



## **Christians on Trial – Part 5**

### **The Power of Integrity**

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I think most of you would agree that one of the most unsettling, the most vulnerable, one of the most at-risk things that can happen to you is when someone serves you papers. The kind of papers where there are a lot of impressive surnames at the top followed by the words law firm and your name is at the top. And you are there being the target of someone's lawsuit. Now, unless you work in the legal industry and that's your profession, to the rest of us this is a very serious and scary thing to get a letter like that. I would say even if you're an attorney you don't want to be the target of a lawsuit. You don't want to be accused. You don't have to, you know, testify or give depositions or be somehow named in something where someone is having some pending judgment on you and you're going to face the consequences of a judge. I mean, we don't want to be embroiled in lawsuits. We don't want to be the target of someone's legal animus. We don't want to have the kind of frustration that comes by being hauled into court and not knowing what's going to happen to us.

And yet that's exactly what we've been studying in the book of Acts is that, talking about Christians on trial, Paul is our standard. And when we think about the fact that there's a lot of hostilities that are targeted against us. And as we saw last time there can be a human or demonic adversaries who are going to work hard at trying to oppose us, putting us on trial. And, they're not always honest, obviously, and they're not always working toward justice, but, they're seeking to undo us in some way, as Martin Luther's old hymn used to put it. So we have to be vigilant. We have to be thoughtful. And as we think about the kinds of things that may happen to us we usually stop short of thinking that we're going to be hauled into court because of our Christianity. And I hope, at least in our lifetime, that doesn't happen. I hope it doesn't happen ever in our culture. But things are ramping up and there are a lot of hostilities. And we reached the next level in this particular passage. We've seen Paul having to answer before the Sanhedrin and Ananias, the high priest, and there have been the Roman officials, Lysias has been one who has dragged him into having to answer for himself. Tertullian, the attorney, has put him on trial. Felix has been there having to ask him all of these questions. And now Festus, the next governor, has been put in charge of figuring out what to do with the prisoner, Paul.

But today in Acts Chapter 25, beginning in verse 13, we see this kind of elevated and escalated to a whole nother level. For the first time in our text we have Paul being dragged in before someone with the title of king. And I think this is important for us to see how this has escalated and what kinds of power now is residing in the sovereign who can really say thumbs up or thumbs down to the Apostle Paul. Well we may not be able to identify with that fully, I hope there's some applicational truth we can pull out from this text. Let me first read it to you. It's rather lengthy, verses 13 all the way to the end of the chapter. It sets us up for an amazing chapter in Chapter 26 as Paul defends himself before this king. Let's start in verse 13 and just catch up with where we are in Paul's trial.

Verse 13, follow along as I read it from the English Standard Version. It says, "Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived in Caesarea." Now, you might remember his dad had died. He was simply called Herod, Chapter 12. But this is actually his namesake. King Agrippa the first was the one who died in Chapter 12. Even secular historians talk about how he died suddenly there in Caesarea Maritime where we're at, this is his son. Actually when his dad died he was only 17 back in Rome but he was called back eventually after they thought he had enough experience to arrive here in Judea, actually in the coastal city of Caesarea. And you might know when we talk about someone who bears the name Herod that he's been a very familiar character throughout the New Testament. His great-grandfather was the one who tried to kill Jesus when he was a baby. When the wise men had come to him, you might remember, he tries to figure out where this king of the Jews was born. That was Herod's title, the king. And so Herod wanted to snuff out this baby Jesus. He ended up killing a bunch of children in the village of Bethlehem and all the environs.

Well, his son, Antipas, Herod Antipas he was called, was the key antagonist as we see in the gospels as he was not only opposing Jesus but opposing John the Baptist prior to that and actually had him beheaded, you might remember when he's on his vacation over there in Perea. This Agrippa the first that we met in Acts 12, simply called Herod, was his nephew, he was Antipas' nephew. And now we have Antipas his son, and now he is the king. He's a young king and he's here to find out what's going on. He's got a governor named Festus. And it says in verse 14, after they had "stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, 'There is a man left prisoner by Felix.'" That was the one who came before Festus, of course, as the governor of Judea. Verse 15, "And when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him," Festus says, "asking for a sentence of condemnation against him," a capital offense. We need to put this man to death. Verse 16, Festus says, "I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had an opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him."

Verse 17, "So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day I took my seat on the tribunal, and I ordered the man to be brought. When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed." I didn't find there was anything worthy of putting him to death. Everything I heard when Tertullus came and all that went on when Felix was hearing the case. And even when Festus gets the case, as we saw last time, there was nothing that warranted in his mind of putting Paul to death. Rather he explains this was a religious dispute. "Rather they had certain points of dispute about their own religion," the Jews did, "and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. Being at a loss of how to investigate these questions," verse 20 says, "I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem to be tried there regarding them." Just go up to where the religious center of Judaism is and maybe all these people who know the Bible can figure this out. You're claiming he's the Messiah. You claim he rose from the dead. Maybe you can figure it out there. Being at a loss how to investigate this he wanted to go to Jerusalem.

Verse 21, "But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor," right? Remember he said, I appeal to Caesar. He said, "I ordered him to be held

until I could send him to Caesar. Then Agrippa," the king who outranks Festus, "said to Festus, 'I would like to hear the man myself tomorrow.'" Festus said, "'Tomorrow, you will hear him.' So the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in." Here's what Festus said. "He said, 'King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. But I have nothing definite to write to my Lord, about him. Therefore I brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after we have examined him I may have something to write. For it seems unreasonable in sending a prisoner not to indicate the charges against him.'" Which, of course, that is inappropriate so we better figure out what's wrong. And we're going to see in Chapter 26, a great chapter as Paul gets to stand trial before King Agrippa.

Today I was looking at this thinking, okay, this is really escalated from court, it's not a civil court, this is now a Roman court. And now we actually have gone from, you know, tribunes to governors and now we have, for the first time, a king. And, of course, you've got to sympathize with your pastor studying the Bible during the week, trying to figure out how we're going to preach this message to all the people of Compass Bible Church and everybody on the radio. I'm thinking how do we do this? It's hard for me to make an applicational bridge to you standing before a king because even in our system you're not going to stand before a king, not in our system. We don't have a sovereign like that who can say you live or you die based on your Christianity. I hope none of you are in a position to stand before a court or a jury in our day, let alone a king in a sovereign of an ancient Near Eastern culture, in this case the Greco-Roman culture. I just think, well, it's never going to happen. So I sat there thinking this week because I'm trying to prepare a sermon for you. Like they're never going to stand before a king, they're never going to stand before a king, they're never going to stand before a king. Then it dawned on me. Yeah they are.

So being that we've been in this judicial setting of courtrooms and Paul on trial, and I've tried to get you to think about all the ways in which we stand on trial as this continues in another chapter in this whole story. Right? It's the same song, another verse. I think it's good for us to extrapolate just a little bit, applicationally. Allow me a little lenience here in my exposition of this text to help us think about ultimate realities because there is a king. He's actually the King of kings. And the Bible's very clear that there is going to be a court summons that's going to be sent to you for one of two courts. Either you're going to go to the great White Throne judgment that it speaks about in Revelation Chapter 20 or you going to go to the Bema Seat judgment of Christ, as First Corinthians 3 says, and you're going to stand before the King and you're going to have to answer to the King. So in that sense you are served papers. You've been served papers just by being part of the human race and you're going to have to answer to that King.

And so I want to think about our judgment, our coming evaluation, because it's "appointed for man once to die, and after that comes the judgment." It says in Isaiah 33, we have a "king,"



that is the Lord. He is the "lawgiver" and the "judge." And those titles, the Lord's name, we speak of Yahweh as our king, right? He's king by virtue of being our creator. We are his creatures. He's the one who gives us instructions. He's the lawgiver, and therefore he'll hold us accountable for the laws that he's given us. He's also our judge. And in light of that since we're looking at human courts, I think it wouldn't be a bad thing for us to have a little leniency to think of applicational extrapolation into the idea that one day all of us in this room are going to stand in a courtroom, one of two different courtrooms, but you're still going to stand before the King. So I want us to prepare for that. And to think about this let's look back at the passage here. Paul is a prisoner, verse 14, before the king in both verses 13 and 14 and it says there is a case that the Jews had laid out against him, and it was asking for a sentence of condemnation. Those are all biblical concepts that are all applied to us as individuals. And so we want to think about the reality of having a sentence of condemnation and try and think about how we are supposed to respond to this.

So let's think about that as unpleasant as it is, and it is a bit unpleasant. It's unpleasant because many people who like to talk about Christ and God and Jesus and Christianity, they don't like to talk about these things. But if we don't talk about these things we're not talking about Christianity. Biblical Christianity necessitates we think about the coming judgment. This is critical. Paul had spoken previously under his Roman incarceration about the coming judgment. And so we ought to think about the coming judgment as long we're thinking about judgment here and a king judging Paul and whoever might judge you, as we saw last week. Even with the cosmic powers of this present darkness there's a sense in which we know we're always being accused and we're always under accusation. But the ultimate accusation would be if we're accused before the living God. And to help us with this, let's get some directives from Jesus in John Chapter 9.

So take your Bibles and turn to John Chapter 9. And let's remember the context of this particular passage that speaks about Jesus healing a blind man. A bunch of questions about why is he blind. Right? It seems like maybe someone sinned. Was it his sin? Did God look forward and see the man would be a sinner and therefore he made him blind? Or is it maybe his parents who sinned and maybe that's why they had a blind child? But nevertheless, all those theological questions about sin and consequence sets up a discussion that Jesus ends up having with the leaders of the synagogue. And the Pharisees here who are leading in this particular place they don't like the fact that Jesus, as Pilate was clear to point out they're very envious of Jesus. They didn't like the fact that he was getting all this airtime, all this laud, all this glory from the people. And when he heals people the Pharisees are mad about it. So they're going to struggle with this because here's an undeniable miracle and what are they going to do? Well, they're going to start throwing their weight around as the leaders of the synagogue, as the leaders of Israel. And they're going to start castigating a lot of people in this narrative.

So let's jump into the middle of it, if you would, in John Chapter 9. Let's start in verse 24, as they called this man who had formerly been blind, "And they said, 'You need to give glory to God.'" We don't want you giving glory to this man, this Jesus of Nazareth. "We know this man is a sinner," right? You're trying to give credit to this man, Jesus, this rabbi. But I'm telling you

he's no one in our book. So you need to give glory to God because this guy's a sinner. The man who'd been formerly blind, "He answered, 'Whether he is a sinner I do not know.'" I don't know his moral life. I don't know anything about that. "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see," right? So this just throws it right back in their face. I don't know what this guy's all about, but I was blind and now I can see. This is a miracle. This is amazing. And this is cause to not only say thank you to the means of your sight but it's also something to glorify God for and he's not opposed to that. But that's a big deal, right? He's just done something that shows something divine is at work through him.

Come down to verse 34. "They answered him," speaking to the man who was blind, "'You were born in utter sin, and you would teach us?' And they cast him out." They didn't call his parents in. They're calling him a sinner. They're mad at his parents who were trying to equivocate on the whole issue. They're calling Jesus, the means of this healing a sinner. So these guys are calling everyone a sinner, right? Except themselves. And Jesus has a lesson to teach us all about our ultimate standing before the King one day. There's some courtroom language that is utilized in this text. So let's take a look at the last three verses of this narrative. Verse 39, "Jesus said, 'For judgment I came into the world.'" Now that statement, if you know the book of John, may confuse you just a little bit, because in John Chapter 3 you might remember surrounding the most famous verse in the Bible, verse 16, is the statement about Jesus coming to the world, not to judge the world but so that through him he might save the world. So you're thinking, wow, this seems like a contradiction. Well note the next verse which says, listen, here's the deal. Those who are believing in the Son of God they don't come into judgment, but those who do not obey the Son, right? They don't trust in him. They don't obey him. They don't follow him. Well, condemnation is resting upon them already.

So this is not about the fact that Jesus doesn't want us to determine where we stand with the living God. That's the judgment he's talking about here. He did come into the world to separate, John Chapter 1 started that way, that Jesus would be born, and the angel told Mary he would be "a sign to be opposed." He would be for the "rising of many in Israel and for the falling of many in Israel." There's going to be a separation, as Jesus kept saying in his ministry, I'm going to separate even intimate relationships like those in a family, right? A mother against a daughter-in-law. Sorry, happy Mother's Day. But there are issues of Christianity dividing families. And so the reality of this is Jesus is coming to judge, not the coming consequence of sin. That's his second coming, right? Read the book of Revelation, Chapters 6 through 19. A lot of judgment coming to the world. And then ultimately in Chapter 20, the Great White Throne judgment and the punishment is going to come. So he didn't come to punish the world. He came to save the world. But he did come to judge in the sense that he wants you to figure out where you stand. And so he's going to use the illustration of a blind man seeing, the miracle, which actually historically had just happened. But he's going to make that the analogy of making sure you know where you stand with him.

Now take a look at how this goes. He says now, middle of verse 39, "that those who do not see may see, and those who see might become blind." Now, this is a riddle here, is it not? Just think through what you're saying. So if you don't see, you can see. And if you see, you can become blind. But that seems like it's just a perpetual, you know, circular concept

because if I am seeing and become blind and I realize that I'm blind now, you said you also came so that the blind can see. So it seems like, I don't know, where are we going with this? Everyone's going to end up seeing. Is that what you're saying? That's not what he's saying. But that's the point. I want people to know whether they're seeing or blind. And the reality is all of you are blind. And here's a principle I'll make you lean into in your small groups this week. "We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." We all are sinners. So in this analogy everyone is blind. So he wants people who see and you can put that in quotes who think they see, and I'll prove that in a minute as we read the rest of these three verses, he says, I want you to know that you can't see. And just like the motifs of John Chapter 1, he comes as the light. He comes to bring the light of revelation, of clarity to this world. And coming to bring that light, the light is going to, as he even says at the end of John 3, he's going to call people into the light so that their deeds might be exposed. And that's why people don't want to be in the light. They'd rather stay in the dark, because if I can stay in the dark, I don't have to admit that I'm blind. I don't have to admit that I'm a sinner. So we are to come into the light so that we can see that we're blind and then God, in this analogy, will heal our blindness. That's the picture of this riddle. Jesus said, "For judgment I came to the world so that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind."

Now the Pharisees were picking up on this even if we're slow to pick up on this. John 9 verse 40 says, "Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said, 'Are we also blind?'" Now we know this is metaphorical in this passage, right? They're not thinking they can't see. They know they can see. They just watched a blind man become seeing. And they say, you're using this as an analogy that somehow we're in the dark, right? That something's wrong with us. Well, what have they been doing, these Pharisees? They've been looking at the people saying, you're a sinner, you're a sinner, you're a sinner. And now they're saying, you're not saying we're blind to. I mean, you're not putting us in that camp because they love to think they were right and the other people were sinners. We're not sinners. We're Pharisees. We're leaders of the synagogue. Well, he says this as they ask the question, "Do you think we're blind?" Jesus answered them, verse 41, "If you were blind, you would have," now here's the courtroom language, "no guilt." If you were blind, what does that mean? If you knew that you were a sinner, if you came into the light so that your deeds could be exposed and you knew that you were a sinner, here's the thing, then God could remove your guilt. "But," he says, "now that you say, 'We see,'" you think you're innocent, you don't think you're a sinner, guess what? "Your guilt remains."

See Jesus came not only to be the light to show you your sin, but as John Chapter 1 says, he is also "the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." Sin makes you guilty. The Bible says we're all guilty. So we bring it back to the courtroom language. If you are guilty and the condemnation and sentence of death is upon you what you need is to have your guilt removed. And the only way to have your guilt removed as this passage clearly says, even if it's in riddle format, right? The point is, you need to admit that you're blind. You need to admit that you're a sinner. If that's too confusing and you didn't follow all that, this will be really clear. Luke 18. Turn there real quick. Luke Chapter 18, then we'll write down our first point. Luke Chapter 18 verse 9. Same group of people, right? Same title at least, same category, they're the Pharisees, verse 9. "And he," that's Jesus, "told this parable to some who trusted in



themselves that they were righteous." Oh, those are the people who say, "We see, we see, we don't have sin." Well, those people were also the people who treated others with contempt. You're a sinner, you're a sinner, you're a sinner. They look down on other people. And what's the parable? Verse 10, "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector." And that's where everyone would say Boo, a tax collector. They were the people who not only collect their taxes but they were cheating. They were turncoats on the nation of Israel because they were collecting taxes for Rome. And they were there among the people in the villages of Israel ultimately pushing not only to get the taxes for the conquering nation that was over them that they didn't want over them, but they were also skimming off the top and collecting more than they were supposed to. And that was really clear in Luke Chapter 3. That was the problem with the tax collectors.

So the tax collector, Boo. And there's the Pharisee, righteous man. That's at least how they saw themselves. Verse 11, "The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I'm not like other men, extortioners,' like those Roman soldiers, "unjust," like the people who are out there in the marketplace trying to cheat and steal, "adulterers," the sexually immoral, "or even like this tax collector," over there. Look at that guy. He's a turncoat. He's betraying his nation. He's not loyal. And not only that, he's a cheat. "I fast twice a week," look at all the things I do, "I give tithes of all that I get." So he's feeling pretty good calling everyone else a sinner but he himself being self-righteous. Verse 13, "But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift his eyes to heaven, but he beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me,'" here's his self-analysis, "'a sinner!' I tell you," Jesus breaks into this parable and says, "this man went down to his house," the first usage of this word, it's a courtroom word, it's the only time Jesus is recorded as using this word in the gospels, he says, "he went home justified." He went home exonerated. He went home before God, to put it in terms of John 9, without guilt, all of his guilt was removed. "Rather than the other." The other thought he was better than everyone else. He thought he was better than the turncoat tax collector. Why? Because "Everyone who exalts himself," and thinks that he sees, "will be humbled." Ultimately, there will be guilt upon him and judgment coming for that guilt. "But the one who humbles himself," and is honest with himself. And that's why the sermon is about integrity. It takes honesty. Integrity is honesty, and honesty is saying I am a sinner. And that's hard for people to recognize.

There are people in this room right now who don't think they're sinners. I guarantee you your neighbors in your neighborhood. Go ask them are you a good person or a bad person. What are your neighbors going to say? Good person. You start talking about heaven and hell and guilt and judgment they're going to say I'm not going to be judged. Why? Because I'm a good person. How are you going to determine that goodness? I'm going to look at other people and say I'm better than them. And everyone likes to have a self-assessment that they are good. And if you're good, you're saying I see, my eyes are clear, I have good moral character, I'm okay. Well, your guilt remains. But if you're willing to say I'm a sinner, if you know you're blind, you admit that you're blind and you do it without any rationalization, without any excuses, right? Then you get your guilt removed. This is the key, by the way, to the gospel. That's the reason a lot of people do not understand the gospel even though they go to church and carry Bibles around. They do not understand the gospel because they do not grapple with the



problem of sin. If you get the doctrine of sin right, so many things just immediately align themselves, including the gospel. And you would never write a gospel tract that doesn't deal with this front and center, head-on, from the beginning. You have to understand the problem of sin. And when you realize you're a sinner before a holy God that's the key. I mean, it couldn't be any clearer in this passage that is the key. You cannot think you're righteous. You cannot think you're good. You have to admit that you're a sinner.

So let's go back to the courtroom you're going to stand in front of, you are going to stand before God. The only way to prepare for that is to plead right now I'm guilty. I know we have people all the time, including in this room, who would say before, God, I'm not guilty, not guilty, not guilty. Or they love to, as is true in legal jurisprudence, even here in California, *nolo contendere*. They can make a plea that is no contest. You've heard of that, right? If you're in the legal profession, you know what this is all about. It has certain implications in court. Basically, it's saying, listen, I'm not going to fight this. I'm not going to argue this. I know a lot of people spiritually who are pleading no contest before God. They're saying, "Well, you know what? Everyone's imperfect. No one's perfect." If you have a non-Christian tell you that or if that's the way you're thinking, "Yeah, I might be a sinner, but, you know, everyone's a sinner. I don't want to talk about my sin. I don't have to respond to you about my sin. I don't want to look at Bible verses about my sin." They don't want to engage in looking at it in detail. They just want to say no contest, I'm not here to argue with you, right? You cannot get right before the living God by pleading not guilty or no contest. The only plea that works before God's tribunal is to say you're guilty.

Number one on your outline. it took a long time to get there, but here it is. We need to "Admit Guilt Before God's Tribunal," as you imagine it. And I hope you don't have to stand there before the Great White Throne. But if you think about meeting the God who created you, the King of kings and Lord of lords, you have to say, I am guilty, I am a sinner. You cannot do all this lateral comparison and think, well, I'm better than someone else. That makes me good. It doesn't make you good. My illustration that I use over and over again about the car windshields. The windshields coming off the windshield assembly line in the factory cannot get off that factory floor if it has any kind of defects in it. If there's a crack, if there's a pit, if it's smashed to pieces, it doesn't matter how it's broken. If it's broken, it's broken. That's why the Bible says in the book of James, if you've broken one part of the law then you're a lawbreaker. Duh. It doesn't matter if you haven't broken all of it, you've broken some of it. That means it is not acceptable before God. God is a holy God, the only kind of person he's ever going to deal with in fellowship and blessing is the person who is perfect. He's morally perfect. He fellowships with morally perfect people. And you say, well, no one is morally perfect, right? That's exactly right. No one is. "We all fall short of the glory of God." Everyone is a sinner. Do we want to get right with the living God. Do you want to make it on the day when you're called by the summons to go stand before the King, the judge of the world, the lawgiver, you need to say, I broke your law. I broke your law, and there is no excuse. That's the only way this works.

This is admitting sin. The doctrine of sin is so important and it's the thing you've got to get people to understand. And if you're trying to win your neighbor or your extended family member to Christ, you can't sit here and just say, well, it'd be great if you became a Christian





because everything would be better. Here's a big bag of blessings over his shoulder he's just going to pour on your life and he loves you and it's great. Well, he does love you and he does have blessings, I understand that, but the gospel of the good news of Christ begins with we have a sin problem. How serious is it? It's of an infinite magnitude, the sin problem that we have. That's why the gospel, man, it's hard to preach the gospel to non-Christians. I've told you before, I say I'll do your weddings and they say preach the gospel, preach the gospel. You don't want me preaching the gospel, right? If I preach the gospel at your wedding, I can talk about Jesus, I can talk about your commitment to Christ, I can talk about how this mirrors the relationship God has with his people. I can do all that. But you want me to tell your Aunt Ethel that she's a sinner before God and guilty without excuse, right? She won't want me to come to the reception. I'm just telling you, this is not going to work out. Let's save the evangelism for after the ceremony or before the ceremony. All I'm telling you is the gospel is hard-hitting because it forces people to say I am guilty. I am a lawbreaker. And all we can do is what the man does here in Luke 18, throw yourself on the mercy of the judge. Have mercy on me, a sinner. I'm guilty. Everyone in this kind of cleaned-up South Orange County culture likes to think that they're good. No one. Not one. No one is.

Back to our passage. Again, it's just a platform for looking at transcendent realities, all but the last point. All the first three points are all about transcendent realities. I want you to think now about what he ends up saying when he says, Festus says to Agrippa, listen, "I answered it wasn't the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met his accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge. So I sat there on my tribunal on the next day and I said, come on, let's hear the accusers. And the accusers came and they stood up and they brought their charges. And I sat there and realized there was no charge at all that was evil. This was some weird dispute about their religion. There was nothing that rises to the margin of what it would mean for me as a Roman official to put him to death. They wanted him to die. I could find no death sentence in him." Now that's what we want, right? Again, just to use this, the platform, into eternal truths. Right? That's what I want to know that I am not worthy of eternal death. And yet the wages of sin is death. And I've just admitted that I'm a sinner.

Here's the second half of it at risk of oversimplifying the gospel. It starts with the reality of saying I am a sinner, I admit it, I throw myself on the mercy of the judge. And secondly, we've got to think about how we get this removed. How is it that the "Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world?" Well, first and foremost, you've got to admit you're a sinner. But once you do, now I've got to say how am I going to get this taken care of? And it's hard for us because you've been taught a kind of forgiveness that is not divine forgiveness. Our forgiveness is very different. The word "Aphiēmi" in the Greek New Testament really means to let it go, release it. And I'm supposed to release this debt, this anger, this frustration, this hostility I feel toward you because you've wronged me. Like when I lent out my car to someone. I told you this story about my car. I was a young pastor. Like, oh, this guy's hurting. He's my friend, here's my car. Well, it comes back to my driveway behind a tow truck and it's smashed to pieces. And he shows up and gives me the key back. I was a young pastor, I had no money, I was barely making it. But I let this guy use my car. He crashes my car. We made certain stipulations about the use of the car, he broke all of those, he comes back with the key, and I'm sitting



there as a pastor having preached on forgiveness all these times in the pulpit, even as a young pastor. And I just prayed like I could stop being a pastor for about two weeks so I could deal with this guy. I was mad. I was so young and so poor, I didn't even know what the word comprehensive coverage meant. I didn't know, I had none of that. All I saw was a huge bill sitting in the driveway, devastated. All I can think of is the sermons that I kept preaching about forgiveness. Let it go, let it go, let it go, let it go.

So I did. It wasn't easy. I struggled, but I said forgiven as though you'd never done it. I forgive you. It took some time. I wrestled through that. I'm a human being, it was hard for me. But I did it. And the day I did it, I looked out on the driveway. And you know what? That car just fixed itself. It was all fixed. (audience laughing) No, it doesn't work that way. I am called to forgive but it doesn't fix the problem. And that's why some of you struggle so hard to forgive, it doesn't seem to fix the problem. God cannot forgive without fixing the problem. And the problem is you have violated his holy standards. You are, I hate to put it this way, repulsive to a holy God. Because of the love that he has for you because you were created in his image and you are his creation, he's willing to fix the problem. But to pay for the damage that you've caused there has to be a payment. Turn to Romans Chapter 3 with me. The payment has to be made. And for you to have sinned without the penalty of eternal death, because "the wages of sin is death," you have to have the payment paid. And by the way, the skinny jeans, goatee-wearing, new theologian of the modern, you know, coastal California, who's going to tell you that you cannot believe in substitutionary atonement as though God punishes his Son so you can be forgiven because that's cosmic child abuse. I'm just telling you he's wrong. I don't care how skinny his jeans are. How cool his goatee looks. He's wrong. He's wrong because the Bible says it is exactly what happens.

The Father is pleased to "crush him," to quote Isaiah 53, "and put him to death to offer him as a guilt offering" so that he might forgive us, so he might make "intercession for the transgressors." That's the only way this works. It is not cosmic child abuse, right? It is the Father being willing to treat his Son as though he were me. Look at this passage. It's not just him dying. He didn't show up on Thursday to die on Friday to be raised on Sunday. He lived an entire life of human righteousness so that that righteousness could be given to me. That's why it says in this passage, look at it with me in Romans Chapter 3, drop all the way down to verse 21. This righteousness of God. It's come, it's here. It's in Christ, the glory of God. Here he is resident. "The fullness of deity dwelling in bodily form." "It has been manifested apart from the law." It wasn't about me keeping the standard. I couldn't keep the standard. "We all fall short of the glory of God." Even if I'm better than the next guy, I am not good before God. I have to admit it, throw myself on the mercy of the judge. But there is a righteousness to pay for the damage that I've caused and is a righteousness that God himself provides. Now it's apart from the law and all the rules but it doesn't mean that the book of the rules, the law and the prophets, the Old Testament, didn't talk about it. I just quoted one passage, Isaiah 53. It talked about the coming of a forgiveness that is given to us in the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." The righteousness of God that he's going to provide, "It comes through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there's no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are," here's the courtroom language, "justified by his



grace." What does that mean? That we didn't earn it. We didn't buy it. "As a gift, through," the buying back, "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Not only do your neighbors not want to hear about your Christianity, because you're going to have to start with you're bad, not good, even though you think you're good. But secondly, you're going to say this is a gift of grace that God through his Son, his ministry, his life, his death, his burial, his resurrection has all provided you the righteousness you need to fix the damage you've caused with God. They're going to start to understand what you're saying, that it's a gift and it's given. There's no distinction that you can be a good Sunday school kid who's grown up in church and you've never done anything egregious. You're not an extortioner. You're not an adulterer. You're not betraying your nation or your family. And in all those things they're going to say, you mean you're saved the same way that the extortioner and the adulterer are? Now let's talk about a child molester. Let's talk about a rapist. Let's talk about a murderer. "You mean to tell me that the guy that sits in the penitentiary, he could three hours before he dies put his trust in Christ and say I want the forgiveness that's found in Christ by faith and God would impute that to him and make him absolutely qualified and worthy to go to the same heaven you're going to? If that's what your gospel says, I don't want any part of it." That's what non-Christians tell me. I don't want any part of that. Why do I want to go there with all these child molesters and murderers and rapists that you're telling me get it just immediately the forgiveness that comes in Christ. I don't want that.

But once they give me that objection I think to myself, finally, I've communicated properly the grace of Jesus Christ. It is exactly what it is. That's why Jesus dies on a cross with a criminal dying next to him and says, today you'll be with me in purgatory. Remember when he says that? Because there's a lot of sin that's got to be burned off this guy before he gets there. No, no. Today you'll be with me in... They exclaim, "What? That guy. Can you imagine? Can you imagine the Sabbath School graduate looking up and hearing that and going what are you talking about? He's not going to Paradise. He's here hanging on a cross because he's justly being punished. He's the worst of the worst. I mean, yeah, the immediate thought. Let's create the doctrine of purgatory. That'll be a great idea because we cannot let him go directly to heaven. Impossible." But you understand that is what the Bible teaches. That you are fully qualified because of the work of Christ. Right? Fully qualified to inherit this whole big giant thing called God's favor and grace and forgiveness. Right? "To share in the inheritance with the saints in light." Saints. So when a non-Christian says to me, "You're telling me I'm bad and you're saying that badness disqualifies me as much as the badness of anyone else and that the grace of forgiveness bought through Christ it is imputed to me the same way it's imputed to everyone else. I don't like that because I want my good works to count for something." And this text says no.

The purchase of you to be on God's team it comes in Christ, look at this, verse 25, "Whom God put forward as a propitiation ... by his blood," the payment by his death. His death effectuates for me my forgiveness the same way it did the thief on the cross or the guy in the penitentiary who comes to Christ at the end of his life. That's what the Bible teaches. It's purchased by Christ, and it's to be received by a lifetime of good works, at least 25 years of faithful giving to the church. No, it's to be received by faith. And this was to show God's



righteousness. God's going to show righteousness that he's going to impute it to people no matter what their level of sin. "Because in his divine forbearance, his patience, he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time," right? There was a lot of stuff that God put up with. But here all the righteousness that makes up for every lack, here it is, he comes and replaces resumes of every person who is trusting in him, that he gives them that righteousness so that he might be the righteous, that's what the word "just" means here, the righteous, the just. And he can be the one who makes righteous "the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

Number two, let's put it this way. If you don't want to be condemned before the tribunal of God you've got to "Celebrate the Exoneration Won by Christ." And that's a great word, exoneration. I am exonerated of all of my sins. And I don't do it by my good works, I get it because Christ has won it for me. He fought temptation and was righteous. He was tempted in every way as I am but he was without sin. He won the battle. I failed at the battle. He is the one now who incurs all of my sinful punishment. "God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Christ I might become the righteousness of God." I get all the righteousness from heaven that God has provided through his Son. This is the gospel. If we get these two points right and at the risk of being reductionistic let me just say you throw yourself on the mercy of God because you know without excuse you're a sinner and you say I'm going to celebrate the full purchase that Christ has fully done this and I can't contribute to it. The only thing I contribute to it, as others have rightly said, is my sin. If you think that way you've got this. And once you've got that here's what happens. You no longer have to face that judgment. Your summons will not be for the courtroom called the Great White Throne judgment, Revelation 20. Do you know why? Because your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. And the Bible says, the only people who are summoned to the Great White Throne are those whose names are NOT written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Woohoo! No judgment for me.

There are two more points in the sermon. Those might be for the non-Christian in the room, and maybe just for the Christian just to be refreshed on the points of the gospel, you know all that, you yawn through a lot of that. But let me remind you of a doctrine that's not taught very often in the Church. And I'll use the platform here of our passage, if you go back to verse 19, as Festus rightly says, "I didn't know how to judge all those religious thoughts. And they were talking about Jesus. Did he die? You know, was he raised again? Paul said he did. And they said he didn't. I didn't know how to investigate all this. I mean, come on, this is above my pay grade. I can't figure out what people's beliefs are and whether they're doctrinally right. This isn't a religious court. This is a civil court. This is a court, a judicial court. It's not a place for me to figure out whether someone's doctrine is right. He can't do that. Right? He appealed to Caesar or whatever, to Caesar he's going to go. But I'm just telling you this is just not what this court is all about." And I'm thinking, well, that's true. That's really true. When it comes to things like this, like your doctrine, your beliefs, your motives, your life. Right? The things that you're never going to get arrested for. No one's going to be arrested in our county, at least not today, for saying Jesus isn't the Christ or he didn't rise from the dead. That's just not in the purview of the court. It's not the jurisdiction of our courts. And in a sense we got to realize the jurisdiction of the Great White Throne, that courtroom is very different than the other



courtroom that the Bible says that every Christian is going to be called and summoned to, and that is called the Bema Seat of Christ. Which, by the way, every time we see the word "tribunal," that's the word "bema," the raised elevated platform. And so we have a tribunal that every Christian is going to be summoned to, and it is one that will determine all the nuances of your beliefs. Not only that, all the motivations of your life, every word that you've spoken, every deed that you've done, every imaginative thought you've had that you've willfully engaged in. The Bible says you will be called to account for that.

Number three, you need to "Soberly Anticipate Christ's Tribunal." It's called the Bema Seat judgment of Christ. And it's not going to happen in the same room, I don't think, let's just put it in terms of courtrooms, as the courtroom that consigns people to punishment for their sin. "Because there is no condemnation for those in Christ." And the only thing about the Great White Throne is what kind of condemnation you're going to receive. It's going to be based on knowledge. It's going to be based on deeds. It is going to be based on bad works. Sure. But what about the Bema Seat judgment of Christ? That's where there is a court that is going to view your life and decide whether or not your life was lived in a way that is worthy of reward or how much of your life was not worthy of reward. And this goes back to every parable Jesus told about faithful stewards. Stewards are given responsibilities. They're entrusted with certain gifts and then the master goes away. And when the master comes back, and we get this phrase from those parables, and he either says to them, you were a good servant, well done, good and faithful servant, or he says you were a bad servant, a lazy servant. And the reality is, we're going to have to stand before God and give an account to him. That's what's going on in passages like First Corinthians 3, Second Corinthians 5. That's what's going on in Romans 14.

Let's look at that passage just to show you that we have to stand before God's tribunal, more specifically, Christ's tribunal, even though it's here labeled the Throne of God. We're going to have to stand before the almighty authority and answer for our lives. And in this context it's very clear that in the Church there were disputes about things that ultimately didn't matter. These were issues of conscience, about kosher eating and about whether we should even remember it's the Passover this week. We got Romans who don't even think in those terms. You got background Jewish believers now that say, well, that is important. We should honor that day. And he goes, listen, none of that really matters. Look at the point that he makes here in Romans Chapter 14 verse 4, he says, "Are you passing judgment on a servant of another? It is before his own master he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand now." All of us are going to stand through the Bema Seat judgment of Christ, but there are going to be things that we're going to be ashamed of, and they're going to be things we're going to be rewarded for. Verse 10, "Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you," think about your life, "why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.'" And that passage that's quoted here from the Old Testament, from Isaiah 45, is a reminder that it's not just non-Christians who are going to stand before God, we're going to stand before God. Different day, different time on God's eschatological calendar. But verse 12 is very clear. Each of us, Paul puts himself in this, will give an account of himself to God.



What's he going to look at? How you responded to all the things that God has told you to do. Like in this passage, don't despise your brother. Stop passing judgment on mere opinions. Look at verse 17, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy." Those are the things we've got to focus on. "Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men." Your life will do better in the church. Your friendships will go better. Your small groups will go better. And guess what? God is going to like that. You're going to please him. So let us pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding. "Do not for the sake of food," verse 20, "destroy the work of God." Do not do things that God is not going to be pleased with. Why? Because First Corinthians 3 says, you are going to be judged either with rewards for what you've done right, or you're going to "suffer loss" by watching all the opportunities you could have had to do something that pleased the Lord and it's all going to be, as he says in that passage, "wood, hay and straw" burned up and gone. You want to make every day count. You want to do what Jesus said. Store up for yourselves "treasure in heaven."

I talk about this all the time but do you believe this is coming, a day when your life is going to be evaluated? You've got to get to the place where you say, I got to work, I got to invest, I got to think, I got to soberly prepare for that. Soberly, really soberly? God doesn't want to harsh me out here. Yeah, he does, First Peter Chapter 1. He says that you need to, as you think about calling on your Father, you pray to God, he's also one who impartially judges each person's work. And so you should live your life in fear during your "time of your exile" down here. You live in a sinful culture, but you want to do well by not being sinful and doing what's right in your relationship with the world, your relationship with your job, your relationship with your family, your relationship with your church. And you do not want to displease the Lord. You don't want to tear things down. You want to build up. You want to do what's good. It takes integrity to tell the truth about your sin before God. It takes integrity, honesty to say Christ paid it all and I can't contribute to it. And it takes integrity to look at your life and say I want to make sure I adjust my life so I do what I should do when it relates to me pleasing the Lord regardless of the topic, whatever it might be.

There's a lot in our discussion questions for your small groups this week to dive into this, and some people in your small groups, I guarantee you, have never even thought about this. You never think about it. You're going to be evaluated. Every Christian's going to be evaluated. No condemnation, you're not even going to be punished. There's no purgatory and there is no Lake of Fire for you as a Christian. But there will be a suffering of loss when you look at things in your life and think, man, I can't believe it. I gave an account of myself to God and God was not pleased with half of my Christian life. You're not going to answer for your pre-Christian life, you're going to answer for your Christian life. And in that you're going to have to struggle through that but right now we can make a real big difference by making sure we not only look at our actions but also our motives. And Jesus talked all the time about our motives, didn't he? He said that the motives are really a problem that so often we have. Because we can do the right things as the Pharisees did, but they did it for all the wrong reasons.



Just jot this down. First Corinthians Chapter 4 verses 3 through 5. First Corinthians 4:3 through 5 just reminds us, as Paul said, one day I'm going to be judged and the secrets of men's hearts are going to be revealed, and "Then each one will receive his commendation from God." We'll be praised, we'll be rewarded and that'll be an amazing day. But for now, to think back to our passage, Paul standing in court, which I've often said, I hope you never have to stand in court because you're a Christian. Well, the last verses there, 22 through 27, just talk about all the things that Paul had been through and he's just bringing Agrippa up to speed. King Agrippa the Second is coming up to speed on all that Paul had been through. And I think to myself, I don't want you embroiled in court cases. And I think that can be a pretty across-the-board principle, even though God sometimes makes it unavoidable for people like Paul and maybe one day for you, I don't know. But to the best of my ability, I'd like to stay out of this. As a matter of fact, as Paul put it to Timothy in Ephesus, he said there in First Timothy Chapter 2, we should seek to pursue living a "quiet life," a quiet life. He's talking about government officials. I don't want to make a mess. I don't want a tumult. I don't want to be a troublemaker. I don't want to be a meddler. I don't want to end up in court. Matter of fact, I want to avoid court at all costs, I do. I don't want to be dragged into court, not only for my Christianity, I want to live a quiet life. It doesn't mean I'm not faithful to God, I'm faithful God. If faithfulness to God leads me to court, so be it. But I want to do all I can, even as it relates to First Corinthians 6, when you and I disagree with something. Stay out of court he says. Don't drag your stuff before the secular magistrates. Don't do it.

Let's put it this way. Number four, I think integrity can keep you out of court. Let's put it this way. "Diligently Avoid Man's Tribunals." There are tribunals. We don't want to go and stand before you. And you should hope to never be delivered a summons, right? Depending on your life or your job and I've had my own summons. I understand how it is to be falsely accused by the world. You will be and I get it. But the reality is to the best of our ability we want to, even as Jesus said, let's make peace on the way to court. You never know what's going to happen in a secular court. So I'm going to live a life that avoids that. Here's a passage, one of my favorite verses. Can I share one of my favorite verses? I say that about a lot of verses, but here, this one, I mean it. I mean, this one I'm just saying that because I have this emblazoned right next to my reading chair. Every morning I get in my reading chair and do my reading, both in the Bible and all these other Christian books. But right there I have this verse and this verse, verse 14, Philippians Chapter 2 verse 14 is there, but it's not a complete sentence. I want to read 15 and 16. But here's what this passage says that will avoid so many problems. Here it comes. Philippians Chapter 2 verse 14. It says, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing." That's a good one right there. Grumbling and disputing. I don't want to complain. Right? That causes problems and I don't want to dispute. I don't really want to fight and argue. I don't want to wrangle about stuff. I would rather be wronged, as First Corinthians 6 says, than to be embroiled in something that is going to put me before an arbiter or a mediator or a judge. I don't want to do that. I want to make peace. I'd rather be wronged as Proverbs 19 says, "It's a glory overlooking offense." I don't want to pound the table for justice. I don't need my pound of flesh. I don't want any of that. "So far as it depends on me I want to live peaceably with all" men to quote the Scriptures.



Now, is it unavoidable? Some of you I know it's not avoidable. Even Christians, I understand there could be businesses involved and employees involved and all kinds of things that go beyond just your personal offense. I understand you may end up in situations but let it be the exception and not the rule. Please, let's do our best to do no grumbling, no complaining and no disputing. That's hard for us to do, I get it. That's why I emblazoned it there where I see it every single day. I don't want to live like that. What does it do? Verse 15, "So that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation." And in a twisted and crooked generation who knows what might happen when I'm called in before officials? I want to avoid this as much as I possibly can. Of course, Paul is a case in point where he couldn't avoid it, I get that. I'd like you to avoid it if you possibly can. And if you can just be no grumbling, no complaining, and be innocent children of God in this generation, then guess what? "You can shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ," Paul can say of us, not that he invested in us like he did the Philippians, but he can say, "I'm proud of you," you know, Christ will be proud of us. "He didn't run," he didn't, "labor in vain." He didn't teach them for nothing. They really responded to what he taught, which was, listen, guys, stay out of trouble. We've talked a lot about that kind of integrity in this series already. But let me just punctuate it with the fourth point of this sermon. Just try to avoid the controversy. Do what you can. Again, integrity. Integrity is honesty. Live an honestly good life that includes being willing to stay out of the controversies if you possibly can. That's important and critically helpful to some people and their personalities.

Speaking of attorneys, we have plenty of attorneys in our church who do that as a profession. You're the ones whose names are on the top of the letterheads that we fear so much. I just want to remind you, you don't have a great reputation in our culture. Did you know that, you attorneys? I think you do know that. You know the "ambulance chaser" or whatever, "people that lie for a living," you've heard all this stuff about what you do. But I know that the Compass attorneys who call this their church home, I trust as your faithful to follow Christ, you do not want to be like that. You'd like to be an attorney with integrity, which is not an oxymoron, that it's possible. As a matter of fact, there was one attorney, a very famous attorney, who was so honest that he earned the nickname. His nickname was Honest Abe. Have you ever heard of him? From Illinois, Honest Abe. Early 19th century. He became a lawyer, and he was once speaking of his profession as a lawyer to people thinking about becoming lawyers. And I love what he said, he said, "Resolve to be honest in all things. And if in your own judgment you cannot be an honest lawyer," I love this, "then resolve to be honest without being a lawyer." Pick something else. The whole goal is to be honest.

And he earned that even before he became an attorney. Matter of fact, the job he had before he went and became an attorney and opened his own, you know, law firm, law office, which he was the minor player in it, not the major player. He was the postmaster of his particular town. And in his town there in Illinois he was the postmaster, which, as things continued to increase, the main postmaster in the government said we're going to shut down your post office. And so he wasn't making much money at this. I read two biographies. Well I read more biographies than that. But one of them says in this particular scene he was earning \$35 a year for that job. Another said he earned \$55. I don't know which is right, but he earned a whole lot less than you're making. Let's just put it that way. Even if you adjusted for inflation.





He didn't make much money doing this and he was poor. And when he got out he went to go to law school and went to go on and open his law practice, which wasn't going very well. But when they shut this down, of course they needed to do some accounting, because there's a lot of money going through the post office. And so it was such a small operation there in kind of rural Illinois that they didn't even get around to accounting for the office until like three years later. But finally they send an agent from the Postal Commission and he comes to Illinois, and they come to the law office where Lincoln worked. And they said, Abraham Lincoln, you know, in looking at the ledgers, it looks like money that came in without services or postage going out was about \$17. And if you're making \$35 or \$55 a year, that's a lot of money. And at this point, there was a lawyer standing by who worked with Abraham Lincoln who thought, oh, man, that's way too much for this guy. He's got nothing. And he offered to give him the money or lend him the money, at least, so he could pay off this debt.

And Lincoln, this is the kind of man that he was, he said just a minute and he walked out of the office, he went to the boardinghouse where he was living and he came back with a sock with a rope around the top of it. He came and he set it down on the desk, he untied the sock, he poured out all this money in coins onto the desk, which equaled \$17, which is what the postmaster said was money that came in that never went out, never was reckoned for. And he said I would never spend money that wasn't mine. Right? That's the kind of lawyer you'd like to have, an honest lawyer. And he was an honest person. And of course, he did amazing things in our country. And you should read some biographies on Lincoln. He's quite a remarkable individual. He's not perfect, obviously, not sinless. But even in our country, even secular values can come to a place of realizing the virtue of guys like Abraham Lincoln. The only reason I thought of this story and the only reason I went back to my shelf and picked up the biography that I have, one of the biographies on Lincoln, was because I saw a video about the Lincoln Memorial, which of course I've been to like three times in my life. Which every time I go it's like, dude, I mean, that's my California response, so it's like, man, look at this place. I mean, if there's anything in D.C. that looks like a temple it's that. Matter of fact, it's called the temple and it's on the back of your \$5 bill. It's etched on the back of your pennies. And there it is, the Lincoln Memorial, and it's over 100ft tall. It's got gigantic columns in front of it and it is open-air. You know this. You've been there, many of you've been there. And as you walk through the pillars up those steps and you go into it, you see, here he is seated on the throne. Talk about a temple. It looks like here's the demigod of D.C. and Abraham Lincoln is sitting there exalted on this throne. And maybe even as a Christian that rubbed you the wrong way. Particularly that it's called a temple. And here's a man exalted on a throne and he is on a throne. And there he is. He was a tall man, six foot four inches in life, but they made him 28ft tall. And you're dwarfed by it, you've taken pictures by it. Selfies next to it. It's crazy.

Maybe why I even thought about Abraham Lincoln is because I saw this little documentary on the Lincoln Memorial. And I thought to myself as I started going, it's kind of weird. I mean, I don't know. And then I thought about Matthew 19. And Jesus turned to his apostles. He said, you know what? You've been faithful to serve me. When I return and sit on my glorious throne, you will sit on thrones. Thrones, not folding chairs, thrones. And you'll be judging the 12 tribes of Israel. Almost every parable Jesus tells about being faithful as a steward and then coming before the master and having your evaluation, it ends with rewards. Rewards, right?



Talents, Minas all the examples. Oh, you're going to get ten more or then take charge of five cities, take charge of ten cities. And I think about Jesus and all of the promises he makes about integrity in the Christian life being rewarded. And I think about, you know, this is nothing compared to what you're going to see when you walk into the gates of the New Jerusalem. Peter, a fisherman from Galilee, is going to have his name emblazoned on the walls of the New Jerusalem. I mean, the honor that is going to be pitched out there to people who served him well, regardless of rank, regardless of intelligence, regardless of any earthly thing, it's going to be the integrity and faithfulness of his servants. And the Bible says he's going to take himself and gird himself like a servant to serve us. And when the King of kings starts to serve and exalt people it will be amazing.

It's going to be great. We don't want to sin that away. We don't want to be unfaithful. We don't want to wimp out. We want to get ready, soberly preparing ourselves for the evaluation that's coming. And to do that, it certainly means living a kind of life that stays out of trouble till we get there. It doesn't mean you don't stand faithfully with Christ if it takes you before the kings of this world, oh well, so be it. But please don't be summoned to the wrong courtroom. I don't want to see you in line with the Great White Throne. Join me at the Bema Seat of Christ, which will be a swallow-hard, sweaty-palm kind of experience for us. I get that. But let's be there because we're going to walk out of that particular evaluation with a whole variety of glorious rewards that the Lord wants to give us. It takes people who are virtuous and the rewards them greatly. You can't even give a cup of cold water to someone in his name without losing your reward. You will not. God is not, Hebrews 6, unjust to not reward you. Let's look forward to that as we live a life of integrity.

Let's pray. Go, help us in our generation, our day, this world, the struggles that we have in a crooked and perverse generation to stand faithfully as light. And then in all of that sometimes we often think about the controversy that we cause, but it's a controversy we want to slalom our way through and avoid if we possibly can. Help us, please God, not just run headlong into controversy. We don't want it. We don't want to complain. We don't want to grumble. We don't want to dispute. We don't want to argue. If it comes down to it, we do want to hold out the word of life. We want to hold tightly to it and we want to advance the light and the salt of the gospel and our good works into this world. Give us what we need to do that well. Help us to be faithful and resolve to do that. I pray for people in this room who are not Christians because they're afraid, or they're resistant or rebellious to call themselves sinners, but I pray there would be some who would say have mercy on me, a sinner. And they would know they need to transfer their trust not to their good works, not to their relative righteousness but they need to transfer their trust to the finished work of Christ. Have that propitiation redeem them from the category of being an object of your wrath, your just wrath, to an object of your blessing, and the blessing we'll have by being faithful stewards are going to be mind-boggling. Mind-blowing. Minds haven't even imagined. Eyes haven't seen the good things that God has in store for those who love him. Help that love work its way out in tangible ways in our lives this week.

In Jesus name. Amen.