

Hot Potato - Acts 23:17-35

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[0 : 0 0] The message tonight is hot potato. I'm going to put hot potato Paul, but Paul's the hot potato. Nobody wants him. Nobody wants to take him. Nobody wants to own this guy. And I did not have time to put together an outline. I hope that doesn't make or break your evening. So we've come as far as 16. Paul has been taken by the captain of the Roman guard of the Antonia Fortress. And then he had an opportunity to come back and speak to the Jewish leaders. And they were ready to tear him apart when he then pits them against each other. Well, it reveals the rift that was already there, reveals the division that was already there by saying that he, excuse me, believed in the resurrection. And then the whole thing just went into chaos. And then he was discouraged, but the Lord comes and speaks to him and says, hey, be of good cheer, Paul, that as you've testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome. And here, I think it's a promise for Paul where for him, it's the same kind of thing. Is he going to leave his hands off or is he going to be like, okay, I got to get to

Rome. God says, I've got to get to Rome. Well, God didn't say he's got to get to Rome. He said, you will bear witness of me in Rome. So it's that walking by faith very often is trusting God to do what I feel like I need to do. You know, it's like leaving my hands off and letting God do what he says he's going to do. It's not, it's not, it's not that often that faith is going to require me to go and grab and do something. It's usually I need to let God do something because I'm trying so hard in my own efforts. But anyway, in verse 16, it says that Paul's sister was in Jerusalem and that she has this son and he overhears this plot by these guys, these brave 40, these brave men, 40 strong, who said, we're not going to eat or drink until we kill Paul. So I guess you could call that the Pauline diet, you know, it's a very lean diet. And they make this rash promise and obviously they didn't keep it or they all starved, but it's the next day they're a little desperate. So they're like, all right, we got to come up with a plan. I'm getting hungry. And they, they decide, you know what, if we can convince the, the captain to bring Paul where we can get at him, hey, we've got a chance.

And so verse 16, it says, when Paul's sister's son heard of their laying in wait, he went and entered into the castle and told Paul. And we said last time that one child with the truth had a greater impact than any political scheme. So these guys had their schemes, they had their conspiracy, right?

It's a word we hear a lot today, a conspiracy theory. Well, a conspiracy theory is just that, a theory of a conspiracy. If it's true, it's no longer a theory. It really is a conspiracy.

And that's just multiple people working together to bring about nefarious means. But the world sees a conspiracy and God sees transparency. Like these guys like, ha ha ha ha, we've got this idea. And what is this kid doing there? How did he hear about it? What's he doing?

[3 : 01] You know, he just kind of walked into the room with 40 guys who looked really hungry and heard him talking. I mean, but the Lord has him in a place where he hears about what's going on. And Psalm 139.12 says, speaking of the Lord, it says, yes, it says, yes, the darkness hides not from you, but the night shines as the day. The darkness and the light are both alike to thee, right? If you hide in the dark, it's like hiding in the middle of the room to the Lord. He's kind of like, I see you. No, you don't. And that's these men. They're like, we've got this idea. This is going to work great. No matter how secretive they were, no matter how much they plotted, the Lord knows it.

And if he wants to reveal it, he's going to reveal that. And Paul called one of the centurions unto him. And he said, bring this young man unto the chief captain, for he has a certain thing to tell him. And this guy listens to Paul. He doesn't just say, you're a prisoner. Be quiet. I'm not going to listen to you. But Paul's integrity that he had proven in the face of his own personal pain and personal cost has earned him the respect of these soldiers. You know, Paul was willing to lay his life on the line, unlike what they've witnessed with the Jewish leaders, the religious leaders, who just trying to work the system, whatever is convenient. Paul was willing to lay his life on the line for the truth that he preached. And so the centurion seems to have come to respect that.

This is also very possibly just a minor miracle. One of those things that looks normal to us. And yet it's miraculous because the Lord is having this guy listen to Paul to take this young teenager to go and talk to the commander of the Antonia Fortress, who's going to then respond to what this kid says. And so Paul calls him. He called one of the centurions and said, bring the young man.

Paul does not try to take control of the situation. This is where I first see that, where it's like, okay, Paul could be like, all right, bring him in here. I want to talk to him. Take me to the commander. Paul just says, hey, I see God doing a work. I'm just going to let God do it.

Paul doesn't try to take control or credit for the deliverance that God is working. God is working deliverance. And Paul sees that and he's like, all right, let's just see. Let's just see what he does. Isaiah 12 verse two says, behold, God is my salvation. I will, I will trust and not be afraid for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song. He also is become my salvation.

[5 : 34] So the result of God being our salvation is trust and not fearing. It's not, well, then I have to do something. I have to get out there and try and make something happen. And so when we see God working, our first tendency should be to step back in faith and let God do the work. And then what we see here in Isaiah, man, we praise the Lord. He's our strength and our song. If God's at work, praise the Lord, let him work. You know, as we're preparing to move to this next place, my mind goes way ahead.

All right, what about this, Lord? What about, what if they, you know, a little PTSD, what if they pull the rug out from under us? And it's like, well, they can't unless God wants them to. And I firmly believe this place where we've been here is because God had an interim of time that he needed to stick us somewhere until it was ready. You know, behold, I go and prepare a place for you. And if I go, I will come and receive you to myself that where I am there, you may be also. And so this place that just happens to be that they're, they're the property they're closing on and they gain control of it right at the end of May. We need to get there in the first Sunday of June. And they're like, go for it. You know, because the Lord, the Lord's done all that. So he'll keep us there. If he doesn't, he doesn't, right? If a few months into this, he's like onto the next. Then we pick up our tents and we follow the cloud and we just go. But man, I want to be on the vanguard of faith, right? I want to be on the, whatever that looks like where we're at. It could be we're established in one place. And, you know, the, the next stop for Calvary Chapel of Charlotte after, um, 413 or 4, 316. Sorry,

I remember it. John 316. We're 4, 316. 4, 316 Mount Holly Huntersville Road. The next stop may be the rapture, maybe heaven. It may be there four years, two years, three weeks. Um, but whatever that looks like, that step of faith, the next one, man, we want to be on the front of that, right? We want to keep moving forward in faith. We don't want to get stagnant and we don't want to fall back on our own ideas. We want to stay with the Lord. So the centurion, now he takes this kid and he brought him to the chief captain and said, Paul, the prisoner called me unto him and prayed me to bring this young man unto you who has something to say unto you. This, this short section we're going to cover tonight, everybody in it passes the responsibility off to the next guy. Like, hey, Paul, the prisoner called me and told me to bring this guy into you. This wasn't my idea. This was Paul's.

Let's, let's make this clear. And he told me to bring him unto you because he has something to say. God's deliverance very often flies under the radar of the enemy. God's deliverance and God's messengers flies right under the radar of the enemy, right? Satan, he's got his guys and they're planning, they're plotting. And then this little kid, this teenager just walks right through the midst of them, finds out their plans and goes right to the people that he needs to. Psalm 8 verses 1 and 2 says, O Lord, O Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth, who has set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings have you ordained strength because of your enemies, that thou might still the enemy and the avenger. So the Lord whose name is most excellent in all the earth, his glory is above the heavens, he's so mighty. He takes the very smallest thing so that he can still the voice of the enemy because the enemy is going to be left doing, well, if I just got defeated by a child, what hope do I have, right? I mean, Satan couldn't put to death

Jesus as a baby. Then he thought he won by putting him to death as a man and he was wiped out. God's deliverance flies under the radar. First Corinthians 1 27, but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. If that's you, raise your hand. And God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty so that they will look at us and they'll go, well, what kind of like, you know, education did you have? What degrees do you have? Like, well, tell me what your church plan was.

[9 : 35] You know, what was your program to build the church? And we'll just all sit there and just go, we just followed. We just taught the word. We just, we did what it said in Acts, continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship and breaking of bread. And here we are.

That's foolish. It sure is. It sure is. Speaking of Jesus, Isaiah 53 2 says, for he shall grow up before him as a tender plant and as a root out of dry ground, he has no form nor comeliness. And when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

Nobody saw Jesus walk by and go, he's the only one in the crowd with a white robe and a blue sash and his hair is blowing. Must be Jesus. No, he would have walked by and you would have seen one of the disciples and been like, I wonder if that one's Jesus. He's, you know, that's Peter. Oh, well, that one's kind of studious. Maybe, oh, that's John. That one's Jesus? That guy? He's so, just a guy, you know, flowed right under the radar of the enemy. The enemy, he looks at the outward appearance. He looks at the flesh. He looks at his strength, right?

He looks at the power and the authority. When he came to Jesus to tempt him, he's like, all of this, I will give to you. Jesus is like, I don't need that. Peanuts. And then the chief captain took him by the hand and went with him aside privately and asked him, what is it that you have to tell me?

Like I said, this is like a miracle, a minor miracle. This guy is just like, well, okay. But it shows you, I think, the credibility that Paul gained with these guys. When they came upon him, he was getting beaten. And they're taking him up the steps and he's like, guys, guys, guys, I want to talk to them. Blood running out of his mouth, you know, black eye. He's like, please, please let me talk to them. And then the next day when they bring him back down, they're ready to tear him apart again. He gets slapped in the face. They're ready to rip him apart. And they have to come and rescue him again. And they're like, what is it with this guy? So he takes him aside and he says, what do you have to tell me? And he said, the Jews have agreed to desire you that you would bring down Paul tomorrow into the council as though they would inquire something of him more perfectly.

[11 : 45] This is, you know, I was thinking this young man, he has more text of him speaking than some of the apostles. Does Thaddeus ever say anything in scripture? Bartholomew? No. And this kid, he gets more press in scripture than some other people of note. Proverbs 18, 17 says, he that is first in his own cause seems just, but his neighbor comes and searches him out.

And so here are these Jews, they've got their plot and their plan. And this seems like a really good idea to them. But another one comes and searches him out and says, yeah, well, no. The Jews' perception of justice was simply a cover for manipulation, right? They are coming with their justice. They're going to get justice upon Paul. But it was only a cover for manipulation.

They're going to desire this guy to come down, oh, tomorrow into the council so that they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly. Well, we want to talk to you, Paul. We want to make sure we understand. So we're going to bring you in under the guise of justice. But it was simply a cover for manipulation. They're making a pretense of desiring to hear the truth from Paul, but their end goal is destruction. Manipulation. The definition of manipulation is to treat or operate with the hands or by mechanical means, especially in a skillful manner. So it's to manipulate something. Like if you're modeling clay, you're manipulating it, right? But when we talk about manipulating people, it's not grabbing them with my hand and twisting them. It's the second definition. To change by artful or unfair means so as to serve one's purpose. So when I manipulate, well, I shouldn't manipulate. When someone manipulates, it's to gain their own purpose, but it's by artful or unfair means. It's not legit. You know, it's not saying, hey, I'll kind of like we talked about deceit. Manipulation goes hand in hand with that. And here they're trying to manipulate the Roman system. They're trying to manipulate this justice system, manipulate this captain.

Second Peter 2.9 says, The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished. The Lord knows how to deliver the ungodly out of temptations, even when what should be a fair and just system is used to manipulate. And he will reserve the unjust to the day of judgment. Again, that's not something I need to put my hands on. It's not the church. You know, Jesus said, I did not come to condemn the world, but that the world through me might have life. You know, they're condemned already if they don't believe. Jesus didn't come to rub our faces in sin, but to deliver us from them, from sin. So as the church, our place isn't to like condemn the world. It's not to bring justice upon the world. It's to bring grace to the world and to tell people, hey, you can be saved.

But the kid says, Do not thou yield unto them, for there lie in wait for him of them more than 40 men. So now it's gained and the group's grown.

[14 : 56] Other people are jumping on board this Pauline diet. Which have bound themselves with an oath that they may, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now are they ready, looking for a promise from you. They're just looking for a pretense, ready to pounce. I don't think this captain liked this very much. No one likes to discover they're being manipulated. No one likes to find out that what they thought was face value was really an ulterior motive behind that.

And the Jews are manipulating the justice system for the purpose of taking matters into their own hands. What should have been left to someone else's hands, they're going to manipulate this system so that then they can take matters into their own hands.

And so they want to have this show trial. So the chief captain then yet let the young man depart and charged him saying, see thou, tell no man that thou has showed these things unto me.

Proverbs 10, 14 says, wise men lay up knowledge but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction. In other words, like if you're just going to you know, speak everything that comes to your mind and tell everybody everything that you, you know, whatever knowledge you have of situations, it's going to end up in destruction. You're going to tell someone the wrong thing at the wrong time.

Wise men lay up knowledge. You store up the knowledge. You lay it up like a treasure and then you dispense it as a treasure. Proverbs 21, 23 Whoso keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps his soul from troubles.

[16 : 30] And every kid finds that out at some point in their life don't they? And if not, you find it out again when you get older. Proverbs 17, 28 says, even a fool when he holds his peace is counted wise and he that shuts his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.

It's a time to be quiet, the time to speak, even a fool. You know, it's like, you know, that guy's just he's not saying a word. Probably, what a wise man. Or you open your mouth and you let him know you're a fool.

Keep your mouth closed. At least they will be perceived as wise. Silence is golden when I'm not. Right? Silence is golden when I'm not. If you can't, if you don't have anything good to say, don't say anything at all.

So when I'm not golden, keep my mouth shut. But the centurion here, he's very wise and that he realizes he has a situation that the best thing he can do is use wisdom and discretion to take care of this.

And so in verse 23, he called unto him two centurions, which would be 200 men, saying, make ready 200 soldiers to go to Caesarea and horsemen, three score and 10, that'd be 70, and spearmen 200 at the third hour of the night.

[17 : 43] So it's 470 soldiers for Paul. The Roman third hour was 3 a.m. It's the same clock we use. So the third hour of the night would be 3 a.m.

He says, and provide them beasts or horses that they may set Paul on and bring him safe unto Felix, the governor. So they're going to take him from Jerusalem up to Caesarea where Felix had his, that's where the Roman kind of centrality of power was in Israel up in Caesarea.

We'll look at Felix, who he is when we get next time into chapter 24, which will be in the new building. And we'll find out all about Felix.

Interesting guy. Psalm 20, verse 7 says, some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. Remember back in verse 11, the Lord had already said to Paul, Paul, be of good cheer for you have, as you have testified of me in Jerusalem, so must you bear witness also at Rome.

For Paul, he could just sit back and just let the Lord, you know, take him. He's like, wow, Lord, 470 guys, huh? Okay. But if it was one man, if one guy was just taking Paul, if it was the middle of the day, whenever it was, Paul knew he was going to end up in Rome.

[19 : 01] And so now this, the captain of the Antonia Fortress here, he writes a letter. And you remember, Paul's our hot potato. So he's like, oh boy, what am I, I got to get rid of this guy.

I'm going to take him to Felix and just get rid of him. And he wrote a letter after this manner, Claudius Lysias, that's his name, unto the most excellent governor Felix sends greetings.

It's interesting because Claudius Lysias, this guy, we would never have any idea who he is if it wasn't for his association with Paul. Paul, the prisoner, Paul, the one nobody wants and nobody cares about.

And at this point in time in history, nobody really knows. They just know he's a rabble rouser. He's nobody. And here he's writing most excellent Felix. We wouldn't know who Felix is if it wasn't for Paul because of their association.

The name Claudius Lysias. Claudius means lame and Lysias means releaser. The dude's a lame releaser. Claudius was one of the names of the emperors and he was lame.

[20 : 01] So it's lame and Lysias releaser. For him, I think standing with the truth it cost too much. It was too hard to stand with the truth. He's going to write in this letter and he's going to say, this man was taken of the Jews and should have been killed of them.

Then came I with an army and rescued him having understood that he was a Roman. And when I would have known the cause whereof they accused him, I brought him forth into their council whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or bonds.

So why is Paul still in bonds? He's like, I can't find any reason that he should be in bonds but I'm not going to take responsibility for this. Standing with the truth costs too much.

It was easier to pass the buck. Have you ever heard that phrase? I always thought it had to do with money, right? Passing the buck. So passing the buck means shifting responsibility for something to someone else.

The act of attributing to another person or group one's own responsibility. I don't want to take responsibility. I'm going to pass the buck on to you. I thought it was like passing the dollar. But pass the buck originates from the poker tables of America in the 1850s.

[21 : 10] To decrease the risk of cheating, the dealer of any card game would rotate around the players. You'd rotate who deals. So the same guy is not dealing every time. And the dealer of the game would be, or the dealer at the game table would be marked with a buck-horned knife.

The buck. They'd stab it in the table next to the guy who was dealing. And then when it was your turn to deal, you take it and you stab it on the table next to you at that point too. If the player did not wish to deal, the responsibility could be passed on by the passing of the buck.

So for Claudius Lysias, our lame releaser, instead of actually taking responsibility for what God has placed in his hands and doing the right thing, man, the truth was going to cost too much.

He's like, this is my career. If I release him, the Jews are going to flip out. I'm just going to pass him off on to Felix. Shifting responsibility for something that was your own responsibility or this guy's, right?

People who will not take responsibility are not willing to pay the price of the truth is ultimately what it is in any situation, right? If it's, I was supposed to take out the trash and I didn't want to because I was lazy.

[22 : 21] I wasn't willing to pay the price for that truth that I needed to take out the trash, that responsibility. And the price might have been as simple as, I don't want to get up and do it. So I pass it on to Henry. But it's passing it on and people who refuse to take responsibility for their actions, for things that God's placed in their hands, it's because they're unwilling to pay the price.

They're unwilling for that cost. When Jesus stood before Pilate, if you remember, he said to him, everyone that is of the truth hears my voice. That was right after Pilate had asked him, he said, are you a king then?

And Jesus answered, you say that I'm a king, to this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world that I should bear witness unto the truth. He says, yes, I'm a king, but the whole point of my reign is to bear witness to the truth.

I'm not here to take over the world, I'm not here to set up my kingdom, I'm here for the truth. I am king of truth. And so he says, everyone that's of the truth hears my voice. And what does Pilate answer? What is truth?

What is truth? So when we pass that responsibility on, well, what we're doing when saying in that moment, everyone that's of the truth hears his voice. Are we hearing the Lord's voice saying, take up that responsibility?

[23 : 36] Like, oh no, Lord, I'm going to pass the buck. I'm going to pass the knife on to someone else. And this man was taken of the Jews. Verse 27, we read all through this, but let's go back through. So he's writing the letter and he says, so this man was taken of the Jews and he should have been killed of them.

Then I came with an army and I rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. Is that how that went down? Well, he came and he rescued him, but then he was going to whoop him.

He was going to tie him and he was going to beat him. Well, he left that part out, didn't he? And he's kind of puffing himself up in this letter to Felix, like, well, there was trouble, but I took care of it.

And I rescued this Roman as well and I've sent him to you because something's going on, Felix, and you're so wise you can figure it out. But this is just self-aggrandizement, like the lifting up of self, making himself seem grand in his own eyes.

And that is simply pride waiting to be exploited. So someone who builds himself up is like ripe for the picking for the enemy or for manipulation. It's just pride is easily exploited, right?

[24 : 39] You can't exploit humility very well. It's very hard to take advantage of humility. Pride is easy to take advantage of. You can play on someone's pride. And so when someone lifts themselves up, they're just waiting to what?

Fall. Right? Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. And then a true leader never needs to declare his leadership. Paul never declared himself a leader.

Didn't need to, right? How do you know if you're a leader? You turn around. Is anybody back there? You can declare yourself the best leader in the world, but if nobody follows you, you're not really a leader, right?

And a true leader never needs to declare his leadership. Think of Moses. He didn't say to the people, well, I'm your leader. No, he went to the Lord over and over and said, I'm not their leader. What am I doing here? Proverbs 25, 27 says, it's not good to eat much honey.

So for men to search their own glory is not glory. What happens if you eat too much honey? Ugh, kind of get sick to your stomach, right? For men to search out their own glory, you just, don't get sick on yourself.

[25 : 48] Don't read your own press. In Luke 14, Jesus is speaking to his good old apostles, who at that time were still jockeying for position, right?

He says, look, when you're bidden to go and sit at a feast, he said, take the lowest seat. That when he that bade thee comes, he may say unto you, friend, go up higher. Then thou shalt have worship in the presence of them that sit at meet with you.

For whosoever exalts himself shall be abased, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted. It's easier to look good than to do good. It's much easier for Claudius Lysias to look good than to actually do the right thing.

And where Jesus is saying, look, take the lower seat. Then if you look good, you have some substance behind it. You've shown humility. You know, you've taken the lower seat.

You've not done it in pride, as opposed to just trying to look good and take the highest seat. And then in front of everybody, you'd be exposed. And when I would have known, in verse 28, he's continued right here, when I would have known the cause, wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council.

[26 : 57] Oh, I looked into this Felix. I had an investigation opened into this. Whom I perceive to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or bonds.

Matthew 16, 3, Jesus says, And in the morning, it will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and lowering. Oh, you hypocrites, you can discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.

So Claudius Lysias here says, I perceived, but perception is not discernment. Discernment is something that comes from the Lord. It's a spiritual gift. Perception is not.

He thought he understood the situation, but he was not looking at it with the same eyes that the Lord was looking at it. And when Jesus says to the Pharisees, he's like, you're very perceptive.

You're very perceptive in what's going on around you, but you have no discernment about what's actually happening in the area of the world that matters, right, in the spiritual.

[27 : 58] And here we see the help given to Paul, Claudius Lysias, his help given to Paul. It was just another opportunity for political gain. That's what he's using Paul for. He's like, okay, I don't want to deal with him. I'm going to pass him off, but I'm going to try and use this as best as I can to get something out of it.

And when it was told how the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to you and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him, farewell.

And now he's playing on Felix's pride. Why didn't he let him go? He says he has no, I can't find any reason that he's in bonds. I don't see him being guilty of anything. But you know, when I found out that they were laying in wait, well, I sent him to you, Felix.

I gave commandment right away that he goes to you and the accusers go to you because nobody can discern this better than you. Pretty much, I just want him out of here. You take the hot potato, Paul.

I don't want to have to deal with this guy. Remember, Paul didn't take any credit when his nephew came. He said, hey, take him to the captain. He didn't say to his nephew, thanks, son, and send him on his way and then said, hey, I have information that I found out.

[29 : 04] He took no credit. But powerful men take credit where credit is due another. Right? And here's this powerful man manipulating the situation and he's taking credit where credit's due another.

It was not his to take. He just says, oh, I was told and then I figured all this out on my own. Why would an innocent man need to answer to his accusers?

Claudius Lysias, our lame releaser. So the soldiers, they obeyed the command and they took Paul and they brought him by night to Antipartus.

Antipartus. That just means like the place of my father. As Herod built this place for Antipater, his father, and it's midway between Caesarea and Jerusalem. Remember we've got, how many men do we have?

470 soldiers. Take him to Caesarea. And you see this procession going out of Jerusalem. And the Jews must have been like, wow, man, the strength of Rome. And they brought Paul by night to Antipartus.

[30 : 09] And on the morrow, they left the horsemen to go with him and returned to the castle. So all of a sudden, this big show of force, they like all leave. And there's just the few horsemen that go with him.

Paul's need for protection was simply an opportunity for political flex. It was an opportunity for Claudius Lysius to go, hey, I'm going to flex and I'm going to show the authority I have.

I'm going to use this to my advantage before Felix by sending him Paul and for my advantage before the Jews by showing how powerful I am. The church will never win in the political arena.

What it looked like helped for Paul. Paul, we want to help you. We want to protect you. It was just an opportunity for them to gain more political power, to gain more opportunity for themselves.

You see, the world sees the church as either a headache or a pawn. Paul's a headache or a pawn. Which is he? Oh, let's get him out of here. Hey, maybe I can use him to my advantage. It's one or the other. Jesus says, if they hated me, they're going to hate you.

[31 : 12] I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. So in verse 33, it says, then when they came to Caesarea and delivered the epistle to the governor, they presented Paul also before him, handing off this hot potato.

you know, Paul, it tells us in 2 Corinthians, there wasn't much about him to look at either. In chapter 10, verse 10, it says, for his letters, speaking of Paul, say they, are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible.

So here he comes before Felix, and he's probably like, I've heard of this guy, or who is this guy, or why is he here? And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was, because he wants to get rid of him too.

And when he understood he was of Cilicia, I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall until that time.

This is the beginning of two years that Paul's going to be in Caesarea. Two years, he's going to be handed off from person to person, political jockeying, trying to use him for a pawn, trying to use him to their advantage.

[32 : 25] He's just handed off for two years. You think of the carefree life Paul lived, just going where the Spirit led, here, there, and everywhere, wanting to go into Asia, while the Spirit forbid him, going into Macedonia, then down to Corinth, then eventually into Asia, to Ephesus, just all over the place, and now, just in one spot, just stuck here, just sitting here.

Felix was also hoping to pass the problem of Paul onto someone else, but that didn't work. You know, we talked last time about how to run a good political campaign. Well, to have political success in this world, step number one is never take responsibility.

Never, but always take credit. Never take responsibility. But man, if you can take credit, you do that. I'm not going to be responsible for this, but hey, I'll take all the credit. And if you want to be successful as a politician, and Claudius Lysias is on his way, if Felix was forced to have to deal with this problem of Paul, well, then he would at least see what political and personal gain he could get from it.

All right, if I got to deal with him, all right, I'm going to wait until his accusers come, and that's what we're going to find out this next chapter. And at the end of it, spoiler, at the end of chapter 24, it's going to tell us that after two years, that Portius Festus came into Felix's room, and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

He didn't care about Paul. He didn't care about justice. He only cared about the gain that he could receive from this. We heard from Paul in this section of Scripture once, telling the centurion to take his nephew.

- [34 : 02] This whole time now, as he's passed from person to person, as he's thrown on the back of a horse and taken to Caesarea, we don't hear anything from him. What should Paul's response have been? How should he respond in this situation?

He's being used unjustly. He's being held unjustly. The law is being used against him. Maybe he should become Paul the protester. Maybe that's what he should do. Maybe he should get out there and declare, I am going, this is not right and just.

I'm going to protest against how the system is being used against me. It is easier to loudly proclaim my rights instead of quietly crucifying them.

much easier to loudly proclaim my rights instead of just quietly crucifying them. Matthew 16, 24-25 says, Then Jesus said unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

One who's being crucified, guess what they don't have anymore? Rights. As Jesus, when Pilate signed that letter or that seal and said, take him away and crucify him, at that moment, Jesus was a dead man walking.

- [35 : 09] He had no rights. At all. That's why they treated him the way they did. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it. And whoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

You can't hold on to the life we have here. It's not meant to be. It's meant to be crucified. Why? So that I can just be miserable? So that I can endure hardship?

No, so I can gain so much more. Right? Whoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. She'll find true life and true meaning. Okay, so Paul's not going to be a protester, right?

Well, maybe he should be Paul the politician. Maybe he should try to work within the system. Do you know for the next two years Paul is going to have the best chance? He has a chance that most active conservatives would die for today.

He has the ear of kings, of governors, and he's right in the middle of this. He can change the system. Maybe he should do that. It's easier to tell others how to live a holy life than to live one myself.

- [36 : 13] Much easier to go out and tell you what you should be doing and how to live a holy life but how many people are willing to do it themselves? Right? Well, I don't like that law. I don't like how that's affecting me.

Why do you want to change? Because I want to do what I want to do. But are you willing to live a holy life? Oh, no. No, I don't like that entertainment's gone that far. That's terrible. But a little bit of sin in my entertainment is kind of fun. I like that.

You know? Well, are you willing to give your life for Christ? Well, no, no, no. I want to live my own life. I want to have my own plans. I don't want someone telling me what to do. But I'm also not going to totally surrender to Jesus either.

Much easier to tell others how to live a holy life than to live one myself. 1 Timothy 2, 1-2, I exhort you, therefore, Paul says, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.

For kings and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. Paul says, do you want to live a peaceable life in this world?

- [37 : 13] Pray. Not politic. Pray. 2 Peter 3, 11, seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy living and godliness?

How should you live if these things are going to be dissolved? You know, if God has called, wherever God places us and God calls us, calls us, we are salt and light.

Right? God doesn't necessarily call us into every sphere. God is going to call Paul to a specific way, a specific calling here.

So he's not Paul, the protester, or Paul, the politician. So who is he? Philemon 1, 1, Paul says, Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

God called Paul to be a prisoner. Just because Paul was effective in ministry as a prisoner does not mean I'm going to run out and try and become a prisoner. Right? Okay?

[38 : 10] God can use someone in the realm of politics. Just because God uses someone in the realm of politics doesn't mean I run out and try and throw myself into politics. Right? I'm not called to be an evangelist.

I'm not going to run out and try and start an evangelistic ministry. That's not what God's called me to. Where God calls us and where God places us, we are salt and light. That's where we are. That's what we do.

But that's for him to determine. And so for those that God puts in the political sphere, man, it's not to make this world a better place. Right? All these things are going to be dissolved. They're going to pass away.

That's not it. It's to stand for the truth. Even if they don't stand long. Right? Not to compromise. But Paul is a prisoner of Jesus Christ. He never once fought against the situation he was in.

He didn't try to protest or change the system. God used Paul to be a blessing in the situation he was in. Philippians 1, 12 through 14 says, 2 Timothy 2, 9 and 10.

[39 : 31] Paul says, wherein I suffer trouble as an evildoer, man, I have been unjustly accused. Even unto bonds I have been wrongfully imprisoned.

But the word of God is not bound. Therefore, I endure all things for the elect's sake that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. What is Paul's goal?

Salvation in eternity. We wouldn't have the book we have today if Paul decided to protest or if Paul decided to politic. If he said, I'm not going to let this happen to me, we wouldn't have this book.

Because so much of it was written when Paul was sitting there in bonds. He said, I'm a prisoner of Jesus Christ. Lord, how do you want to use me in this situation? How can I be used to edify the brethren?

How can I be used for eternity? You see, man could manipulate and they could politic, but they could not alter God's will nor hinder the truth. Man cannot alter God's will. They can't.

[40 : 28] Period. No matter what country, no matter what system they're in, God's will will not be altered and they cannot hinder the truth. You understand what Paul's saying? He's saying the truth doesn't need a perfect environment. It doesn't.

It doesn't need good laws. It doesn't need righteous people to make the system work. It doesn't. The truth cannot be bound. No matter the situation that you're in, the truth will always prosper.

So what is the end of all this? Paul, what's the end? What's the point as we close this out? Well, I think it's this. We can't pass the buck. We are the only hope for this world.

We cannot pass that responsibility off to someone else. I can't pass that to someone else to make this place a better place, to go and do whatever. We are the light of the world. We are ambassadors for Christ. We are the only hope for this world and not to make it better, but to call men and women and boys and girls out of this world because there's an eternity on our doorstep.

Romans 6.22, as we close, I just like the way this was phrased. You know, there's the scripture that says we're ambassadors for Christ, the one that says we are the light of the world. The city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

[41 : 36] Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. But Romans 6.22, I think just answering that question, what's the end? Well, this. But now, being made free from sin.

Okay, that's where we're at. And become servants to God. You have your fruit unto holiness and the end, everlasting life. That's what we're here for.

That's who we are. You know, and as we've established or God has established this church and us in it, what is the purpose? It's to edify and mature and to grow up the church.

God doesn't want a shallow church. Remember what he said about a lukewarm church? He spit it out of his mouth. God wants, God doesn't want a shallow church. So we want to be an equipped church.

We want to be a mature church. We want to be a bride that's prepared. Why? Because then we are equipped to go out and be the light of the world. Then I'm not getting distracted by all these other things. I can, like Paul, look at a situation that many others would look at and say, that's not right.

[42 : 41] And I can say, you're right. It's not. But this world's not my home. And so Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, is about to settle into one of the most fruitful periods of his ministry, which is still bearing fruit today.

We read the accounts of what he's done in Corinth, in Ephesus, but we don't really have any fruit from that, particularly that we can grab onto. But these letters that he wrote, so many of them from prison that make up our faith today.

So, Father, as we close, we thank you, Lord. Your word's so relevant, Lord. Lord, we don't want to be ineffective in this world, Lord.

But at the same time, Lord, we don't want to be manipulated by the enemy to think that effectiveness is in a realm and an area that is not in keeping with your word, Lord.

Lord, here is Paul, this amazing man, this example set before us, Lord, he is in prime position to do what many in the world would tell us is our priority, to affect the system and policies and practices of this world.

[43 : 53] But, Lord, what we see from Paul is that that meant nothing to him. What he realized, Lord, that his calling and his purpose was to affect the people of this world with the gospel, with the truth.

Lord, that's why we exist, to preach the word, Lord, to be built up, Lord, to be instant in season and out of season, to exhort, rebuke, with all long suffering.

And, Lord, we know that you have desired, Lord, for us to know you through your word, to be built up and edified and matured in your word. And, Lord, I pray that we would, like Paul, Lord, be used by you in whatever realm we're in to be the light of the world, Lord.

We are the only hope for this world. Thank you, Lord, for just your grace and your faith and your favor, Lord. We don't have to try and be something we're not. We don't have to try and fulfill your promises.

Thank you, Lord, that the enemy is defeated by a child. He was defeated by a child born in Bethlehem and then he was defeated by a criminal, what they thought was a criminal, that they hung on the cross.

[45 : 01] And today, Lord, he's defeated by us. That nobody's, Lord. The people that the world, they don't know our name, but you do, Lord.

And so, Lord, I pray that we would live effective lives for you. That we would not pass the buck, as it were. That we would take up the responsibility you've given us, Lord. And that, Lord, there would be fruit to your account and there would be men and women and children and boys and girls, Lord, in heaven, that their souls would be saved, Lord.

That there would be those who have fruit and reward and glory in heaven for all of eternity, Lord. Because we have chosen to go after the wheat, Lord, and not after the chaff.

Thank you, Jesus. In your name we pray. Amen.