



## **Christians on Trial – Part 8**

### **Seeking to Turn Opponents to Allies**

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You know, Pastor Doug says he doesn't know what I'm preaching on next. Do you know why? Do you know why he doesn't know? I don't know. I mean, come on I have planned out every sermon through mid-October. Like what do you want from me? And he acts like, oh, they have nothing to say about it. I always bring it to the pastors. We always discuss what we should preach on next. Doug always says the Apocrypha, the Apocrypha. So I don't listen to him anymore. But it is true. We're getting to the end. We're in Chapter 26 now. I hope you're already turned there. Chapter 26. And I think as we get to the end of this and we have nine more sermons, if you count this one in the book and it is a book that you're going to study with a theme that just recurs over and over again. Really there are three verses you should jot down in the introduction to this if you're taking notes. And one, of course, you know these probably by memory, but Acts 1:8 is very clear that it sets the template for the book. Right? That you are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. So that picture of the central capital city of Israel, the surrounding tribal territory, Judah, and then Samaria where the northern tribes used to live and had intermarried with the Assyrians, and then all the way out to the ends of the earth, Asia Minor and beyond all the way to Spain. And we want you to just take the gospel everywhere.

That first generation of Christians commissioned to be testifying to the life, death, burial, resurrection of Christ. And then in Chapter 4 verse 12, here's the second verse I want you to note, Acts 1:8, Acts 4:12, we hear Peter make very clear the emphasis and the reason this is so urgent. He said, there is salvation in no one else, and "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." So just like Jesus said, "I'm the way, the truth, the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" So this is it. This is the only way to get right with the Father. You cannot know the Father if you do not trust in the Son. And so we have to just realize this is life or death. And then if you're in verse 26, just drop down to what Paul said the last time we were together studying this passage, he recounts his own commissioning. Look at it in the context here. He says above in verse 18, end of verse 17, he says, "I'm sending you," Jesus says to Paul, here's the commission to be more specific not just to be witnesses. Here's what happens when we're witnesses of the one and only way to be right with God "to open their eyes." Their knowledge of this gets opened. That's metaphorical, of course, to they get it now. "So that they may turn from darkness to light," right? Not in a relationship with God. Metaphorically talking about this exclusion now to light, in the truth and in relationship with God. And look how powerful and dramatic this is. And "from," grasp or, "the power of Satan," the adversary of God, "to God." There are only two categories in the world, as First John 5 says, where "the whole world lies in the power of the hand of the evil one." Or Second Corinthians 4:4 says, Satan "is the god of this world," and we're extracting people out by testifying to the life, ministry, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, knowing it's the only way to get out of the power of the enemy.

And then here's the real deal for us, "that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are," set apart or, "sanctified by faith." So if we trust in Christ, the kind of



trust that's defined in Scripture as trusting in Jesus Christ to forgive our sins, we're taken out of a place of alienation and hostility toward God into a relationship of peace and unity and reconciliation with God. And then we get to include ourselves in that promise as we think about our future in a place where we will, as Jesus said at the funeral of Lazarus, "I'm the resurrection and the life," but the ultimate key to all this, then if you trust in me, "even when you die, yet shall you live." And as Paul said there in Acts 17 and elsewhere in the book of Acts, we are all going to be resurrected, and we're all going to stand in either the Kingdom or in a place of exclusion in outer darkness. This is a huge thing. And that's why throughout the last 124 sermons have been all about, one way or another, our task in the 21st century, like they had in the first century, you know, some 50 generations later, at least, here we are responsible to do the very same thing that they're responsible to do. With an urgency of Acts 4:12, a simple commission of Acts Chapter 1 verse 8, and knowing what it accomplishes here, Chapter 26 verse 18. This is huge and it's what it's all about.

And so if we step in the direction of doing this, as we challenged you in the first chapter to start to target in your own minds, this person I know is not a Christian. I want to testify to the truth of the gospel to them, we'll realize it's not just the red carpet, it's not laid out with open doors. Right? There are a lot of people that don't want this, I'm not interested in this. And they start to even "exclude us ... and spurn our name as evil," as Jesus said in Luke 6. That starts to become the reality that sometimes makes us just sit back and say I can't do this, I quit, even though they start to say you're crazy. If you believe in a book written so long ago, rewritten millions of times by a bunch of, you know, people who had an agenda, probably political agenda, probably for money, and it's just all about fables and myths that they try to pass off as true. And you're trying to tell me that's going to determine whether my son can wear a dress or whether or not, you know, two men can be married or whether or not, you know, your rules should be affecting my wife's pregnancy. Those are the kinds of things they say you're crazy. You're crazy. You're out of your mind. You shouldn't be doing that, right? You guys are nuts.

And if we had a room full of people, let's just say it's the majority or let's just say every last person, let's just say. I mean, that would be crazy, but every last person in this room was committed to that, right? We would have so many challenges of us hitting a roadblock, hitting opposition, getting pushback, having resistance, people calling us names because we are insisting that this is the truth and it's the only hope people have, the only hope people have, of hearing from God say, "Enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." If you don't hear that then you're going to hear this, "Depart from me ... into outer darkness" "where there's weeping," wailing, "and gnashing of teeth." If we believe that, if that's the truth of what we're saying to our generation, we got to be ready to know what we do when we are called crazy. And thankfully, in this passage we get a great template of that. How do we respond? What are we supposed to do?

Well, let's take a look at it beginning in verse 24. Paul is there testifying to the gospel. You'll see in verse 23 he kind of hits the apex of what is the major theme in gospel preaching in the book of Acts, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. And here he says in verse 22, according to the Scriptures, both the prophets and Moses, "that the Christ," verse 23, "must suffer and



that, by being the first to rise from the dead..." And you say, wait a minute, there are a few others, and there were, less than ten in the whole Bible of people who had died and were brought back to life. But I always try to make sure you understand the distinction. And they were brought back to a life that was still subject to death. Jesus was the first to be resurrected in the kind that we're hoping for, the eternal life of having a body that is impervious and no longer subject to disease and decay and aging and death. And so he's "the first to rise from the dead, and he would proclaim light," truth, "both to our people," the Jews, and this is what got the Sanhedrin all uptight, "and to the Gentiles."

And in the middle of all that, here we'll start our passage for today, verse 24, "As he was saying these things in his defense, Festus," remember he's the governor, "said with a loud voice," and they're probably in this amphitheater that overlooks the Mediterranean and the acoustics are great there. I've been there to the very place where this took place and you can hear him saying this word. Hundreds of people probably heard him say this "with a loud voice" right? He says this: "You are out of your mind." Now, I know you got a PhD in Jewish studies. I know you know the Scriptures. I know you're saying a lot of things that sound very, you know, erudite, very wise, very intellectual, but it must be that "your great learning is driving you out of your mind." Right? You've just studied way too much and now you're not even making sense. You're just so lost in this that you don't get it. So verse 25, Paul said, I'm so sorry. He took his seat and never said another word. No. Verse 25. Here's the basic lesson of our passage today. "But Paul said, 'I'm not out of my mind most excellent Festus.'" And we've learned this throughout our series that we know that when we're on trial, we're pressed, we get pushback from people, we need to "do it with," as Peter says, "gentleness and respect." And so he says, "most excellent, Festus." Right? This is not a pejorative. This is not sarcastic, but he's got respect for these people. I'm not out of my mind. "I'm speaking true and rational words" True and rational words.

"For the king knows about these things." What things? The bodily resurrection of Christ. "And to him I speak boldly." I mean, I'm just asserting what's true. "For I am persuaded that none of these things," about the life, the ministry, the death, the burial, the resurrection of Christ, none of this, "has escaped his notice." He looks over Festus' shoulders to the king enthroned there at Caesarea in the amphitheater. He says, listen, I know the king knows this. "It has not escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner." This is not some clandestine, behind-the-curtain, just a secretive, you got to trust us on this, believe us, you know you can't see it for yourself. No, it's been done out in the open. And then he just leans in even further. You want to talk about not sitting down and being quiet, "Hey, King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." Now he may be a Roman client king of this area of the ancient world that Rome has its oversight over. But he was, at least as we know, a practicing religious Jew, at least to some extent. So he was familiar with all the Scriptures. He's read the Scriptures, he's informed in the Scriptures, he's well-educated in Rome. He knows this stuff. So Paul says, I know you've read the prophets. I know you believe. And that was the basis in verse 22 that all of the stuff that he's saying about the Messiah, the Christ, has been recorded, various aspects of his ministry, his life, his death and burial and resurrection all have been spoken of in the Old Testament. You know the Bible, you know the prophets.

And King Agrippa now breaks in, verse 28. "King Agrippa says to Paul, 'In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?'" Now, there are different ways to translate this. There's even a textual variant here that some older translations kind of fell toward. And there is even a question with the text that we know is what Luke wrote as to what exactly was his mindset when he said this. But King Agrippa is basically feeling the pinch of Paul's persuasive speech here and he's like, well, are you trying to convince me to be a Christian now? I mean, had probably that sense. Are you trying to in just one day have me dismiss all of this belief that Jesus is not the Messiah? You want me to become a Christian, a follower of Christ? And remember, the word "Christian," is only used three times in the Bible and started as a pejorative term. You're a little Christ. You're a follower of this Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, you're a Christian. And so who knows exactly what his mindset is? But clearly you see the pinch of conviction because Paul's leaning in hard. This is public stuff. The Scripture spoke to it. I know you know the Scripture. I mean, if you really sat and thought about this, King Agrippa, this would make sense to you. "And Paul said," am I trying to persuade you to be a Christian? Oh, absolutely. "Whether short or long, I would to God," I pray, I want that "not only you," king, "but also all who hear me this day." Think about this, this amphitheater here. Here it is. He's speaking of the truth. I want EVERYONE, everyone in this arena, right? "I want everyone to not only be as I am," right? I want that, I want you to be a Christian. Except I don't want you to be in prison for it. "Except for these chains." Right? Here I am in prison.

That was enough for the king. "The king rose, and the governor," Festus, "and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. And when they'd withdrawn, they said to one another," Luke figures out or finds out by reporting or investigation what they said behind the scenes. "They said to one another, 'This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.' And Agrippa said to Festus," Agrippa is Festus' boss, "'this man could have been set free,'" because now Agrippa is saying, I don't think he's a criminal, "'if he had not appealed to Caesar,'" now as a Roman citizen appealing to Caesar, but he now says, I'm just bound to do it. We got to put him on a ship and send him across the Mediterranean to Rome is just what we got to do. And that's where we'll pick it up next time as we see this incredible, tumultuous voyage across the Mediterranean from Caesarea all the way to Rome. Crazy. And we'll get into that. And I trust that it will be great. Chapters 27 and 28 will finish out our study.

But let's just look again at the beginning of this, called crazy for stating the facts of the gospel. And I just hope that there's not a person here who has not avoided that accusation because you're going to hear it if you're faithful to tell people, yes, you do believe the Bible. Yes, you do believe God has revealed himself in the pages of Scripture. Yes, you do believe there was a historical figure named Jesus who changed the world and the dating of our checks. All of this happened and he lived and did miraculous signs to prove who he was. He died by a public professional execution, those Roman executioners. He was buried, everyone saw that. And he was raised from the dead on the third day. And then he ascended like some strange thing without any kind of breathing apparatus from the Mount of Olives up into some other dimension to where we couldn't see him and off he went. Yes, we believe that's true. And with the promise that he's going to come back and receive us unto himself that where he is we will be... also. That yes, we believe that. Someone's going to say to you that's crazy.



And the reason, at least on the surface, now I got an emphasize, at least on the surface, the reason is, here's why, they'll say that doesn't happen, that doesn't happen. I bet I've had more experience, unless you're a mortician, more experience with funerals and death than you have. Right? And I'm with you on that. It doesn't happen, right? At every funeral I haven't had anybody crawl out of the casket and say, "Hey, you know, I'm back," and that just doesn't happen. So the thing that precipitated Festus' outcry that you're crazy asserting this is true, you can see on the surface you might have a lot of people nodding their head, yeah, yeah, this is crazy. Death is death. Death is the end. People don't come back from the dead. Certainly they don't come back from the dead and be impervious now to death and dying. And they don't float up into the sky. That doesn't happen. Right? And so I can see that what they're saying on the surface makes sense. And it seems like they have when we speak about the Bible, they have what often is called an anti-supernatural bias. And we need to understand that if they say I can't see it replicated in my day, in my life, then it doesn't happen.

Number one on your outline, let's just understand Festus' comment that I'm sure a lot of people in the arena that day shook their heads, "Yeah, that's right." That's why they nodded their heads, yes, that's right. "Understand the Anti-Supernatural Bias," point one. Understand the anti-supernatural bias. That is simply saying that what we see and perceive with our senses and see in our day is all that ever happens, right? And when someone tries to walk on water, they sink, right? And when someone is born blind, John 9, you don't have someone walk up and say, poof! You now can see and they see. That doesn't happen. You don't have a man publicly executed by professionals and three days later he rises. That doesn't happen. And so they say, I dismiss it all because it's anti-supernatural, right? I mean, it is supernatural and I'm anti-supernatural. That's the right way to say it. It's supernatural and I don't believe in it. Okay. I want to look beneath the surface of that because I'm going to tell you that is what is said and it makes sense at a cognitive level but it is not the reason. It's really not the reason.

The Bible is clear about what the reason is. John 3, Psalm 2. Matter of fact let's turn to Psalm 2 and look at that because it really diagnoses the problem for us. Psalm 2 verse 1. In Psalm 2, we have a statement about the fact that people rebel against God. Now, what's interesting about this text and often in the Psalms when you see someone called "the anointed," usually we're talking about the king of Israel. Because like in our ceremony of inaugurating a president, he puts his hand on a Bible, the chief justice swears him in and he repeats after the chief justice and that's the inauguration service. That is not how it happened in Israel. In Israel they would have someone authorized by the priest pour the oil that was a special kind of anointing oil that smelled like perfume or cologne and pour it on the top of the head of the king as he knelt down. The word "anointing" means "to pour." And that's what happened. And in an inaugural kind of fancy ceremony where they said this is our new king. It happens with Saul, it happens with David, it happens with Solomon, Jeroboam, Rehoboam, it just happens throughout all the king middle monarchy of Israel. That is what takes place. Okay.

The anointed in this passage is much bigger than that and we know that because at the beginning of this passage we're not talking about the 12 tribes of Israel, we're talking about the world, and we're talking about God and his anointed. And whenever you see the word





anointed, that Hebrew word "Messiah," we transliterated it "Messiah" and the Greek word "Christos," we transliterate "Christ." So whenever you say Messiah or whenever you say, or Messiah, whenever you ever say Christos or Christ, you're saying the word anointed. That's the word and it means the king. And I want to tell you that the people don't like the king and they don't want to follow the king because the king is authorized to tell you what to do. He can tell you if life is sacred and whether you can abort your babies or not. He can tell you whether or not your gender is fluid or whether it's fixed. He can tell you whether or not you can marry another man, or if you're a woman, you can marry another woman. He can tell you those things and you will be judged because he's the lawgiver and the judge and he's holy and he's right and his standards are true and you should do what he says because he's authorized.

Well, here's what the Bible has to say about why people don't like it, why they chafe against it, or a stronger word, why they rage against it. Look at verse 1 now, Psalm 2 verse 1, "Why do the nations rage?" We're not talking about the 12 tribes of Israel, the whole world. "Why did the peoples plot in vain?" Do you think there's any plotting in Western society now? All these verses etched in marble in D.C. that talk about our Judeo-Christian founding, the Ten Commandments, all these statements and verses about God. You think right now if I walked into an elementary school in Capo Unified or Saddleback Unified and I said, hey, I'm going to teach all these things that are etched on all these monuments and statues in D.C. I'm going to explain them from a biblical perspective the way they were intended when they were put on. Do you think anybody would buy that? Right? You'd see your pastor probably in handcuffs being dragged out by the Orange County sheriffs if I insisted on giving them that biblical lesson. I mean, prayer a long time ago was excluded from the classroom. Right? Now, there's a revived, interesting in a circuit court decision, you know, a new, revived debate about the Ten Commandments in schools. But here's the deal. There is definitely a plot to say we don't want any of that. We don't even want you praying on the steps of an abortion clinic. You can't even pray for the sanctity and the preservation of the life of that pre-born child. You can't do that, right? We want to be free from you Bible-thumpers telling us what we can and cannot do. Even if you tell us that it's because there is a Christ, there is an Anointed One.

"The kings of the earth set themselves up, and the rulers take counsel together," what's the verb? To be against. "To be against," Yahweh, "the Lord." And that's his proper name. You can know that by the capital case. "O-R-D." Right? It's a smaller capital o-r-d. That capitalization is always underneath that text in Hebrew. This is the Old Testament so this is Hebrew, right? This is his proper name, Yahweh. And then it says these leaders "are against" Yahweh and against his Christ or his Messiah, "his Anointed." Now David, even in David's life, he was the ultimate king, at least in response to Saul. Saul was bad. God now says I'm choosing a man after my own heart. And yet God was careful to record through the prophets all of David's flaws, all his foibles, all his feet of clay. He's not perfect, right? Far from it. And yet here the promise is there will be a son of David coming one day who will be the ultimate king. Second Samuel 7 says, there is a promise of one who is coming from David's line, and he will be the ultimate king, as Isaiah says in Isaiah 9. And "the government is going to rest," on his decision making, "on his shoulders" and the extent of his reign and his "peace there's going to be no end." He's going to rule the nations and the world and the kings of the world,



okay? And they say we're against him. And right now we're proclaiming that Jesus is Lord over the world and people are saying I don't want that.

And here's the reason, verse 3, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." Please know that for whatever reason people reject the Bible and the easiest target for them is it's filled with supernatural things and they don't believe in that because they have never seen it and it doesn't happen. The laws of nature, they don't vary. There's constancy there. And as Lewis said in response to that in his day, I guess you can say that. Right? You can say there's uniform experience against the supernatural if, of course, you know that all the reports of the supernatural are wrong, right? But the only way we know they're wrong is if we believe and have preconceived that they don't happen. And so the reality of this is based on just the lack of even starting an investigation because I presuppose there is no miraculous, right? And on the back of your worksheet, you'll see some books on the miraculous. This is not about, you know, what's going on in Pentecostal or charismatic churches or what they're claiming is going on. This is about the miracles in the Bible, which, by the way, there are less than 100 that are described. Less than a hundred. I know you think they're on every page but they're not on every page. It is a rare occurrence. And they have reasons to authenticate the messenger who's speaking for God.

And the ultimate messenger as Hebrews 1 verses 1 and 2 say is Jesus Christ himself. "God spoke to the world through ... his Son," and the whole world, according to Daniel 2, Daniel 7, Daniel 9 are all going to bring their submission to him. He's the king and he speaks authoritatively. And whatever he says, if he says God created male and female and that's all there is, then that's all there is no matter what the DMV might say. That is the truth. And the truth is because he is the king and he has all authority. And they say we don't want their bonds or their cords. What does that mean? We don't want them telling us what to do. We don't like the, I like this, the strictures of the morality of the king. We don't want the king telling us what to do. It's like the kid on the playground. "You're not the boss of me." We don't want someone else to be the boss of who we are. And yet the Bible says there is a son of David, the ultimate anointed one and he does have things that sometimes in our flesh feel like strictures, handcuffs, cords, bonds. And we think you mean, I can't do that. No, you can't do that. Why? Because the king said you can't do that. And the point of us saying to people, Jesus Christ is Lord, you must do as he says. You must follow him. The sheep must hear his voice and follow him. They don't like that because they don't like it. The real reason is they don't want to submit. There's an anti-submission motivation to every anti-supernatural bias.

And I say "every" that's too superlative, I shouldn't use it. It is generally true. And I've done a lot of evangelism. And I know when people say I don't believe it because those are miracles and magic and I don't believe in miracles and magic. They're all fairy tales. As all the modern atheists like to say, it's just a bunch of fairy tales, just a bunch of fairy tales. But I'm saying the reason you're quick to dismiss it is you don't want this to be true. Because if it is true then you have to submit to it. Because, as Lewis rightly said to his detractors, you've got to now investigate these. And that's the point. That's what truth is. When Paul says, "These are true and rational words," the word "truth" means a correspondence to what is real, to what happens. If I say to you, I went to Taco Bell for lunch yesterday, right? Is that a true statement



or is that not a true statement? You don't know, right? You don't know. You may trust me that I'm telling you the truth, but you'd have to do some investigation. And if I go every Saturday, take a break from my study and I go to In-N-Out Burger but I say, yesterday I went to Taco Bell. I had a bean burrito, no onions, a crunchy taco and a bottle of water. That's all I had, 500 calories. You know, don't applaud. It's okay. It's not great. It's not super healthy, but it's only 500 calories and count the calories and that's good, right?

Or I could say no, no, I went to In-N-Out Burger, right? And in there I had a chocolate shake, a Double-Double with all the stuff on it and all the fries, which is about 2,000 calories or whatever it is. And, you could say, well, it looks more like you ate the 2,000 calories for lunch yesterday. And I say, well, listen, I'm telling you, the truth is I went to Taco Bell, I had it bean burrito, no onions, I just had a crunchy taco, a bottle of water. We'd have to do some investigation. You'd have to do some investigation on, say, for instance, the trustworthiness of me as a messenger of that information. But those propositional words are either true or not true. I can't listen to Oprah or her counterparts in our culture and hear them say, well, that's your truth. It has nothing to do with what I want, it has nothing to do with what I prefer. What matters is do those propositional words correspond to reality? You picture Taco Bell, whatever you think about anything. Okay. He says he went there for lunch. Okay. Did he or did he not? That determines whether my statement is true or whether it's not true. Did Jesus die by professional executioners? Did he die publicly according to the Scriptures? Did he get buried and did he rise bodily on the third day to be impervious even to the laws of physics to be able to jump off the Mount of Olives and go into some other dimension? Did that happen or did it not? Right?

Muslims say it did not happen, right? Most religions say it did not happen. Christianity says it did happen. And according to Romans Chapter 1 verses 1 through 4, it is the credential of Christ to be able to say, I'm declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead. This is one of the main things, this is his badge he pulls out when he tells you to do something and he says, look right here. I rose from the dead. So you have to do what I say. And if you don't trust in me there's salvation in no one else. So that is his credential. And what we need to know is that people don't want to see the badge, and the badge is a supernatural event. And they'll say, well, it's just the way it works. It's just the way it works. There are no miracles. And I would say, well, you need to investigate the claims of the miraculous and the claims of the miraculous that should be investigated first is did Jesus rise from the dead?

Now, it's important that we understand the claim. And I like to think about how Aquinas makes an argument about how things come to be. The biggest phenomenon that's most real to you, the most personally to you, is your existence. You're a phenomenon, right? I know. It's a sweet compliment, Pastor Mike, but you're a phenomenon. You exist. That's an amazing thing. And not only do you exist, I mean, some of you can do art that's beautiful. Some of you can create music that's great. Some of you can fix computers. Some of you can weld, you know, pipes together. Some of you can do all kinds of things. And no matter what the NPR blue hairs say that the dolphins are so smart, they're not doing any of that, right? You have capacities. Even though dolphins reflect the glory of God, they don't reflect the glory of God the way you do. You're an incredible phenomenon. You do amazing things as a human being





because you're made in the image of God, Christians would say. Well, that's a miracle, and so is everything that might explain your origins.

Well, Darwin came along on the heels of the Enlightenment and said, well, we don't need a God. Let's detach ourselves from God, which sounds a lot like Psalm 2 verses 1 through 3. We don't need God to explain anything. And you know why they did that? Because we don't like the authority of the Church telling us what to do. So the enlightenment was culture growing up, and now we came along with theories like the most remarkable one that you exist, as some theologians like to say, that there's something rather than nothing, and that requires an explanation. And so, as Ronald Nash says in trying to explain Aquinas, it's not that Aquinas simply said, like many of the deists believe, that God just existed and got this thing going. And Nash illustrates it by a bunch of dominoes that are lined up, right? Do you remember when you were a kid you would stack up the dominoes? Well, we enter the timeline in space and time, as Act 17 says, and we're born on this timeline and we look and dominoes are falling, right? Time marches on, things happen. Rules of nature, gravity, physics, all the things that go on in this world, mathematics, art, beauty, justice. All of it's happening and we think, wow, look at this stuff that's going on.

And some people misunderstand, as Nash says about Aquinas, that Aquinas is just saying, well, there has to be a prime mover. There has to be someone who knocked down the first domino. There has to be someone who's the uncaused cause. And by definition, that's God. And I like when Nash says, I'm not big on quotes. But here's a good quote that I think he puts it well when Nash writes about Aquinas, he says, God is not merely the being who moves the first domino. Okay. That's helpful. He is the being who makes the dominoes. He's the being who sets up the dominoes. He is the being who supports the dominoes in their existence. God is not simply a cause that may have existed once and then went away. God is the eternal and necessary ground for everything that has been, and for every causal relationship and for every change that takes place. Now that's a helpful addition to our understanding of God being creator. And we cannot just simply say God created us. The Bible is very clear. And you can ask Heisenberg, or, you know, you can ask Einstein, or you can't ask them personally, but you can look at their writings and you can see even the physics, even all the quantum mechanics and all the understanding of things, you know, that we have in this world, right? Like neutrinos, for instance, when you get into leptons and all the things that go on in modern physics and you ask the question like, how does this all work? It's kind of like asking the question, well, if the Big Bang was the cause, how did it all work? And you read about all these things that took place in the milli-, milli-, milli-, milli-, milli-seconds at the beginning of this thing. Right? And all I'm telling you is that all of this defies explanation.

And it's not that we're just trying to jam God into the gaps which people do. If we take Aquinas' argument about cause and effect, and we say the reason we're here is because there's an unmoved mover, there's an uncaused cause, and we know that God got this started. That's just Aquinas saying, well, we don't believe in infinite regression. That matter has always been here. Either we need an eternal God or eternal matter. Well, it's more than that. We need to add to our category of God being creator is that he's not only creator, as Paul actually said in Acts 17, but he's also the sustainer, as he says poetically, "In him we live



and move and have our being." I mean, it's just the way that Nash puts it about Aquinas, right? He makes the dominoes, he sets them up, he supports them. He's not simply a cause, right? He's the necessary ground for everything that has being and for every causal relation. There's no gravity without God, right? And it doesn't function without God, right? It's not just that it doesn't exist without God. It doesn't work. As Paul said to the philosophically impacted Colossians, "In Christ, all things hold together." This all happens and is held together by the sustaining empowerment of God. God is present in his creation.

And that just even helps us with the next words of the Apostle Paul. Look at what he says here in verse 25, he says, hey, hey, Festus, I'm not... Go back to our passage now in verse 25, "I'm not out of my mind, ... but I am speaking true and rational words." Here's the rational part of it. Right? It's all based on time and space. He's about to say that. But the rational part is that God, who I think you should even say by necessity there needs to be, that's the ontological argument of Aquinas. But the idea of God that we understand, if he is not only the maker of the rules of physics and nature, time and space, but he is actually the sustainer of those things. It's not just that we see philosophically God in nature, it's that he is actually sustaining nature. And I just mentioned Heisenberg because of principle of uncertainty at the atomic level, there's something going on in the building blocks of reality that helps us to say there is a God making all of this happen, and he keeps it. I'm not just putting God in the gaps, I'm putting God over the whole thing. God is in the thing, moving in the thing, involved in the thing that we have.

And if God is involved in the thing that functions, if God is making gravity work today, if God is making digestion work in your body and he makes black holes and all the things that go on in quasars, if that is a God who is making all that happen, then God at any point could stop doing that. God could at any point tailor what he's doing. God is a God who is actively involved. That's why the deists were wrong. Like God is not separate, just transcendent, but he's eminent. He's involved in his creation. And in that regard the less than 100 times that God suspends natural law, like with the death of Lazarus or Jairus' daughter, that then he raises to life. We might call that a resuscitation even though it's a resurrection, it's not the kind of resurrection of Christ. That's the ultimate miracle, transforming the kinds of material that are subject to decay from Genesis 3 and reversing that in one person's life to where we have a person with eternal bodily life. That we know God can do because he sustains the rules. If he wants to stop everything for Joshua so that he has a lengthened day, God can do it, right? That's a rational thing.

There's a sermon on the back that I preached way back in 2004, called When God Breaks the Rules That He Made. Now, if this is a new concept to you, we're not talking about the stuff that's going on and claims to be going on in certain segments of today's church. We're talking about what the Bible says took place as miraculous events, less than 100, where he suspends natural law. God does that for a purpose. And I explain a little bit about why, look at passages like Hebrews Chapter 2 verses 1 through 4, and I explain that this is a very important part of God's authentication of his prophetic truth. He signs all of this with those things. And if that's happening, that God is the sustainer, not just the creator, but the creator and sustainer of all things, then it's no big deal for God to withdraw a rule and allow the laws



of hydrology and physics to not function the way they do by having Jesus walk on water, right? Or to have every molecule in a storm cease when Jesus says, "Be still," to the storm on the Sea of Galilee. This is something that God can do and it's no problem for God.

And this makes perfect sense when you start to investigate the miracles of Scripture, and the one that is most attested in every way is the resurrection of Christ. And look at why in our passage, "The king knows about these things," verse 26, "and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner." This has not been done in the dark. It has not been done in the shadows. It has not been done in secret. The resurrection of Christ comes after a public execution, and I often talk about it being outside the walls of Jerusalem, as Hebrews 13 says, and of course it was. And you think, "Well, that seems like it's deserted. No one's..." No. Everyone goes by. You go today to the walls, the Turkish walls in Jerusalem now. But parts of that Turkish wall, even, you know, follow the old walls that were existing in the first century. But what you'll see around the walls are streets that run along the walls. Which, of course, is what you have even in the ancient world with a sprawling metropolis, if you want to call it that, of first century Israel and the walled city, this fortress part of it was the downtown. It was the Manhattan of Judea. And in that you had the roads all around it. And they would take because of Orthodox rules, the Roman executions, and forced them to do it outside the gates. But that's where everyone traveled. Everyone goes in and out of the city by going down those roads. And the Romans said, fine, we like that because we want everyone to see when the government is going to execute a person and it's going to be done publicly. And we want all the teenagers to walk by and see here's what happens to lawbreakers, you get on the wrong side of the government. And this was something done publicly.

It was done publicly and there were some public miracles that took place in a huge way. Some of them seem small, but as John says that even when the water came out of Jesus' side, this was something that everyone could see. The darkness that went over the land, this miracle, was something that everyone could see. The death that he died on the cross was something everyone could see. It was public. And then he was put in a grave in a very public place. And in that garden, even though it was the Sabbath during that period of time when no one came to that tomb, when the Romans were there guarding it on Sunday morning the women come and he's gone, and you think, well, where did he go? Someone stole the body. The problem is, he appeared to hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people, and it was the same Jesus who they saw crucified. And even as Paul makes this point in First Corinthians Chapter 15, he says not only did people see him individually like, yeah, I think I saw Elvis at K-Mart, right? That's not how that worked. This was like Elvis came and did a concert at the Pauley Pavilion, or he did a concert at Irvine Spectrum. This is like Jesus was appearing and Paul said in First Corinthians 15, sometimes even to "500 people at one time," and he chides these Corinthians, if you don't think this happened, you can go find these people because "many of them are still alive." But by the time he's writing this in the 50s or 60s, in the mid-first century, he says, this has happened 25 years ago, 30 years ago. Go look them up. They all saw him and he appeared and he appeared and he appeared and he appeared for 40 days. Why 40 days? Because you want to make sure everyone saw the resurrected Christ.

And Agrippa knew about this. He'd heard about this. There were plenty of eyewitnesses to this. And he says not done in private. This isn't like the Mormon golden plates in upstate New York where it's only a few people, just trust us, you know, we can't show you any of that. This was all done publicly, publicly. And then he says not only that this was opened, which, by the way, I should give you the title for this. This is Paul defending the God who makes sense, by the way. Right? Number two on your outline, "Defend the God Who Makes Sense." Paul does it. We need to do it. Defend the God who makes sense. He makes sense because he's the creator and sustainer. It makes sense because the historical facts on which our faith is predicated were public, historic events, right? Including and most importantly the resurrection of Christ. Given more ink in all the preaching in the book of Acts that he's bodily raised from the dead. Right? And then he says this: he shifts gears in verse 27, "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?" Hey, do you look to the prophets and see that as God's Word? Of course you do. I know you believe. In other words, you have read the Scriptures and you know that one of the key themes is the coming of the Messiah who's going to fix all of our problems. This is put in Daniel Chapter 9. He's going to remove all transgression from us. He's going to be, as Isaiah 53 says, the one "who takes away our sin." This Messiah who's going to suffer and die before he reigns is all written about in the Old Testament.

Now, King Agrippa, you've read that and you've read things like in Micah Chapter 5 verse 2, that the great son of David from Second Samuel Chapter 7 is going to be born in a little village called Bethlehem because David was born there. Now you know that and you know all the facts you've heard about Jesus. You know that everything that you saw and everything that you heard and all the people who you talked to, it matches perfectly with the prophetic word, all these promises. And by the way, I think this is a genius thing that God did providentially, he stopped all the prophecies 400 years before the birth of John the Baptist, 400 years. They're called the 400 years of silence. And even the rabbis living during the period of the Inter-Testamental period, they knew they were in the period of silence. They knew there was no prophetic gift being exercised because there was no breaking of natural law for 400 years. Think about how long ago 400 years was. Think about it. If we had nothing, we know that all the things that we read in the Bible had been closed. The closed canon of the Old Testament, 39 books were done. There's no way you could say like all that writing bumped right up into the fulfillment. They didn't. Gap. Why? I think in part, now you'll have to ask God this, but I think in part so that no one could say that the predictions were written after the fulfillment. And yet people tried so hard, tried so hard to look for some vocabulary word in the book of Daniel. And it looks like maybe this is a later Aramaic term in that Aramaic term, I think all of that in Daniel was written after the fact. Why? Because everything is too specific about the coming of Messiah, and about even all the inter-testamental things that God predicted.

And what about Isaiah? And they went on and on and on and on and on in the seminaries in Germany and it spread all over the world in what was called higher criticism, that was looking at the text of Scripture and saying all of this was a compilation of editors with a Christian axe to grind, and all they're doing is rewriting this after the fact and putting it together. There may have been some truth in Isaiah's day but they pieced it all together and it's just a patchwork of



stuff to where finally we get it the way that the Christians are reading it and they're claiming it's all about Christ. But they only claim it's about Christ and it fits so nicely because they're written after the fact. Well, they were saying that big time in the 18th, 19th, 20th century even, until the middle of the 20th century, when a shepherd boy threw a rock into a cave and heard a pot break and he comes and brings out these scrolls that he takes to Saint Mark's cemetery. No. Not even a seminary. It's a monastery which feels more like a cemetery than a seminary. Don't track any of those things. But listen to me now, at Saint Mark's Monastery those guys get this from the Bedouin shepherds and say, wow, this is crazy. We know this is old, old, old, old, old Hebrew. We don't know what it is.

So they called the Americans there at what's now called the Albright Institute. And the head honcho is not there but a guy named John Trevor happens to be there with the best camera equipment of the middle of the 20th century because he's there doing a dissertation, taking pictures of the flora and fauna of Israel. And he says, oh, okay, as they bring these scrolls in he takes pictures of them and the first scroll, the first scroll that he takes pictures of is a rolled-out scroll written before the time of Christ. No one would debate that. No one, I mean this, this is the way it is written and everything about it is tested before the time of Christ. And what do they find? The exact opposite of what all these seminarian professors were teaching in Germany and around the world about the fact that this was not pieced together by Christian editors, it was not put together patchwork. They had an entire scroll, the great Isaiah scroll, which if you ever go to Jerusalem be sure to go to the Shrine of the Book Museum, where they have a facsimile of it going all the way around the middle of this museum. And there it was in one piece. Yeah, it had some fraying at the bottom but we had a complete scroll predating Christ with all the messianic predictions in it that was complete in one piece. I mean, it was like God mocking all those professors who said this wasn't true. And I'm telling you, prophecy itself is an ongoing record of the miracle of God predicting things before they happen.

And so he says, listen, you need to know God makes the rules, sustains the rules, he can break the rules. He can raise his Son from the dead. There's no problem with that. Right? And we have all these historic events happening in public, right? The death was in public, the resurrection and the effects of the resurrection, all in public. And not only that, we got a book. Hey, Agrippa, you've read the book and you know that all these prophecies have been fulfilled in Christ. You know this, you know this, you know this. And that's when Agrippa breaks in, verse 28, and says he's trying to convert me. "'In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?' And Paul said, 'Whether short or long, I would to God,'" I would to God that I persuade you. I want everyone to be as I am. I want you persuaded. Why? Because he was persuaded. Look at the word in verse 26. "I am persuaded that none of these things have escaped his notice." I am persuaded that you know it. I'm persuaded this was done publicly. I'm persuaded that God did it. Of course I believe it. I am persuaded, and I want to persuade you. I would like to persuade you, and "not only you," but everyone who hears my voice, I want you all to become those who trust in Christ through the truth of God's Word. That's what I want. "And the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them." They said, this guy could have been let out, but "he appealed to Caesar" or whatever. We'll put him on a boat to Rome.





I'll tell you what, though. I love the fact that not only did Paul not sit down, but he continued to seek to persuade. Some of you have really good theology in this room, right? You feel like your theology is like you've learned some things. It's like, I love my theology now because I'm willing to say what a lot of other people aren't willing to say. And that's great. You may have good theology, but you might be using your theology in a bad way. You might be having biblical thoughts about biblical truth, but you're using those biblical truths in an unbiblical way, and you are the reason we get a lot of people castigating our theological position, because you are using your theological truth in the wrong way. And you do it because you think if God wants people saved, he will save them. It's a done deal already. Therefore I don't need, some people would even say, I don't need to evangelize, right? God will get it done. And then you say, "Well, okay, maybe he needs me to evangelize, but I'm not going to persuade because non-Christians can't be persuaded, they're dead in their transgressions and sins."

I certainly believe in the depravity of the world. Right? I believe in utter depravity. I believe in it 100%. But I do know this: the means of seeing the dead come to life, Ephesians 2, is the persuasive teaching and preaching of God's truth. Your evangelism needs to be persuasive. Let me put it this way. Number three, "Don't be Reluctant to Be Persuasive." You need to lean into a persuasive kind of response to people who say, you guys are crazy believing in a book of fables. Don't say, well, clearly that guy is not called to salvation. No no no no no. Lean into this. Say, let's discuss this. Is there a time to stop being persuasive? Yes. We know that all throughout the Bible, there is a time to kick the dust off your feet and say clearly you're absolutely implacable. You will not even listen to me anymore. Great. There's a time to not throw pearls before swine as the Bible says. There's a time for you to say your blood is on your own head. But when most people call us crazy there's a little bit of them that says, well, you know, prove me wrong, prove me wrong, and you need to engage in that.

Let me just remind you of some things the Bible has been saying from way back. Let's go to the book of Proverbs really quickly just to remind you of something the Bible is so clear on and we need to be. Proverbs Chapter 12. And I'll illustrate this this way, because this reminds me of it in this passage. If I said to you, do you believe the promise of Matthew 6? Right? You theologians in the room, do you believe the promise of Matthew 6? And that is that he will take care of you. You are his children. You're more valuable than sparrows. He will feed you and give you shelter. He will do that. He's going to feed you and give you shelter. So "seek first the kingdom of God," and if you feel like you're leaving some domestic duties behind, don't worry, "all these things will be added." Do you believe that God will providentially in his sovereignty add those things to you? Well, then you open the Bible elsewhere in the book of Proverbs. You see it in the books of First and Second Thessalonians. Here's what the Bible also says. If a man is not willing to work he shouldn't eat. Don't let him eat, don't eat. So here's the thing. God gives you a command to work so that you can feed yourself. That goes all the way back to Genesis 3. It goes all the way back to Genesis 1. We are supposed to be workers to earn our bread, and you should work. If you're capable of working, you should work or should be married to someone who works. If you're raising children and have the blessing of being a stay-at-home mom. Great, but you should have a man who is working to



provide for a family. And the thing is, God is providing through the obedience to the command for you to work, right?

You wouldn't say I believe in the promise of God therefore I'm not going to work. You'd say, I'm going to obey the command to work so that God will do what he says he's going to do and that is to provide for me. Now, that is a critical thing to remember, because here's the Bible saying to us over and over again, you need to persuade people. You need to be engaged in the battle of ideas. You need to really engage with people who think that we're following a book of fables. You ought to work as best you can to defend the truth, to give a reason for all of this. And you need to take that seriously, not falling back on your theology that I believe that God is going to save who he's going to save. And persuasion doesn't work because they're dead in their transgressions and sins. Is anyone following this argument because some people believe this and they get a lot of grief, I get a lot of grief, because we sit back on our heels and we don't do what God has called us to do. You're called to evangelize persuasively because that's how this works.

Take a look at this passage. Proverbs Chapter 12 verse 14. Proverbs 12:14, "From the fruit of his mouth a man is satisfied with good, and the work of a man's hands comes back to him." Okay, your words have an effect, right? There's good that can come from your words like you can persuade someone to do what's right, to believe what's right, to put their trust in what they should. And the work of your hands brings you gain. Do you see what I'm trying to illustrate here? Those things go together. The end is what God promised. The means is what God commands. And our obedience to the command is engaging in the means through which God brings the end. Do you follow that? That's how this works. I mean, look at a couple more. Chapter 18 in Proverbs. Proverbs Chapter 18 verse 20 just to continue this concept here. Verse 20, "From the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach is satisfied." So like in my life and maybe your life too. Maybe you don't work with your back, you work with your mouth. Maybe even in that. Right? I get food on the table. I get to eat my Taco Bell because I get a paycheck for talking for a living. I talk way too much, right? I mean, it's amazing. I get paid for talking, studying and talking, studying and talking. And through that I could even go to In-N-Out Burger today. I could get my stomach. Satisfied. He is satisfied with the yield of his lips.

How powerful are words? Not only can they bring me an income, look at verse 21. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." People could leave here today with their name written in the Lamb's Book of Life if I give a persuasive sermon. And you can have a persuasive conversation in the workroom of your office, and you could lead someone to Christ, you can have them be freed "from darkness into light and from the power of Satan to God, to bring them forgiveness and have a place among those who are sanctified," to quote Acts 26 verse 18. Your words, life and death, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit." Do you understand that? You, if you love talking to people about Christ, if you love being engaged in a battle of ideas and the persuasion that comes from sharing the gospel with people who are lost, you will love the fruit of that. I mean, you get a lot of shut doors. Sometimes you'll have to say, okay, he's just absolutely implacable. He's not interested in this and you're going to move on, but someone's going to respond. And that's what's happening, look up in verse 17 of Proverbs 18. Look at verse 17, "The one who states



his case first seems right." How many people were nodding their heads when Festus said, Paul, you're crazy? Dead people don't come back to life, right? "Until the other comes and examines," or refutes, "him." There's a rebuttal here. He said, well, wait a minute.

And who knows how far he went into this. Because this record is just a truncated summary of what Paul said. But who knows what might have been said here at length to persuade the people that no, no, no, there is a rationality to this. "These are true and rational words." The public nature of the miracles, right? The prophetic prophecies regarding the miracles, all these things are true. And so that's why we need to respond. We can't let the people in our culture just continue to say nonsense about the Bible, to say nonsense about the gospel, to say nonsense about the less than 100 miracles in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. We can't let them talk. They talk themselves in an echo chamber into believing their nonsense about the Bible. They don't know the Bible. We need to respond to them.

More on this, Chapter, let's look at 25 real quick before we leave Proverbs. Proverbs 25. As long as Paul is here before the ruler, King Agrippa, look at verse 15. Proverbs 25:15, "With patience a ruler may be persuaded." I know he's an expert in the Old Testament law. Saul of Tarsus grew up memorizing Scripture. Who knows, he might have memorized the whole book of Proverbs. But I know that Paul the Apostle, formerly Saul of Tarsus, probably had this verse, I mean, I got to think, I mean, maybe, perhaps in mind, "With patience a ruler can be..." You need to be patient, let's add our word persuasively. He's saying to Agrippa persuasive things and Agrippa gets it. Wow. "Are you persuading me to become a Christian?" Well, keep at it, Paul. And some of you say, well, I got resistance. Well, they're not called, obviously. Right? Can you just agree that you don't know, you don't know? You're not the judge and jury of who's done with getting the gospel. Stop with that mentality. Some of you think you know, "Well, obviously they're never going to be saved." You don't know that. People said that about Paul. People said that about a lot of people in Church history. People might have said that about you, right? You need to know that God's grace can extend to the least and the worst, as Paul said. So we need to be patient in our persuasion, and maybe they will be persuaded. Look at this. How strong can your words be? "A soft tongue will break a bone." Wow.

One more passage. Look at this. We're out of time but let's look at Second Corinthians 5. Some important words here. Second Corinthians Chapter 5. Look at verse 11. I don't want this just to be about I want to win debates. That's it. Battle of ideas, win debates, win debates. Paul's winning a debate. It's so cool, it's so macho. I want to be that. I want to be the Tom Cruise of Christian debating. Stop. Stop. It's not about that. Okay? I want you to care about lost people. Just to quote Hebrews 10, "It is a terrible and dreadful thing to fall into the hands," as a non-Christian, "into the hands of the living God." You do not want your neighbors, your coworkers, your friends, your family members to go and face God without being clothed in Christ. You don't want that. Care enough. Look at verse 11, Second Corinthians 5:11, "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord," here's our word, "we persuade others." We're trying hard to persuade. That's a great word. Drop down to verse 20. At the end of this whole discussion that I wish we had time to go through, but look at verse 20. "Therefore, we are," representatives, "ambassadors for Christ," in our generation right now, "God making his," this is a strong word too, "appeal through us." How much do you think God wants to persuasively



appeal to your friends, coworkers, neighbors? A lot. He's making his appeal through us. When you open your mouth, the way he accomplishes his sovereign plan is through you responding to his obedient command, for you to be obedient to the command, and that is to be persuading people.

"We implore you..." Now he kicks into a second-person argument. You guys. Hey Corinthians, "We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." That's a strong word "to implore." Look up that word in your Bible software. "To beg." Right? To beg and to plead. Right? The old translation is "to beseech you." I just beg you. I'm on my knees begging you. You need to be right with the living God. There's no other name. There's no salvation in anyone else. He's the way through life. No one's going to come to the Father except through him. And they're going to call you narrow-minded, they're going to call you bigoted, they're going to call you egotistical. They're going to call you stupid, ridiculous, out of your mind. Lean into this. I understand the anti-supernatural bias, which is an anti-submission bias. Defend the God who makes sense. And he does make sense. You know go into our bookstore today. Go into that apologetics section. Just do some reading this week. Don't be reluctant to be persuasive. That is our calling. We've got a lot to do in this regard to our generation. We need to fill this church up 4 or 5 times over every weekend and get more churches planted everywhere. That's our task. Let's get to it. Why don't you stand with me? I'll dismiss you here with a word of prayer.

God, what a busy weekend for our church, a great weekend. We're grateful, God, to be in this place. As much as people complain about California even on a warm summer day today, we're grateful for our mission field. We're grateful for the place we live. We know there are people in this area who have been appointed to eternal life. We want them to come to faith. We don't want to presume upon your work in their lives. We want to persuade anyone who will listen, both great and small. Everyone who hears us we want them to become as we are, trusting in Christ, confident, standing on the firm Word of God. Even this week we want our kids to have an increasing growing understanding of what God's Word is. We're thankful to spend all week and thousands of man hours, so to speak, investing in our kids. But God, let it be with us, even today, going into that bookstore and looking for something that's just new and fresh. To open a book, look at the table of contents, find a chapter and say, yeah, I want to dig into that. God, we need more of that. We need that experience of just getting our minds challenged. We need to face our world with a kind of confidence in your Word, knowing we speak true and rational words. We're not out of our mind. We're not crazy. One day our gospel and all of our teaching will be vindicated. It's not that we got an angle on everything, obviously, there are some things that are hard to understand in Scripture and maybe we're wrong about this or that on these tertiary issues. But in terms of the gospel, it's clear. It's so clear. God help us to remind people, that yes, Jesus lived and represented us, fulfilled righteousness, died, was buried and was raised on the third day for our justification. Let us preach that message and defend it this week.

In Jesus name. Amen.