurrection is public truth that must be reported.

The Gospel is not ever just a private, personal thing. It's not ever something that must just be hidden away in our private lives and never spoken about in public.

[7 : 50] We can't ever say that. We can't ever say, oh, we don't do God in public. If it were that, Paul would never have been imprisoned, would he? No, the Gospel is an announcement of news to the world.

It's a heralding of great tidings. And that news is that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and that he is Lord. And that one day every eye will see that, every tongue will confess, every knee will bow.

That's what Paul says to the Philippians. And everywhere Paul went, that is the Gospel that he publicly reported. We saw that back in chapter 23 before the Jewish council.

He said, it's with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I'm on trial. Here in chapter 24, he says the same thing several times. We read it in verse 15. I have the same hope that they do, he says.

Resurrection of the dead. Resurrection of the just and the unjust. That's what the law and the prophets teach. Verse 21, it's with respect to the resurrection that I'm on trial today.

[8 : 55] It says the same thing again in chapter 25. Verse 19, Festus tells Agrippa that this whole issue is about one Jesus who is dead, but Paul says he's alive.

He's risen. And in his defense before Agrippa and Festus in chapter 26, the same thing again, chapter 26, verse 6. It's because of the hope and the promise made by God to our fathers that I'm here.

What was that promise? Verse 8, the hope of bodily resurrection. By the way, some people seem to think and often say that in the Old Testament there's no hope of resurrection.

Obviously, that's quite preposterous. Paul's perfectly clear here that even his Jewish opponents are very, very clear about that themselves. The hope is one of resurrection.

And it's reiterated in chapter 26, verse 22, once again. I'm just saying, he says everything that Moses and the prophets said would happen, that the Christ must suffer, that he must be the first to rise.

[9 : 59] And obviously, that implies there'll be many others if he's the first. and that his light would be preached to both Jews and Gentiles.

When you get to chapter 28 in Rome, at the very end of the book, he's saying exactly the same thing again. That was Paul's public message. A truth that must be reported in every place throughout all the world to Jew and to Gentile.

Now, he saw his fullest explanation of that back in chapter 13. What God promised to the fathers, he said, to us he has fulfilled. How? By raising Jesus Christ.

Back in Acts chapter 20, when he's going over again and again to the Ephesian elders what his ministry was, he said that his whole ministry in public and in private was proclaiming the lordship of Jesus Christ, proclaiming his kingdom.

Jesus Christ is king and lord. That was his watchword because he's risen. But, we've got to ask ourselves, what exactly were the implications that Paul pressed home from that message of the risen Jesus?

[11 : 12] Because it wasn't an overtly political message. It's become quite common to say that Paul's gospel was a direct challenge to Caesar's empire.

Paul proclaimed that Jesus is lord, not Caesar. Caesar. And one says, of course, that's absolutely true. Jesus Christ is lord, not only of this world, but of all worlds.

That was his message. But as Jesus himself said to the Roman Pilate, my kingdom is not of this world. If it were, then my disciples would be taking up worldly weapons and fighting you like that.

But that's not my way, said Jesus. And Paul's message, likewise, was no political threat to Caesar in that way either. In fact, it was to Caesar, he appealed, it was Caesar and his Roman justice that protected Paul against the Jews.

And all the way through Acts, Luke is at pains, as we've seen, to paint the Roman authorities in a very good light. And he makes it clear that Paul was charged with sedition, but that he was found totally innocent of that and utterly acquitted by Rome.

[12 : 24] Vestas says that in chapter 25 and again in chapter 26, he's done nothing to deserve death. He could have gone free, he says, if he had not appealed to Caesar. Now, Paul's message, though public and though for everybody, was not that kind of message.

Jesus' self said, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. And Paul, likewise, says exactly the same thing in Romans chapter 13. The authorities, the governments, the powers that be, including Caesar, are ordained by God.

You're to pay your taxes to them, says Paul, because they're ministers of God, they're priests of God. Think about that when you're filling in your self-assessment return. And yet, Paul is arrested and is on trial in respect to this public message about the resurrection.

Why did that cause such a fuss then? Why did it cause a murderous rage among the Jews, and as well among the pagans, remember, in Ephesus?

Why did it cause such scoffing from the intellectuals in Athens? How could a message like this outrage even those who Paul said, in principle, agreed with the very things he was speaking about?

[13 : 44] Resurrection from the dead. The Pharisees did. Well, clearly I would suggest not because the central thrust of his mission was about improving society or preventing injustice or helping the poor.

Although, as verse 17 we saw last time, shows us Paul is very concerned to help the poor. That's why he's on the journey to Jerusalem with arms. Now, if those are your concerns that you're speaking about publicly, they tend to lead to a claim, don't they, from the public, not opposition.

Now, Paul's preaching of the resurrection caused riots because his public reporting of Jesus' resurrection and the implications of that fact were not focused on ameliorating human culture, but it was focused on assaulting the human conscience.

There'll be a resurrection of all, says Paul in verse 15, the just and the unjust, because of Jesus' resurrection. That's my message. And the implication of that, as we've seen many times from Paul, is that Jesus will be the judge of all people on that day.

And therefore, that's why he says in verse 16, I must make sure that my conscience is clear before God and men. And so must you. That's his point.

[15 : 08] And that's the problem. His message assaulted people's consciences with message about sin. And that's what riled them. That's what people hate.

But that's what Paul's preaching of the resurrection was always all about. And you see, the little cameo that we have here in verses 24 and 25 is here to show us precisely what that message of the resurrection looked like in the flesh applied to real people, in this case, Felix and Drusilla.

It's a worked example of exactly how Paul applied the message of the resurrection. Not just as public truth to be reported, but as personal truth that must be received.

In verse 26, it tells us, doesn't it, that over the two years that Paul was in Caesarea, Felix sent often for Paul and conversed with him. But what Paul engaged Felix in was clearly not just philosophical or political conversation.

It wasn't lobbying about better ways to run the Roman Empire. Luke is very plain. Paul proclaimed to him the gospel of the risen Jesus in a way that was very penetrating and exceedingly personal.

[16 : 28] Now don't forget who these heroes are, Felix and Drusilla. Felix, of course, isn't well known to us, but he certainly was to Luke's first readers. And they knew him to be a thoroughly nasty character.

The historians tell us that Felix was raised as a slave, but he was freed under the emperor Claudius, and he became one of his favorites. His brother, in fact, was the head of the imperial treasury in Rome and had great power.

And he helped him rise up through the ranks until he got this job as governor of Judea. But he governed very badly with terrible violence, lots of bloodshed.

The Roman historian Tacitus said this of him, through all cruelty and licentiousness, he exercised the authority of a king with the spirit of a slave. And that he exercised the imperial functions with a mercenary soul.

He's a good candidate for parliament these days, I suppose. But he practiced extortion widely from monetary gain, as is reflected in verse 26, of course.

[17 : 36] And in the end, what happened was he was recalled to Rome by Nero, because things got so bad. He caused terrible bloodshed among the Jews. There was a dispute that had broken out between Jews and Gentiles in the city of Caesarea.

And he rode his cavalry in and just slaughtered dozens and dozens, maybe hundreds of the Jews in particular. And the Jews sent a formal complaint to Rome. And the historian Josephus tells us that in fact, he would have faced very severe punishment from the emperor had not his brother managed to smooth the way.

Very probably with a large bribe out of the emperor's own treasury. That's Felix. And Drusilla, my goodness, what a story there. She had real form in her family.

She was a daughter of Herod Agrippa I. Remember, he was the one who had James executed back in Acts chapter 12. Her great uncle was Herod Antipas. He was the one who had John the Baptist executed.

Luke chapter 3. And her great grandfather, of course, was Herod the Great, the one who tried to kill the infant Jesus and massacred the innocents in Bethlehem. Quite a family history.

[18 : 45] However, she was a ravishing beauty. And we're told by the historians that in her teens, her father had betrothed her to a minor prince of Asia Minor, but he had refused to go through all the process of becoming a Jewish proselyte to be her husband.

So her father broke that engagement and married her off to a minor king in Syria. He was so infatuated with her beauty that he would do anything to win her. Until one day, the governor, Felix, spied her.

And he fell for her and he seduced her away from her husband. The story goes that he induced that separation from her husband using a sorcerer and spells. And apparently he promised her, come and live with me and you will have true felicity along with me, Felix.

a play on his name of happiness. So she came and became his third wife. Quite a pair really, aren't they? But maybe not so different from many of the tangled lives that we see all round about us today, especially among the powerful and the wealthy, Chelsea footballers, top golfers, you know, this sort of thing.

And of course, adulterous liaisons that become marriages in royal houses among princes and princesses, that's hardly unknown in our modern world either, is it?

[20 : 06] Well, what would you say if you had the chance to share the gospel with a couple like that? I've never been asked to do that.

I've never been invited to preach to royalty. I don't suppose I ever will. Some people do get invited to Balmoral to preach to the royal family. What would I say do you think in Crathy Kirk, the Prince of Wales and his consort sitting in front of me?

It would be a great temptation, wouldn't it, to speak a very pleasing message. I wonder what temptation Paul had as he faced this too here.

Those who had the power to give him his freedom. Great temptation, wasn't it, I'm sure, to soften his message, to stick to completely innocuous things, things that couldn't possibly be controversial even though they might be true.

But instead, Paul gave him an encounter with truth, with personal truth, in this overriding message of the risen Jesus, a truth which he pressed on them and said this must be received.

[21 : 20] So, first in verse 24, he spoke the truth about the Saviour. He spoke about faith in Jesus Christ. Now, the Gospel is, first and foremost, about a person.

And preaching the resurrection is, first and foremost, preaching Christ Jesus. Now, notice both those words. He preached Christ.

that is, he preached the Messiah of the Scriptures. But also, he preached Jesus, that is, the historical person, a real figure of history.

And he preached him and preached faith in his name. Now, we must never depersonalize the Gospel. The Gospel is not just ever a set of propositions.

It is about the person of the Saviour. And Paul presented the Saviour, Jesus Christ, to them. But don't misunderstand that either. A minister said to me recently, I don't want to put people off.

[22 : 24] I just want to commend the Saviour to them. And I'm happy to leave all the rest until much later on. But notice, it is not just commending the Saviour that Paul did here.

Look, it's very clear that speaking about faith in Christ Jesus meant far more than mere facts about Jesus. He explained to them the full meaning of those facts in a very pointed way to these two hearers.

He spoke also the whole truth about salvation, verse 25. He reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment. In other words, to speak personal truth about salvation in Jesus Christ requires Paul to reason with them about propositional truth, about salvation and exactly the terms that he mentions here.

And don't you think they're pretty incendiary terms given who it is he's speaking to? Would you have dared to confront Felix and Drusilla to even utter these words, never mind to reason with them about righteousness and self-control and judgment?

Why did Paul choose such penetrating issues to speak about with these two? Well, simply because he was applying his unchanging gospel, the gospel of the implications of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

[23 : 55] Now, Luke's words, of course, are just a summary, but we've got a very, very good idea of what Paul's reasoning about these matters would have been, because we have in our Bibles, in the very next book of the New Testament, the letter to the Romans that Paul had only just finished writing.

He wrote it on his journey to Jerusalem. And that letter is all about righteousness, isn't it? Just recall how Paul begins that letter. In the opening verses, he says, this is the gospel of God.

It's about his son, Jesus, descended from David and declared to be the son of God with power. How? Through his resurrection from the dead. It's public truth, this gospel, declared to the world about Jesus' resurrection.

And this gospel, says Paul, which is the power of God for salvation, is all about righteousness. The righteousness of God, which is from faith to faith. It's all about faith in Christ Jesus.

But he immediately goes on to say, doesn't he, in chapter 1 of Romans, that it's also all about wrath. God's wrath. God's wrath. God's wrath. God's wrath. Which, because of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of man, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

[25 : 14] All men can see the truth, he says. You only need to look at the world round about us. But you've suppressed it. And that's evident in your wicked behaviour, says Paul.

Envy, greed, deceit, murder, sexual immorality. And that's just chapter 1 of Romans. What do you think Felix made of that?

And then this, at the start of Romans chapter 2. Can you imagine Paul speaking these very words to Felix, as Felix sits in his judgment seat and Paul stands as the prisoner in the dock before him? Romans 2, verse 3.

Do you suppose, O man, you who judge those who do such things, and yet do them yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and the forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

But because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. Imagine him saying that to Felix.

[26 : 22] Or this, verse 6 of that chapter. He will render to each one according to his works. To those who by patience and well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life.

But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. Do you think he could have dared to say that to Felix?

Maybe Felix did hear those words and began to think, well, gosh, perhaps I should have taken my wife Drusilla's Jewish faith a bit more seriously here. Maybe she's even looking to him and saying that sort of thing herself.

But then Paul gets on to the argument of Romans chapter 3. Are the Jews any better off? Not one bit, says Paul, Drusilla. The whole world is held accountable at the bar of God's judgment.

For by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight. not one. But now, says Paul, the righteousness of God has been revealed through faith in Jesus Christ.

[27 : 30] For all who believe, there's no distinction, no Jew, no Greek. And that's what the resurrection means, says Paul, in Romans 4 verse 24. Righteousness will be credited to us who believe in him who raised Jesus from the dead.

Who was delivered up for our trespasses but raised for our justification, for our righteousness. Oh, says Felix, that's good news.

So, all my sin doesn't matter anymore then. That's great. We can just go on as we are, Drusilla, and we believe in God's grace. We're no longer under condemnation. No, no, says Paul, in Romans chapter 6.

No, no, you've got it all wrong. You're a slave to whom you obey. And to be under grace is to be a slave to God, obedient in the heart to his teaching.

Faith in Jesus means new life in the Spirit. The same Spirit who raised Jesus, then he'll raise you at the last day. But, if you have his Holy Spirit, the Spirit of holiness, then the fruit of that will be what?

[28 : 37] Self-control. And if you don't have that, that's the proof that you're not his. You live according to the flesh, says Paul, you'll die.

Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. Those who are saved, who have Christ's spirits, they put to death the deeds of the flesh.

They have this spirit of self-control. That's Paul's reasoning. And it's true, Felix, there are many, many who reject this. Even the multitude of the Jews to this day who are coming against me.

That's what he says in Romans 9 to 11. They did not submit to God's righteousness in Christ. They have not obeyed the gospel and therefore they will face God's wrath.

On the day when, according to my gospel, God reveals all the secrets of your heart in Christ Jesus, he says. Yes, you too, Drusilla. Maybe Paul finished his reasoning with words from Romans chapter 13.

[29 : 44] Listen. You know, Felix, that the time has come and the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is near to us now than when we first believed.

The night is far gone. The day is at hand. So then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Walk properly as in the daytime. Not in orgies and drunkenness and sexual immorality and sensuality.

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires. Now, I don't know exactly what Paul said to Felix and Drusilla, but if he reasoned to them about righteousness and self-control and the judgment to come, as he did to the church in Rome, I find verse 25 very understandable now, don't you?

Felix was alarmed. That's far too weak a translation. Felix was terrified. And he shouted, go away! Because you see, to reason about faith in Jesus Christ, to proclaim the risen Lord, to present the truth about the Saviour and the truth about salvation, means always confronting people also with the truth about sin.

Proclaiming the resurrection can never simply be an intellectual matter. It's always a moral challenge. It's a personal truth about mankind's lack of righteousness that leads to condemnation.

[31 : 22] And it's about a righteousness which must be received, a gospel which must be digested and responded to in the light of what Paul says about the coming judgment.

That's why faith in Jesus Christ always involves repentance. Chapter 20, Paul sums it up like that. Repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ.

That's what it meant when I proclaimed the grace of God to you. That's what it meant that I was always proclaiming the kingdom to you. That's what it meant that I was declaring the whole counsel of God, the implications of the risen Jesus.

And that's what the message of the resurrection is for which Paul was on trial. Remember the climax of Paul's sermon in Athens to the philosophers there.

Jesus' resurrection, he says, means Jesus' return as judge of the whole world. And that means that today, now, he calls all people everywhere to repent.

[32 : 25] You see, that's why this passage is reminding us, thirdly, that the resurrection of Jesus is always a painful truth. And it will often be rejected because of that.

Paul's message always assaults the conscience, just as it did with Felix. And many people will say, go away. They find it difficult, actually, to refute the reality of their own sin.

And so they suppress the truth. It's what we all do. None of us likes to have an assault upon our conscience that loads guilt upon us. So we suppress it.

And yet, Paul's message does arise conflict in the human heart. Felix is convicted by what Paul says and he can't totally suppress the truth. And when the gospel of Jesus exposes our hearts, there is a conflict.

Always a conflict between the conviction and the corruption that's exposed within us. So Felix, we're told, wanted to hear Paul more. He sensed he needed to.

[33 : 32] He feared this message about the judgment to come. He was alarmed. And he should have been. And yet, verse 26 says, at the same time, he hoped for a bribe.

Some cannily like Herod's reaction, isn't it, with John the Baptist and his preaching at the beginning of the gospel. He also was hit by the truth of the gospel in a very personal way for his own adulterous affair, for his own manifest wickedness.

What did he do? Well, he wanted to shut John up, so he put him in prison. Go away and shut up, he said. And yet, Mark tells us, on the other hand, he was aroused.

He wanted to hear more. He was perplexed by what John said. And yet, Mark says, he heard him gladly. There was a tussle going on in his heart. And the gospel of the risen Jesus does arouse conflict within our hearts because it exposes the idols of our human hearts.

It exposes the real saviors that you and I are looking to for our safety and our salvation. And for Felix, it was just the same as for any man. It was money, as verse 26 says.

[34 : 39] It was power and prestige. In verse 27, he wanted to give the Jews a favor. He wanted them not to send any more complaints to Rome so that he would lose his prominent position, his career, his status.

He served money. He served power and prestige. And he served sex. See, the gospel assaults the human conscience and it always arouses conflict deep within us.

And also, and always because of that, it enforces a choice. A choice of lords. We choose between Jesus, the risen lord of the world to come, and the idols of this world, the lords of our present lives.

We have to choose between the kingdom of Caesar, if you like, and the kingdom of Jesus. And Felix, we're told in verse 27, ultimately he chose this world. In leaving Paul in prison, he chose the praise of men over the praise of God.

And that choice showed where his heart really always was. Jesus says that, where your heart is, there your treasure will be also. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

[35 : 58] You can't serve, says Jesus, God and mammon, this world, you can't serve Christ's kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. Either you must invest everything you have in this world, or in the world to come.

It's as simple as that, according to Paul and according to Jesus. It can't be both and. And that's why, you see, you will remove all of that terrible offense of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If you bring, through whatever means, if you bring all its focus into merely the present world. Because you will remove that threat, that personal threat to the human conscience.

You totally change the stakes from issues of eternity and righteousness and personal judgment. And you leave only issues of politics and philanthropy and economics. No preacher, no preacher in Britain today will ever be put to prison for going on and on about global warming, or relieving third world debt, or HIV AIDS, or nuclear weapons, or any other of a hundred things.

If you speak about those things, you'll be invited onto the radio for thought for the day. But dare to do what John the Baptist did, or what Paul did here before Felix.

[37 : 17] Dare to apply personally and pointedly the challenge of God's righteousness to call sin to account. Especially in the realm of sexual immorality.

And at the very least, you will be held down publicly with derision. And in time, if the government gets it, it may well be that you'll be put in prison. But at least, as St. Paul really said, and really demonstrated, preaching the resurrection of Jesus means that the public truth, which must be repeated widely, is above all a personal truth that must be received.

And that is the gospel that we must proclaim, even if it is a painful truth that will often be rejected, and it will be. It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that we also will be on trial in this world.

Let me just close with two points for you to think about. The first, this for us as a Christian church and Christian people. The gospel of the risen Jesus is God's plan for the transformation, not only of this earth, but of the whole cosmos.

And we are called to participate in that plan. But friends, our calling is to follow Christ's example and Paul's example.

[38 : 45] And the example of the whole church as we've seen it through the acts of the apostles. We are called to be witnesses to the ends of the earth, proclaiming the same gospel that Paul the apostle proclaimed.

A gospel of righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come. And that is a gospel of personal faith and repentance in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That gospel, which some people, yes, will call too narrow, that gospel is in fact the power that did transform communities and nations and the whole Roman empire and ultimately the whole of western civilization.

And it changed the world precisely because it saved people into the kingdom of Jesus that is not of this world. To use Paul's words in Galatians, it delivers people from the present evil age and into the new creation.

Only through faith in Jesus Christ. And the consummation of that glorious kingdom will never be and can never be until the Lord Jesus returns and this universe gives way to the new heavens and the new earth.

[39 : 56] But of course, yes, the influence and the values and the beauty of that new creation will be felt and can be felt in our present world as this world's people are transformed into being Christ's kingdom people through faith in Jesus Christ.

Because what Paul says, where anyone is in Christ, there is new creation. Even now, right here in this world. And transformed people in transformed communities living for heaven on earth, they will bless this earth beyond all measure.

And wherever the Christian church throughout history has kept its focus upon the world to come and on Paul's true gospel, it has done that in abundance. It's blessed this world.

Paradoxically, wherever the church has set its heart on changing this world, it has done nothing in this world and won no one for the world to come. So let's never be diverted from changing this world for Jesus in the way that Jesus commands us.

The command, says Paul, of the eternal God to bring about the obedience of faith among all nations by the preaching of Jesus Christ, the crucified Savior and the risen Lord.

[41 : 17] The second thing is this. This is really for you if you're not yet a Christian, not committed to Jesus Christ. Don't procrastinate.

Don't let God's grace and patience pass you by as it did Felix. Don't leave Paul and his gospel in prison and move on. You know, it's exactly the same things today, the same idols, that cause the same conflict within our hearts as pierced the conscience of Felix way back then.

The power, reputation and career that you cherish. The money and the security that you covet. Or a sexual relationship that you can't give up.

But you know that Jesus demands that you give up. But you can't serve two masters. You can't have your heart ruled by this world's treasures and by the treasures of Christ's kingdom, which is not of this world.

It's impossible. You have to choose. And the choice will be painful. Maybe excruciating.

[42 : 35] Maybe killing. But Paul says to you, hour has come for you to wake from sleep. Cast off the works of darkness.

Put on the armor of light. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Because friends, it's when you do that, that your personal world will begin to become transformed.

And as that happens, all through this earth, the whole world will begin to be transformed by the power of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Don't procrastinate. Let's pray. Gracious God, our Father, how we thank you that although your gospel pierces our hearts and our consciences and lays us bare before you, yet also the same gospel calls us into your marvelous light that leaves all the past behind and draws us into fellowship with your Son.

May none of us, we pray, go from this building this morning without having our conscience clear before you and before one another.

[44 : 05] Thank you. In responding to Jesus, we can be sure that it can be so. Amen.