

# Diplomacy - Acts 22 1-30

*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: 17 April 2024

Preacher: Pastor Jared Bromka

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Okay, so Paul, we've been journeying with Paul, we've left Paul standing on the steps of the Antonio Fortress, arm raised, ready to speak, and we left him there for two weeks. Poor guy. Stiff arm, stiff neck, poor man.

And there he is, standing there, ready to speak. And as we saw in the text, it says that he was bound by two chains, meaning that he had one guard, one on each side. And he's in the steps of the Antonio Fortress, and that's looking down upon the temple court, the court of the Gentiles, and they were able to rush down and grab Paul while the Jews were beating him. If you remember in our timeline, where we were in Paul's life, we're transitioning from Paul the missionary into Paul the prisoner. Paul's preparing to go to Rome. He has a little hiatus here where he will be in Judea, he will be in Jerusalem, and then he will be up in the Galilee region in Caesarea. And that's where we've left him here in chapter 22. And I guess you'd say the tonight's section of scripture we'll look at, the theme is kind of diplomacy. I don't know if anybody ever played the game diplomacy. It's like risk on steroids.

I used to, back in the day, we'd get together about once a year, some friends. It takes about four to five hours in an afternoon, and you're playing through like World War I, I think it is. It's long, but it's great. The strategy is fun. But diplomacy, what does diplomacy mean? Diplomacy is the profession, activity, or skill of managing international relations, typically by a country's representatives abroad. So diplomacy would be managing relationships between international, interrelationship between two nations. And so someone who's involved in diplomacy would be called a diplomat. Diplomat would then be an official representing a country abroad. And the key there is abroad, right? So if you say, oh, there's a diplomat, someone in the country, say, well, he's a diplomat to India. Oh, where does he live and work? Well, right here in Charlotte. Well, that doesn't make any sense. He wouldn't be then a diplomat to India. This is a person, an official representing a country abroad. And so we're going to see kind of that idea as we go through the text here of this idea of managing relationships between two entities. Tonight's outline, if you're interested in that sort of thing, verse is kind of broken into four parts. Verses one through five, we're going to see

Paul's pedigree. And yes, we're going to run for the whole chapter. So I'm going to try and move through this. Verses one through five, Paul's pedigree. Verses six through 21 is Paul's testimony. Verses 20 through 22 through 28 is Paul's citizenship. And 29 through 30 is Paul's open door. And then there you see under the testimony, Paul breaks that into three sections. He's got his conversion, his calling, and his commission. So as we pick up in verse one, we'll back up into chapter 21 and we will look at verse 39. Paul says, saying this to the captain of the guard, who's come down and taken hold of him, he says, aren't you that Egyptian? He's like, no, I'm not Egyptian. Paul said, I'm a man, which am a Jew of the city of, of Tarsus, of a city in Cilicia. So Tarsus is the city in Cilicia, the region, a citizen of no mean city. And I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people. So where is that? So if you look at the top of the map there, Tarsus is up in Cilicia. Syria is the region that encompassed Jerusalem, Judea.

And then as you move north, you hit Antioch and you continue up around to the north side of the Mediterranean Sea. And there's Tarsus in Cilicia. And this is, Paul says, this is where I was born. So Paul is a Jew, or I mean, I'm sorry, I will get that. Yes, a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia. And then in verse 40, and when he had given him license, so he said, go ahead, Paul, you can speak. Paul stood on the stairs and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, which we said was a miracle, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying, and that's where we left, our brother Paul. And he says in verse one, men and brethren, fathers, hear you my defense, which I make unto you. So he starts out beseeching these people.

[ 4 : 43 ] Paul, he's just been beaten. He's chained between two guards. Is his face swollen? Is he bloody? Is his clothes torn? And he's like, men and brethren. You know, I don't know if I'd feeling, I'd be feeling the men and brethren part at that point. I might be a little more like you, but men and brethren.

Paul was a Christian, but it did not mean he was not a Jew. Remember last time we looked at that somewhat compromise where Paul, being a Christian, but a Jew, decided to slide back into this idea of living as a Jew. But Paul did not live as a Jew. It did not mean he was not a Jew, being a Christian, but it did mean he no longer followed those practices. But he identified, rightly so, saying, men and brethren, I mean, you are my people. I may not live as you do, but it does not mean that I don't love you. And when they had heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence. So there's a little bit of rumbling going on in the crowd. And then all of a sudden they hear this Hebrew tongue and they're thinking, oh, well, we thought he told that these Jews from Ephesus, we thought they meant he was a Greek. And then the captain of the guard thought he was Egyptian. And now he's speaking forth in Hebrew. And he begins to give what would be his pedigree. He says, I am truly a man, which am a Jew born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, as he had just told the captain of the Roman guard. He is now telling the Jews. Yet brought up in this city, the city being Jerusalem, at the feet of Gamaliel. And it was taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers and was zealous toward God as you are all this day. So he begins by saying, listen, I want you to know who I am so that you know where I came from. And then it'll make sense where I'm going. So Paul's pedigree, Paul had a correct heritage, didn't he? I am truly a man, a Jew born in Tarsus. He says, I have the correct heritage. I am a Jew. He had correct associations brought up in this city, Jerusalem, at the feet of Gamaliel. Ooh, that's a name drop right there. He had a correct religion. He was taught after the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, correct heritage, correct association, correct religion, incorrect understanding. Because then he says, and I was zealous toward God as you are all this day. But their zeal didn't lead to knowledge, was it? It was not a zeal according to knowledge. It didn't lead to faith. So a correct heritage and a correct association, a correct religion. But just like the Jews at this time, he did not have full understanding back then. And in verse four, he says, and I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons, both men and women. Paul's very free telling about his past failures. You know, I mean, I don't think that's all rehearsed the past sin we did. Anybody want to start? You know, no, I'll pick someone. Nobody wants to do that, right? We don't, we're new in Christ. I don't really want to talk about what I used to be, what I used to do, man, that's under the blood. But Paul is not ashamed. He's not ashamed to talk about who he used to be and what he used to do.

See, the gospel removes shame. It removes all shame. It redeems our past sin, and it allows us to use our past for the future. Romans 1 16 says, as Paul would write to the Romans, he's already, he already written this. Remember, he already wrote to Rome from Corinth. He says, for I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. The gospel removes shame. Just as Jesus, in Hebrews chapter 12, verse 2, tells us that Jesus, as we look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, that he, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. He bears that shame for all of eternity. All of eternity, Jesus bears the marks of shame for us. Revelation 16 15, Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watches and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. Lest we don't be clothed in righteousness, and our shame is exposed. The gospel covers that shame, and the gospel removing all shame is able to redeem our sinful past, and Paul's able to use that as part of his testimony here. And so, as Paul says, I persecuted this way into the death, binding and delivering into the prisons both men and women. And also, verse 5, the high priest does bear me witness. Like, you can ask this guy, and all the estate of the elders, from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring them, which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished. And so, Paul says, listen, just because they're disassociating with me now, at one time, we were best buddies, and I was part of this. And they can testify that this is who I was.

[ 9 : 39 ] And it came to pass that as I made my journey, and was come near into Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. So, Paul's a good storyteller here. He's laid a good foundation. This is who I was. He's identified with the people. They're like, okay, yeah, we know who Gamaliel is. We know, oh, we know of Tarsus. That's a pretty slick city.

We know who the high priests are, and the elders. And then he's like, and I was traveling to Damascus, because I was persecuting these Christians. And they're like, oh, yeah, what happened next, Paul?

And a great light shone round about me. Paul experienced an eternity-altering moment in his life. And as he experienced that moment, it altered his life for eternity, and now he's able to use that to then alter other people's lives for eternity.

But I like where it says, where he tells them here, he says, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me, and we know what happens, that Paul falls to the ground. In verse 7, And I heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

And it made me think of in John chapter 12, where Jesus says, Truly, truly, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone, but if it die, it brings forth much fruit.

[10:53] Paul needed a fall. You know, we just looked at Jacob on Sunday. Jacob needed this collision of self and faith, of seeing himself face to face and God face to face.

Faiths to faith. No, face to face. It's in there somewhere. There's going to be one winner. Either faith or self is going to win.

And so here Paul has this eternity altering moment. He's cast to the ground, and he hears a voice saying, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

And I bet you could hear a pin drop across that whole court around the temple as these people are just listening. And Paul is speaking forth his testimony.

In Acts 26, he will rehearse this again in front of, is that Agrippa at that time or Festus? I'm not sure. And he says, And when we were all fallen to the earth, so all the men that were with him, as well as Saul at that time, I heard a voice speaking unto me and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

[12:08] It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And so Paul, who is holding out against the Lord, has this moment where he's spoken to him in the Hebrew tongue. And here is Jesus identifies himself as a Jew, right?

He spoke to him in the Hebrew tongue. But unbelief had left Paul with only his own understanding, didn't it? As he's fallen to the ground and he says, Who are you? He doesn't know who this is.

He's got the right heritage, and he's got the right connections. His pedigree is good, but he has no understanding. God has met with him, and he has no idea who this is because of unbelief.

Proverbs 3, verses 5 through 7 say, Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths.

Be not wise in your own eyes, and that's the temptation. We'll acknowledge God in our ways. We can put our trust in the Lord, but will we let him direct our path? Or will I try and take that back into my own hands?

[13:10] Because I look at the path he's leading, and I'm like, that's not wise in my eyes. I wouldn't have gone that way, Lord. Be not wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and depart from evil. And I answered, says Paul as he's speaking to all the people, Who art thou, Lord?

And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And you wonder what the ripple in the crowd was. It's people of Jesus.

He said Jesus. I thought he was dead. Did he rise? Who was that? As they know who Paul is now associating with. You see, understanding can be corrected in a moment. Saul, on the road, fallen down, had no understanding of who God was.

He says, who are you? And he says, I'm Jesus. And he believes. And his understanding is corrected in a moment, right? Once unbelief is dealt with. Belief came first. Paul had no understanding of who Jesus was, of what the scriptures, how they really tied together, until first there is unbelief.

I mean, until first belief came. And they there with me saw indeed the light, and they were afraid. But they did not hear the voice of him that spake to me. And I said, what shall I do, Lord?

[14:21] And there we see the test of the truth of the belief, as he's calling Jesus Lord. And the Lord said unto me, arise and go into Damascus, and there it shall be told you of all things which are appointed for you to do.

Understanding has changed in a moment because of belief. Being born again is also the work of an instant. Being born again is not a process.

It's not a long, drawn-out process you have to go through. It's not the work of a lifetime. It's the work of a moment. In a moment, as we put our faith in Christ, we are born again.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, Nicodemus, you're a teacher of Israel, and you don't know this? And as we looked at that passage Sunday as well, Nicodemus is like, well, how can I reshape myself? How can I remake myself?

I'm already who I am. And Jesus said, no, you need to be remade by the Spirit. Nobody is almost born again. You're either born again or not born again. It's one or the other. And so Saul comes to this eternity-altering moment where he is born again.

[15:22] But obedience, obedience always has steps. And obedience always has a step one, doesn't it? There's something, Saul, I want you to do. Now that you've believed, now that you've put your faith in me, now that you're born again, your understanding's corrected, there's something I want you to do, Saul.

And as he's sitting there on the road to Damascus, he's probably thinking, Lord, what is it? What is it you want me to do? He says, get up and go into Damascus. And then I'll tell you the next step. Well, can I sit here until you tell me the next step after that?

Couldn't you maybe, like, give me a couple more steps? But the word of God had stopped Paul, it had dropped Paul, and it had rocked Paul, didn't it?

It stopped him in his tracks, it dropped him to the ground, and it rocked him to the core. And then it unlocked for Paul the ability to believe. God's word came to him. Jesus spoke to him, the word of God, and it completely altered Saul.

And so Saul is rehearsing this. And then he tells them, Faith works by humility.

[16:29] Here Paul now, the man who was leading this procession, who was leading this hunt for Christians into Damascus. Now he's, like, looking for someone to take him by hand.

And you see this humility now. Faith also expresses itself in humility. You know, faith can't work in pride. Faith can't operate in the realm of pride.

The two are mutually exclusive. You're not going to be like, I have so much pride and so much faith. It's not going to work. I have pride in my faith. I have faith in my pride. They just don't go together. Romans chapter 10, Paul write in verse 3, For they being ignorant of God's righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

A lack of humility does not allow faith to operate. Then we jump down to verse 10 in that chapter. For with the heart, man believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation.

Humility that allows faith to operate then expresses itself. Just with Paul, we see here, there's a reality to his faith. As he's seeking out to do God's will, but he's doing in humility what God has asked him to do.

[17:41] And one, Ananias, a devout man, according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews that dwelt there. He then comes and is sent to our buddy Saul here.

He came unto me and stood and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive your sight. In the same hour, I looked up upon him. Ananias had a good report, not because he kept the law, but as one who lived in the completion of the law.

You and I have a good report according to the law, the Mosaic law. Do you know that? We do. Now, the Orthodox Jews are like, no, you're not keeping the law. Well, we don't need to keep the law. We have a better report than those who keep the law.

We live in the completion of the law. And Ananias lived in that same completion. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness.

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes. So in Christ, we've come to that end of the law, that fulfillment of the law. And that's where we live. We live in the fulfillment of the law. There's no point in trying to fulfill something that's already fulfilled.

[18:43] Once you pay off your mortgage, you'd be a fool to keep paying on it. That's what that means. He came unto me and stood and said to me, Brother Saul, receive your sight.

In the same hour, I looked upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers has chosen you, that you should know his will and see that just one and should hear the voice of his mouth. A Saul gives God opportunity and gives God's mercy opportunity.

If Saul was not a Saul, God would not have that opportunity. To show mercy in the way that he did in Saul's life and then through Saul's life. Because God says, or as Ananias says here, God is going to use you and he's going, has chosen you that you should know as well, see the just one and hear the voice at his mouth.

And so Saul gave an opportunity for God's mercy, which became Paul. Paul or Saul was chosen by mercy. What are those three things that we see there in verse 14?

What is it? The three things as we observe. Remember, observation, interpretation, application.

That's how we go to the scriptures. What does it say? What does it mean? And what does it mean to me? Three things.

[ 20 : 00 ] He said, God has chosen you that you should know his will, see the just one and hear the voice of his mouth.

God's mercy in our life is that we might know, that we might see and that we might hear. Just like Saul, who became Paul. Paul was chosen for what purpose?

The purpose of being a witness. Verse 15. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what you have seen and heard. And as we've said before, testimony is just faith plus experience.

Your faith plus the experience you live of that faith becomes your testimony. You can, Saul could say to someone, let me tell you what God did in my life. I can't, I can't say, let me tell you what God did in my life.

I was on my way to Damascus and God knocked me to the road, changed my name. I can't take someone else's testimony, right? But I can tell you what God did in my life. I can tell you the shame there once was that the cross is covered, that the blood has covered and the law is fulfilled.

[ 20 : 59 ] I have that testimony, but I can't take Saul's testimony. But our own faith plus our own experience is our own testimony. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what you've seen and heard. And now, why tarryst thou?

Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. And so Paul is rehearsing this to the Jews. They're taking it in. And it's not, they're not rejecting this.

But I think the church in Jerusalem kind of did not the greatest job among the Jews in Jerusalem.

Because we're going to find out when he gets to the word Gentile, the world explodes, right?

They can handle Jesus. They can handle the cross. They can handle their sins being forgiven. But they couldn't handle the true gospel, which is the power of God to save not just the Jew, but also the Gentile.

And we saw that when the elders said to Paul, hey, you need to let the Jews know that you're still keeping the law. And so there's kind of this compromise that's taking place, this appeasement that's happening, which is just setting up problems for later down the road.

[ 22 : 04 ] True faith, though, is passive in the work of salvation, right? We don't have any, we don't do any part of our salvation. Say, well, I believed. Yeah, well, we've talked about that before. If you're at the bottom of the pit and you can't get out and someone comes and says, do you want me to rescue you?

And you say, yes. You then don't go running around telling people, I saved myself. I had a part in that. I said, yes, you did nothing. They saved you. But true faith is passive in the work of salvation, but active in response to salvation.

A true faith will always be active in its response to salvation. We know that the passivity is if we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

That's passive. Our part in confessing our sins is not an active part in partaking in our salvation.

That's the part of receiving. That's the passive part that God is doing it all. And I'm just simply accepting and receiving.

But the active part of working out that salvation is then Philippians chapter 2 verse 12 says, Wherefore, my beloved, as you've always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

[ 23 : 11 ] For it is God which works in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. So we work out our own salvation. Not work for, work out the salvation that God has worked in. As Paul here says, or as Ananias says to Paul, why are you tarrying here?

Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. Paul's sins were washed away passively by the work Christ did. Right? Paul's passive in that.

But the baptism is the outworking of that salvation showing that, yes, my sins have been washed away because of my response. That's proof of that.

Verse 17. And it came to pass that when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance. Well, this is new information. We know Paul came to Jerusalem. That's back in Acts chapter 9 in verse 26.

And when Paul, Saul, at that time, was come to Jerusalem, this is after his conversion, he's left Damascus, he tried to join himself to the disciples, but they were all afraid of him and believed not that he was a disciple.

[ 24 : 11 ] So here he comes back to Jerusalem. He eventually is brought to the disciples. And then he begins to preach so aggressively that it stirs up the whole region and they have to get him out of there.

But we find out here from verse 17, while he was in Jerusalem and while he was praying in the temple, he says, I was in a trance. Oh, dear, Paul, you're in a trance. I don't think we ought to be in trances.

I don't think. Well, trance in Greek just means amazement. In Mark 16, verse 8, we just looked at this account a couple Sundays ago, the resurrection.

And they went out quickly, the women, and fled from the sepulcher, for they trembled and were amazed. The exact same word. They trembled and were in a trance. Neither saw they anything or said they anything to any man, for they were afraid.

That's the same word there. So Paul here says, and when I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance. I was in an amazement. I was just absolutely stunned by what happened to me while I was there.

[ 25 : 13 ] In 2 Corinthians chapter 12, Paul tells about an experience that he had. Whether this was that time or not, but it seems like it might fit. He says, it's not expedient for me, doubtless to glory.

But I will. That's pretty much what he's saying. And I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ about 14 years ago. Whether in the body, I cannot tell. Or whether out of the body, I cannot tell.

God knows. I was in an amazement. Such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And that would kind of fit at this time frame. Paul's in Jerusalem. And God meets him in a vision and just catches him up and speaks things to him in preparation for his ministry.

So he says, I was in a trance or in an amazement. And verse 18, And I saw him, Paul, an apostle born out of due season. One of the apostles who saw Jesus.

I saw him saying unto me, make haste. Get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And so Paul is saying at that time, God said they're not going to receive your testimony.

[ 26 : 20 ] Paul has waited his whole ministry for this moment. Bloodied, beaten, clothes torn, chains on him. You know, he's pulling back on those chains saying to the captain, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. Please let me speak to them.

I've got a captive audience. This is what I've been waiting for. Because they would not receive me. As Jesus had told me all those years ago. And then Acts 22, verse 14.

If you remember, we just read. Yeah. Ananias had spoken to him and said, The God of our fathers has chosen you, that you should know his will, see the just one, and should hear the voice of his mouth.

And here he's telling us in verse 18, he says, I saw him and heard him, to know his will, see the just one, and hear the voice of his mouth. And God fulfilling that as Paul sees Jesus.

We do not always see on the surface what God is working in the background. Paul had no idea what God was doing in all of this. As we said, the church at Jerusalem had a plan, but God had a greater plan.

[ 27 : 27 ] And we don't always see what's happening in the background. And my testimony, you know, that faith plus my experience, it's not about me.

Right? It's about him. Paul is rehearsing all of this, and it's not about him. He's not like, let me tell you what God did in my life. Right? It's about Jesus. And he said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on you.

They know. They know this. Don't send me from Jerusalem. That was 14 years ago. How many years ago when he was in Jerusalem the first time? Don't send me away. They know who I am.

Yeah, but they don't care, Paul. They don't care. Paul was just a tool when he was Saul. And the world no longer found any value in him. He just cast him off. Whenever we try, the church tries to join with the world.

That's what's going to happen. They're going to use us, and they're going to cast us aside. For Saul, he might be like, I had this friend. I had this connection. We were so close. We used to do this. And then Jesus changed everything.

[ 28 : 31 ] For the good, for me. But these people no longer care. Galatians 5.15 says, But if you bite and devour one another, take heed that you be not consumed one of another.

And that's the world, isn't it? Paul was their guy. Saul was the guy. And now they're ready to kill him. They're ready to just consume him. Because they can't abide the fact that he no longer follows their ways.

2 Peter 2.2-3 says, And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you.

They shall just use you for their own gain. Whose judgment now of a long time lingers not. Their damnation slumbers not. And this is the world. They just want to make merchandise. Use us for their gain. But when they're done with us, they're ready to kill us.

And here Paul says in verse 20, And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.

[ 29 : 38 ] So he's rehearsing this. He's rehearsing his talk with Jesus to the crowd. He's saying, I stood there. I stood there when Stephen was being martyred. Acts chapter 7.

A long time ago, we were in Acts chapter 7. Verse 58. And they cast him, Stephen, out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

And then if you jump down to verse 8. And Saul was consenting unto their death. I think it's verse 1. I have the wrong reference there. And so Saul is standing there consenting to his death. No, he didn't partake in it, but he consented.

To consent means to be pleased or approved. So Paul is saying, I was pleased with. I approved his death. That never left him. That rocked his life. Stephen's martyrdom.

Stephen saying that his face like an angel looking to heaven and saying, Father, forgive them. And Saul was just rocked to the core.

[ 30 : 36 ] And for the rest of Paul's ministry, I think that was at the foundation of his ministry. That thought always of Stephen. I want to be worthy to enter into heaven like Stephen was.

The race I'm running, I want to be worthy like Stephen. And he said unto me, Jesus, Paul rehearsing what Jesus said unto him in the temple during that vision all those years ago.

Jesus said unto me, depart, for I'll send you far hence unto the Gentiles. Rejection by our own people. Rejection by your people, Paul. They've rejected you.

Rejection by our own people is but a door of opportunity for God. God's like, I see you're rejected here. You know, you could have ministered to these how many thousands of people, hundreds of thousands in Jerusalem.

But I'm going to change the world with what is going to happen because of your rejection. And they gave him audience until this worked. All of that. They heard Paul's having a vision in the temple.

[ 31 : 34 ] Paul's meeting Jesus in person. Paul's talking about how he used to be with the elders and the high priest persecuting the church. Now he's not. All of that they're taking in.

And then he says the word Gentiles. And he said unto me, depart, for I'll send you far hence unto the Gentiles. Paul will take any cockamamie story you want as long as it validates me as someone special in God's eyes.

But as soon as you start acting like God has rejected me and someone else is special, we're done. I can't handle that. I need your religion, Paul. I need your experiences to validate me.

And they gave him audience unto this word and then lifted up their voices and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth! For it is not fit that he should live. Good old King James. In other words, this guy's got to go.

So he's not going to draw breath on this earth for one more moment. Prejudice is what we see here. They're so prejudiced against the Gentiles that they're unwilling to see the work of God that's actually taking place.

[ 32 : 39 ] They're blinded to it. Their prejudice kept their eyes closed to God's grace. God's grace has gone to the Gentiles. Why should it bother me if God wants to rescue somebody else like he rescued me?

How does that affect me at all? Does that affect my relationship with the Lord? No, it doesn't. My relationship with him is between me and him. I should rejoice that more are able to receive his grace.

Prejudice is to prepossess a mindset or disposition apart from facts or reasons. So I'm going to hold to a mindset. It doesn't matter what facts or reasons say. I have prepossessed this mindset and that's who I am.

It doesn't matter. We see that around us a lot today. And unfortunately, you see it in the church, too. You say, well, look what God's grace is doing. Yeah, but I already have this mindset that's predisposed to this.

So I'm not really going to accept what God's grace is doing. I want it to happen in my church. I mean, that's great it's happening in your church, but I want to make sure that our people are the chosen and the blessed ones.

[ 33 : 43 ] So we can become prejudiced against God's work when we don't see God working like we think he should among our people. And as they cried out and they tore their clothes and they threw dust in the air.

Such an emotional people, beautiful people, the Jews. They threw dust in the air. Their prejudice led to irrational behavior. Irrational mindset, didn't it?

Completely irrational. The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle. He's like, hey, you're speaking in Hebrew, remember? So the chief captain's standing there listening and everything's fine.

Maybe a few ripples in the crowd. As Paul says, Jesus of Nazareth, you know, met me on the road. And they're like, oh, we're using some ripples. And all of a sudden he says Gentiles and the world explodes. He's like, get this guy in the castle.

I don't know what he just said in Hebrew, but this is not good. The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle and bade that he should be examined by scourging. Let's beat him a little more. But he might know whereof they cried so against him.

[ 34 : 48 ] So this is the Romans form of justice. And the world's justice always leads to cruelty. Always. Always ends in cruelty. Because only God's justice is true justice.

And true justice, which is God's justice, leads to mercy. God's justice is always tempered with mercy. Habakkuk 3.2.

Oh, Lord, I have heard thy speech and was afraid. Oh, Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years. In the midst of the years, make known in wrath, remember mercy. Rome's mercy?

What was it? Give you 39 lashes and stop one short of 40? That was their mercy. Right? And the justice of this world, it's not interested in true judgment. It wants results.

Right? Well, Paul, we don't really know what you did, but we're going to whoop you so hard, you're going to confess to something. And then I've satisfied my job description. I have something to write down in my reports.

[ 35 : 41 ] And I keep my salary. So that's what we're going to do, Paul. And as they bound him with thongs, you know, Paul has that amazing sense of timing that the Holy Spirit gave him.

So they're binding him to the posts. And Paul just kind of looks over his shoulder at the centurion that stood by and said, Hey, is it lawful to scourge a man that's a Roman and uncondemned?

This is a capital punishment. You don't scourge a Roman. You don't beat a Roman. Paul understood the true purpose of the law, didn't he?

Paul was not about politics like we said before, but he understood what the law was truly for.

Romans 13.3 says, For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power?

In other words, hey, shouldn't you respect those who are in authority? Do that which is good, and you shall have praise of the same. Romans 13 is not about us submitting ourselves to every and any authority.

[ 36 : 37 ] That's that Western concept. You go to China, they're not sitting around in the church going, I think we should submit ourselves to this authoritarian government that wants to eradicate the church and is satanic and annihilate us.

That's a Western mindset that's been pushed on us. Romans 13 isn't about us obeying authority. It's about the purpose of what authority is. And we submit ourselves to authority. But then God tells us what authority's responsibility is. So if an authority is not keeping its responsibility, I am still bound to be submissive to that authority, but not to obey. It's sin. Not to go against the scripture. Not for it to take authority that's not its own. So just because the authority in the nation we're in says, sin is now the law of the land, you must obey it. Oh, and by the way, church, we're taking authority over you. They don't have that authority. God did never give them that authority. What is their authority? Their authority is to be a terror to the evil. [ 37 : 32 ] That is their authority. You have authority to keep sin in check in a nation, in the world. So Paul understands the true purpose of the law. And he recognizes that the Romans, they are not living under their own law.

Paul was happy to die for his faith, but he realized there was no inherent virtue in unnecessary martyrdom. Wasn't like, yes, kill me. You know, how many years has he lived? How many times have he been beaten? The memory of Stephen is in his mind. He saw a man die for his faith, but his goal wasn't to go out and die for his faith. We know that Paul recognized gain, but not just in death for the sake of death.

For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain, right? But continuing on in Philippians 1 and verse 22 says, But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor. Yet what I shall choose, I don't know. For I am in a strait between the two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. Paul recognizes that death isn't something to be sought for.

[ 38 : 40 ] There is gain in death, but we don't seek it. If we're here, we live for fruit, for God's people and for the kingdom. And when the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what you do, for this man's a Roman.

Dude, your job's on the line. Paul's citizenship was Roman, but it was a whole lot more, wasn't it? Yes, Paul was a Roman, but he was a lot more than that.

Philippians 3.20, For our conversation, our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. So we said in the beginning, diplomacy.

Two nations, the diplomat, one who represents one nation to another. Paul, a citizen of Rome, but Paul was a citizen of heaven. And Paul is representing right now as a diplomat of heaven.

Second Corinthians 5.20, Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ. As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be you reconciled to God.

[ 39 : 41 ] That idea of a diplomat, of an ambassador. And what was our definition of diplomat? It was an official representing a country abroad. And that's Paul.

Paul is an official of a heavenly country representing that country abroad. What is the role of an ambassador? An ambassador is one who, he's a patriot. He represents his country, his citizenship. He's in another place, but he is still loyal to his original citizenship. He's aware of the culture he's in. He's a good communicator. He's diplomatic. He knows how to interact with the citizens of that other nation.

Loyal, affable, negotiator, expert. But he's humble. He's submitted. This is what an ambassador is. We are to be ambassadors for Christ. We are in this world for that purpose.

We don't seek death. We don't run out there and go, Martyr me for my faith, because death is gain. No, Christ is gain. That's why death is gain. But if I'm going to live, well, Christ is still gain.

[ 40 : 41 ] Then I'm going to live for him, right? The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 provides that a diplomatic agent shall enjoy immunity from the criminal jurisdiction of the receiving state.

Diplomatic immunity. It's been abused for decades. It just means I am not subject to your laws. We are not subject to the laws, the justice system of this world.

We answer to a higher one. But that justice system, as Jesus, when he stood before Pilate, he said, If my kingdom was of this world, then would my citizens, then would my people fight?

My kingdom's not of this world. We're not in this world to conquer. We're not in this world to fight.

We're in this world to represent the other world. We're in this world to be ambassadors. We're in this world to call people and say, Hey, I've got a passport for you to a much better place.

And there's nothing that can stop you. You know, this iron curtain here in this world, it can't stop you. Would you like to go? And we need to represent in a diplomatic way, our diplomatic agent.

[ 41 : 50 ] We need to represent Jesus. And then the chief captain came and said unto him, Tell me, are you a Roman? And he said, Yes. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum of money obtained I this freedom.

And Paul said, But I was born free. Paul was born into citizenship. And so are we. We are born into citizenship and we are born free.

1 Peter 1.23, Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever. By a great sum of money did I obtain this.

I had to work and work and work for my salvation. I'm in some religion of works. And I was born free. I've been born again. Have you been born again? You haven't?

Well, let me represent this king to you. Let me be an ambassador for this other nation and tell you about how you can be born free too. So then straightway, these Romans, they departed from him, which should have examined him.

[ 42 : 50 ] You picture Paul like, Guys, can you lose in the bonds before you run off? Maybe. And the chief captain also was afraid after he knew that he was a Roman because he had bound him.

Man, how much more? How much more should this world fear when they bind a Christian, when they grab a citizen of the heavenly kingdom and abuse them, when they think that they can take authority over them?

They will answer for that. 1 Corinthians 7, verse 22 says, For he that is called in the Lord being a servant is the Lord's free man.

Likewise, also, he that is called being free is Christ's servant. So Paul, as he's bound, he's like, You can't bind me. I am Christ's free man. 2 Corinthians 2, 14, Now thanks be unto God, which always causes us to triumph in Christ, and makes manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place.

Man, I'm so glad it's not on me to be an ambassador. Let your light so shine. I don't have to provide all of the training and polish that goes along with being that ambassador.

[ 43 : 56 ] He makes manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place. And on the morrow, as we wrap this up, because he would have known the certainty whereof he was accused of the Jews, the captain, that is, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them.

So Paul's left all night bound while this guy's trying to make up his mind. Is he telling the truth? Is he not? What's going on? He thought, Well, you know what? The best way I can figure this out is to bring the chief priests in, and all their council.

We hash this out in Greek so I can understand. This guy's just all about his own self-preservation. We're going to see that when he eventually takes Paul to Caesarea, and he's going to give this whole story about how he stepped in and rescued Paul, and then he determined, and it's just he's trying to save himself.

But self-preservation becomes an open door to the gospel, doesn't it? How many people, because of self-preservation, how many of us in this room, because of self-preservation? A three-year-old in his bed at night. I don't want to go to hell.

Mommy, I want to accept Jesus into my heart, right? Through self-preservation, it opens the door to the gospel. Romans 5, 8, and 9, But God commends his love toward us, and that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

[ 45 : 16 ] Much more than being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. I want to be saved from wrath. I want to be justified from my sin. Self-preservation is a strong motivator, and God will use that to open the door to the gospel.

And in this moment, God has given Paul an open door he could never have opened for himself. As he's standing there on the Atonio Fortress, on the stairs, he's able to preach that message that years ago, he had begged the Lord, please let me preach.

And he's like, no, you need to leave. I'm sending you to the Gentiles. And now God had opened a door that Paul was not able to himself. There's no way he could have been like, hey, we're going to have a conference. I want everybody from Israel to come and listen.

They wouldn't have listened to him. And there's another door that he's about to open that Paul doesn't know of as he sends him to Rome. As we said before, the elders in the church at Jerusalem, they had a plan to keep the peace, right?

Last time in chapter 22, or I'm sorry, 21. But God had a plan to get Paul to Rome and for Paul to be an ambassador to the nation of Israel.

[ 46 : 27 ] A diplomat, an official representing a country abroad. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ. As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead be reconciled to God.

What does that mean when you stand there in Christ's stead? What is Jesus? How did Jesus represent himself to sinners, to the sick, to the rejected, to the lepers?

How did Jesus represent himself to those that were attacking him, to the Pharisees? We stand in Christ's stead? That's ridiculous. What a horrible idea. That goes back to that scripture we looked at in the beginning, right?

That in all our ways acknowledge him and he will direct our steps. I wouldn't have directed. Lord, I never would have picked this, us, to be the means by which you represent yourself to the world. But it's not on us, right?

Just as a diplomat is sent out with all the backing and all the resources of that whole nation at his disposal, as he goes there to represent his country, he just picks up the phone and says, I need this, this, this, and this.

[ 47 : 30 ] And it's there. He has the entire backing. We have the entire backing of heaven behind us. So whether we're like Paul on the steps of the Antonia Fortress, whether we've been beaten and bruised, or whether we're just standing in front of someone at the grocery store or on a job site, we're ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech that person through us.

Be reconciled to God, right? Father, thank you that we have been reconciled, that there is no longer any separation between, there's neither Jew nor Greek, bond or free, male nor female, but all are one in Christ.

And Jesus, I thank you that you have so perfectly represented the Father to us, the love of God to us, that we could be saved, Lord, that we could be born again.

Not the work of a lifetime, but the work of a moment. Sanctification, the working out of our salvation, that's a lifetime. We look at Paul in a moment, knocked to the ground, Saul converted to Paul in that moment, but then a lifetime, a lifetime to bring him to this place that right from the beginning he had a heart for.

I want to witness to my people. It took a lifetime, Lord. And Lord, those people that rejected him in that moment, Lord, just became another means for you to show your grace and to open a wider door to the gospel, Lord.

[ 48 : 47 ] So Lord, as we experience rejection in our life, Lord, as we experience disappointment, Lord, I pray that you would empower us by your spirit, Lord, to be true diplomats, Lord, to be true ambassadors for Christ, that the savor of Christ, Lord, would be made known, not through our efforts, not through my polish and my practice and my prestige, none of that, Lord.

We saw that with Paul. He had a great pedigree, but complete lack of understanding because he had no faith, Lord. We put all of our hope in you and all of our trust in you, Lord, to do the work in us, Lord. But then, Lord, that you would give us the boldness, Lord, to allow that faith to work out, that salvation to be worked out, Lord, that the light would shine, that, Lord, men and women would look at us, Lord, and they would be like, that's an ambassador.

Lord, you can recognize them. If someone's a diplomat from another country, there's telltale signs. You can know. And so, Lord, I pray, Lord, as we live in this world, Lord, it's not our home.

We have a heavenly citizenship, Lord. I pray that people would be able to see that we embody and represent a heavenly kingdom. And, Lord, as we hold out that passport to people and say, would you like to go?

We pray, Lord, that you would ignite faith in their lives, Lord, and that in the work of the moment, they be born again. We thank you and love you. And in Jesus' name, amen.