

November 1, 2020  
Hillside Fellowship Church  
Pastor Dave Tooker.  
Acts 22:1-30 -- Gospel Story

Transcriber -- MW

[worship]

Pastor Dave: And Father, we join together singing to you, just celebrating the reality of the great story that you're writing that is big enough to fill all eternity with wonder and awe and praise. How you redeemed lost sinners like me, like us, to allow us to join your family, your story, and be part of this great rescue mission of helping broken, hurting, lost people see the light.

And so, this morning as we look at your Word, we're so grateful for the truth that you've given us in a world that really is wandering. We believe that your Word is truth and I pray that you would use it this morning to strengthen and to encourage, to draw hearts closer to yourself as we see the great story that you're writing. Father, would you allow us humility to repent, to take the U-turn that you've put in front of us and join you on your great story of redemption that tells about your goodness and your glory?

So I pray you'd work this morning. I have nothing to offer. And so as I empty myself, would you use your word through your Spirit to impact your people for your glory? I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, welcome. If it's your first time -- I've met a number of first-timers. So glad that you're here. You've found yourself

at Hillside. My name's Dave. There's nothing special about me. I'm a new creature in Christ. I'm a recovering addict and alcoholic that is saved by grace and I get the opportunity each week just to open up the Scriptures with you.

We're in the book of Acts. We have been looking at the earliest Christian church, where it started and the miracle of how we've gotten 2000 years into it to where we're here now in Spring Branch still proclaiming the same story. It really is a miracle. And so we're looking at how God did that, because he's done it through simple, faithful, broken people like you and I, that simply share the story of the gospel of what Jesus has done in our life.

And I'll show you this morning. Man, most of us struggle. Before I read chapter 22, verses 1 through 5, our lives are pretty mundane. We saw it last week. It's like, Dave, what did you do this weekend? Well, it's exciting. I went to Home Depot.

[Laughter]

Well, how does that advance the gallery of God? Like, how does that change anything? I don't know, but God does it. He uses ordinary, simple, weak, broken people in ordinary, simple ways to change everything. And so if you're here, we believe Jesus changes everything. We're as amazed as you are that he uses us; broken people. But I want to show you how he does that. You're going to see it in Paul's life today.

We're in chapter 22. The gospel's advancing. Not in spite of adversity, but through adversity. Paul went back to Jerusalem. He got arrested. Now he's in trouble. Let me read chapter 22, verses 1 through 5 and then we'll just walk

through the whole chapter together.

In Acts chapter 22, God says, Luke writes Paul's defense. 1 "Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you. 2 And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew (or Aramaic) dialect, they became even more quiet, and he said, 3 'I am a Jew, born in tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, (that's Jerusalem) educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today.

4 I preselected this Way (Christians) to the death, binding and putting both. Men and women into prisons, 5 as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.'"

Now this is huge. For those who have never read a Bible, you don't have a Bible, you didn't grow up in church, let me give you a large theological picture that will make sense of Acts chapter 22. If you read straight through the Bible, you're going to leave with an understanding that God is the great storyteller.

In fact, Genesis 1:1, he begins the story for us. "In the beginning, God created the heavens, the earth. The earth was formless and void. The Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the deep." And if you read for 43 more hours and you reached Revelation chapter 12, he ends the story for us. "The kingdom of this world is now the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever."

Handel wrote a song about a messiah. Great song. 🎵 And

*he shall reign for* – ♪. It's great. You should listen.

[Laughter]

It's from Revelation chapter 12. "And he wipes every tear from every eye. There is no longer any death or mourning or crying nor pain because he makes all things new." God's a great storyteller. And he's writing this story. And here's the thing. How many of you have ever been bored in your life?

[Laughter]

Isn't that a thing? Isn't that funny. Now, if you apply that to eternity and you live forever and ever, how many of you have ever been afraid of eternity. It's like, if I'm bored here, if I get 82 years on earth and I spend a lot of it bored, scrolling through Facebook, seeing nothing interesting, but I keep scrolling --

[Laughter]

No. I did a test on myself. I don't do Facebook. So I started scrolling. It was interesting. There was nothing interesting to read. Y'all don't post all that much interesting stuff.

[Laughter]

But I just kept scrolling because it did something to me neurologically. I wonder what's next. I wonder what's next. I'm bored. And I sat there until my hand lost feeling. And I said, experiment done. This is interesting. There's nothing there and yet it pulls me into avoid the boredom or pain. God's writing a story that's so great you won't be bored forever.

How many of you have movies you like to watch more than once? Yeah, what is it about those movies? This isn't part of my sermon. I'm so sorry. Now, I'm just polling the audience.

[Laughter]

Great stories can be watched over and over because there's great writing and nuance and acting. There's something new to learn each time. God's story is so great, for all eternity you're going to say, wow! Let's watch that again. Wow! Let's watch the rescue part again. Wow! Let's watch the love part again. Wow!

The enemy's also writing a story. Here's the underlying theological truth. His story rejected God's story. And his story is very small. It's not big enough to fill a day of your life. That's where boredom comes from. When you write a story according to what the enemy said; love yourself, worship yourself, indulge yourself. It's boring. It's literally boring. It's not enough to fill a day let alone eternity.

This book, the Bible, tells good news. We, as Christians, call it the gospel. It's of an eternal God who humbled himself, emptied himself, entered our story so that we wouldn't be trapped by our little boring stories. He offered an onramp, by grace, through faith in Christ, where Jesus takes all of our sin, gives us all of his righteousness, gives us an onramp to join his story so that we'll never be bored again. It's an incredible, incredible story of God's love for us, in and through Jesus Christ.

Now, today, we're going to see this; the church grew through

simply sharing the story of Jesus' work in the saints' lives. The enemy has told you, your life doesn't matter and your story doesn't matter. The enemy's told you your story's boring, your story's bad and it needs to be hidden because it's very shameful. So we're not even sure you should be at church, because everybody else at church is very righteous. But you're unrighteous.

So what he has done is he's shut our mouths, but in Acts 1:8, it says, "And you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my . . . witnesses to share his story of his goodness written on your life. Let me show you. When Paul's on trial, one of the smartest men I've ever read -- I've read a lot of great writing. Paul's one of the most brilliant men I've ever read.

When he's on trial, watch what he uses as his defense. He's going to say, here's who I was. Here's who I met. And here's who I am now. And that's the story of your life as well in Christ. Here's who I was. And who you were is very important. Here's who I met. Your interaction when Jesus found you, incredibly important. You see, you live in a post-modern world that has rejected all truth. This world no longer says the Bible means anything.

There's no longer any truth. Therefore, you get chaos, because everybody's writing their own story. Your story matters because it proclaims, in a post-modern world, here's who I was, here's where Jesus found me and here's who I am now.

Let me cast this in -- I got 20 minutes. We're coming up on November 3. Anybody knows what happens on November 3?

[Laughter]

High anxiety, high panic, high stress, high worry. Here's why. We're wondering who gets to write the story, at least for the next four years. Who gets to write the story? Is it democrats? Oh, heavens no! Is it republicans? [Chattering his teeth.] Who gets to write the story?

When you're writing your own story, there's high stress, high panic, high anxiety, high worry. Who gets to write the story? The Bible says, God's already written the story. Will you join him as he writes the story? You see, that takes all the anxiety and panic away. I get to go vote and have fun. Get a whole bunch of I've voted stickers and enjoy ice cream with my son. It doesn't change anything. I vote and I trust Jesus.

Watch as people fight over who gets to write the story. We'll start with who I was. Watch what Paul used in his defense. Watch this. This is who he was. Verses 1 through 5 and I'm going to throw in 19 and 20.

Chapter 22, verse 1. "Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you."

Remember, these people are ticked off. They want to kill Paul. Paul asks, can I speak to the audience? The commander is like, you know Greek? Then you're not the leader of the assassins? He lets Paul speak. Paul says, now let me give you my defense.

2 "And when they heard that he was addressing them . . . "

Not in Greek, but Aramaic, a Hebrew dialect, they were like, wait a minute. This guy is saying "y'all." He's from Texas. He's one of us. So everybody listens. They were like, well, he knows how to use "y'all" properly.

[Laughter]

Y'all better now listen. That's why Luke says, he spoke in a Hebrew dialect. Like why would this mob listen to him? He spoke their language. He was one of them. Watch where this goes.

Verse 3. "I am a Jew, born in tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, . . . "

This is Paul's way of saying, I'm a Longhorn or I'm an Aggie. I don't care which one you are. I'm neither. I was a Beaver.

[Laughter]

Doesn't matter. See, that's why people laugh. That's hurtful.

[Laughter]

That's hurtful. I didn't know what an Aggie was and if I heard that, I would've laughed too. So there.

[Laughter]

So when he says, "I was educated under Gamaliel," in our society, we identify ourselves by where we went to college. It's very interesting. So did Paul. He's saying, this is where I learned, and everybody would have known it.

" . . . strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today. 4 I persecuted this Way to the death, . . . "

I killed Christians. I was just as zealous as you guys.

" . . . binding and putting both men and women into prisons, 5 as also the high priest and the all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished."

Look at verse 19 and 20 now very quickly. 19 "And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You.'"

I used to beat and kill Christians.

20 "And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I allisio was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.""

Paul begins with his past. This is who I was. Paul begins by replaying, this is my past. Now, can we be honest? If this were a safe place where each one of you felt fully safe and secure to be open and honest, do we all have a past that's very shameful?

Yeah, we all have a past. And I think we can all agree on that. All of us have done things that's like, golly, I hope nobody ever finds out about that. And, not only do we have a past, we all do something with the past. What are some of the things we do with our past?

Member: Hide it.

Pastor Dave: Hide it? And there's a million ways we can do that, right? You just do revisionist history. You highlight the good. There was one time I got all As. And you just decide to repeat that story. It's very interesting. You know when somebody is doing revisionist history, because they'll have one story. It's like, one time I gave a speech and it was a standing ovation.

Most times I do speeches and people fall asleep. But there was that one time and then we hide the bad and highlight the beautiful, don't we? There's a million things we can do with our past, but we all have a past. We all have a glam shot and we all have a mug shot. I've told you that before, haven't I?

[Laughter]

Why do you laugh at that?

[Laughter]

We do. We all have a glam shot, Olen Mills, where we all sat pretty; the whole family sat pretty. And you did your thing.

[Laughter]

Right? Totally goofy. I think *that's* goofy. My broken bones and black eye? I'll take that every day because at least it's real.

[Laughter]

We all have a glam shot. We all have a mug shot and we all do something with our past. Here is the underlying principle here. The Bible is honest about each and every one of us. "There is none righteous. No, not one." There's none who does good. There's none who seeks after God. None of us are saved by good works. We were all -- Ephesians chapter 2, verse 1, 2 and 3. "We all used to walk according to the pattern and course of this world." We were *all* bad.

Why do you seek to hide that? Why do you seek to cover that up? Why do you seek to run from that? Apparently, Paul holds it out and says, this is who I was. You see? Your story will not connect with everyone everywhere, but your story *will* connect with someone somewhere. True, your story is not going to connect with everyone everywhere. Neither will mine. But it is why I start out not trying to hide my failures, but saying, my name's Dave. I'm a recovering addict and alcoholic, because I know 18% of you will struggle with addictions.

I long for Jesus to set you free as you realize you're in a safe, secure place to meet Jesus. You see, Paul never hid his past. Read through 1 Timothy, chapter 1, verse 12, 13, 14, 15. Here's a trustworthy statement worthy of full acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into this world to save . . . sinners, among whom I am chief and foremost of all. And God did that so that by showing me a chief sinner mercy, all people might realize God's merciful.

Friend, don't hide your past. Jesus wants to use your past to reach people in the present so they might know him and walk with him in the future. So that's where he starts. He

starts with his past. I killed Christians. Now watch what happens. Now he's going to describe what happened; who met him. Watch where he goes from here.

Verse 6, really down to verse 21. Paul says, that's who I was before Christ. 6 "But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus . . . " to kill Christians; to imprison Christians, " . . . about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, 7 and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'"

Please know this. Jesus meets you where you are so he might take you where he longs for you to be. So I don't care what you're struggling with today. I don't care if you're angry, violent, you're against God, you're angry at God, Jesus Christ will meet you where you are. *And* did you notice, he knows your name? He says, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Saul says, verse 8, "And I answered, 'Who are You, lord?'"

Jesus knows *you*, even though you may not know him. He put you together. He cares about you and he's been pursuing you for a long time. All those things that you think are just random occurrences, happenstance, circumstance, random. They're not random. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. And he's searching for you. He loves you. He cares about you and he knows that as you write your own story, it's going to be a mess.

We don't write very good stories, do we? Our stories tend to be very small. Like trying to get a new Volvo or Audi or BMW. That's not a good movie. That's not a good story. It's

pretty boring. So he's pursuing. Watch what comes next.

Verse 9 "And those who were with me saw the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. 10 And I said, 'What shall I do, lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.'

11 But since I could not see because of the brightnesses of the light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus."

Verse 12, "A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, 13 came to me, and standing near said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very time I looked up at him. 14 And he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth.

15 For you will be a witness for Hieronim to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.' 17 It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, 18 and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.'

19 And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in you. 20 And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving,

and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.' 21 And He said to me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

You see, Jesus meets us where we're at so that he might grow us and take us and change us into who he wants us to be. He put you together. He wove you together in your mother's womb. He knows everything about you and he loves you exactly where you are. But he loves you too much to leave you there.

So like Paul, he will meet you there. And how he does this is the most amazing thing. I'm going to make this as simple as I can for the atheist, agnostics and non-believers who are here, because I love you. You see, he never tells you, try harder and do more. I'm happier when you try harder and do more. That's called moralism or religion. Dead religion and dead orthodoxy. That's about you trying to save yourself.

What Jesus does is totally different than that. It's called salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ Jesus alone, as recorded in the Scriptures alone. It's totally different. What Jesus does is he says, Saul, get up. Follow me. Your sins will be washed, literally, white as snow. They'll be taken away.

Here's what Jesus did for me, because I, like Paul, was an angry, violent reviler and aggressor. When Jesus came to me, he did not say, Dave, try harder and do more. That would've just pushed me over the edge to be worse, because I knew I couldn't be good enough. What he did was, he said, come to me and I will take all of your sin, all of your shame, all of your guilt, all of the blame, all of the contempt, all of the bitterness, all of things that are crushing

you, I will take those and I will pay for them. Having been nailed to the cross, I can make payment for your sin and you'll be forgiven.

Now, that's good news. But it's not the end of the good news. You see, if you just forgive me today, guess what I know about the rest of the day. I'm going to sin again. Now I wish I wouldn't. I'm not planning on it. Someone will pull out in front of me.

[Laughter]

It will happen. It happened yesterday. This poor gal, she just pulled out in front of me. Bless her heart. I was in a hurry though.

[Laughter]

Right? I'm a pastor and I was going to see somebody. I'm very important. Get out of my way. Is that love?

[Laughter]

You laugh. If it's not of faith, if it's not of love, it's sin. Did I sin? Absolutely. There was bitterness and anger in my heart. She was going so slow, other people were passing us. I didn't pass her. I felt good and justified about being me.

[Laughter]

Other people were ripping my eyes, like, oh, how shameful of them.

[Laughter]

If you forgive me today, by tonight I will have sinned again and I will feel the blame, shame, guilt, contempt. So what Jesus did, he not only -- this is called justification -- he not only declares me "not guilty" and removes my sin, he credits or inputs or Venmos, he puts into my spiritual account all of his righteousness. So I am a saint wholly. Will I fall? Will I stumble again? Absolutely.

But that no longer defines me. Jesus defines me and he's put all of his righteousness into my account. That's the good news. I begin with everything. And if you don't know that, I can guarantee you're just trying harder to please God. You're working *for* his approval not *from* his approval and you don't understand the gospel.

You see, Paul starts out with everything. When Jesus met him, Jesus took his sin and gave him all of his righteousness. These are the good U-turns that God gives. I just call it Newton's First Law. Anybody know Newton's First Law? Law of motion. Law of inertia, some people call it. An object in motion will remain in motion unless it's acted on by an outside force. An object at rest will remain at rest -- not to mess you up with physics, but it's actually very important.

You see, if you're headed towards death, damnation and destruction, guess what I know about us? Science tells me, I will continue heading towards death, damnation and destruction unless I'm acted on by an outside force. Unless Jesus interrupts my course and offers a U-turn, I'm heading straight to hell, yo. And you are too. And an object at rest is going to remain at rest unless it's acted on by an outside

force.

Praise God for his son, Jesus Christ, who left heaven to come to earth to act upon us. Science tells us that. So Paul goes on. This is Christianity in a nutshell. Repent. That's metanoia or have a change of mind. Take a U-turn. This is one of the things I ultimately love about Texas. How many of y'all were born in Texas?

Whoa! I wasn't. I was born in Oregon. I'm not part of antifa if you were wondering.

[Laughter]

If you're new here. Although, I may look -- never mind. I've got four minutes. Give me grace.

[Laughter]

In Oregon, we have big ditches on either side of the road. It rains a lot. So we don't have a lot of U-turns offered in Oregon. You get on the wrong road and you're on the wrong road. If you try and turn around, you're no longer in the road. You're in the ditch.

[Laughter]

Like, those are your options. Honestly. And I've ended up in a ditch. Literally. That's not a metaphor.

[Laughter]

Often times -- and, well, metaphorically I've ended up in the ditch too. Texas is beautiful. I don't know if y'all understand

how beautiful it is here. Do you know, at least twice a week, when I leave work, I will have forgotten my bag, my books, my wallet. Do you know, within 100 feet of leaving here, I can pull a U-turn and come back. Sometimes, I make it half a mile, but guess what?

Member: There's another one.

Pastor Dave: There's another one! Sometimes I make it down to 46 and guess what? There's multiple U-turns. I can go through Wal-Mart, I can go underneath, I can go around. If I make it past 46, guess what is right after the Home Depot? Another one!

[Laughter]

Do y'all know how blessed you are as Texans. There are U-turns everywhere. In Oregon, we don't have those. If I get on the wrong road, I'm in Albany and I still can't turn around.

[Laughter]

[Baby crying]

I love -- I'm just soaking up the sound of a crying baby.  
[Inhales.] Oh, I might have broke a rib. [Inhales deeply.]

[Laughter]

God offers a lot of U-turns, spiritually, every day. This is the good news about the gospel. Today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your heart as they did in the wilderness. Repent. Turn back to me. God is so good, he doesn't want us to head to destruction. He offers U-turn after U-turn.

He's just saying, don't hide your past, don't sit in hurt over your past. Just walk in humble humility. Take a U-turn and follow me. I'll change everything.

That's what Paul did. Paul simply said, Jesus, I'll follow you. He takes the U-turn and Jesus writes a brand new story with his life. Let me end with this. I have a minute and 43 and then we have communion.

21 down through 30. Watch this. This is who he was now. Many of us began Christianity with wrong expectations. If you begin with the wrong expectations, it's going to crush you. Many of us grew up and thought, I was lost. Now I'm found. Now I live happily ever --

Yes, things were bad. Circumstances were bad. I gave my life to Jesus and now everything is good. There's truth in that. Things were very bad in my life. Jesus changed everything and now in all of eternity, things will be very beautiful. He's going to remove all sin. But guess what? Until today and the day I die and enter his presence, guess what I have? Trials, tribulations, I'm hated, I'm despised.

It's through many tribulations that you must enter the kingdom of God. Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials. So be very realll about your expectations in following Jesus. We saw who Paul was. We saw who Paul met. And now watch who Paul sense now.

Verse 22. "They (the Jews) listened to him up to this statement, and then they raised their voices and said, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live.' 23 And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air, (probably

looking for rocks to stone him) 24 the commander ordered him (Paul) to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way."

We live in a world that seeks to define us. It's very interesting. When you're writing your own story, you naturally have to define everybody else. You'll define people on the opposite aisle. This is profoundly painful. Have any of you ever been defined by anyone? Oh, that's a horrible way to ask it. Anybody ever heard the statement, sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never --

Members: Hurt me.

Pastor Dave: Yeah. What a bunch of rubbish.

[Laughter]

Is it not? Just to use my proper British, it's rubbish. Sticks and stones have cracked my skull, broken different bones in my body, but it's words that rattle around in my soul and in my mind and in my heart that I had to drink to numb and deaden those words. Words can crush you. This is why, in America, we seek to define people.

Here, Paul is getting defined. Away with this man. He shouldn't be allowed to what? He shouldn't even be allowed to live. We live in a world -- the Bible calls it the kingdom of darkness, ruled by the prince of the power of the air; the enemy who is writing a very small story. He controls people by defining people.

Revelation chapter 12, "the accuser of the brethren who

accuses us before the Father night and day." Every single one of you will be defined by him. Many of you have believed the definition he's put on you. You're stupid. You're worthless. You're dirty. You're disgusting. You're unwanted. You're unseen. You're unheard. If anyone knew, they would reject you. If they knew about the divorce. If they knew about the abortion. If they knew that you had to drink before you got up in the morning just to deal with the day. If they knew the pills you were taking. You are absolutely wretched.

You see, this is how the enemy controls us, and many of you believe it. You're weak. You're fat. You don't work hard enough. You don't do enough. You'll never measure up. You should give up. See, this is how the enemy seeks to define us.

In Christ, who I am now is defined by who God says I am. I love the scriptures more than any other book, because as I'm rattling around, these words that are seeking to define me, unwanted, worthless, disgusting. I come back and I say, God, what do you say about me? You're adopted into my family. You're accepted. You're beloved. You're born of God. You're a citizen of heaven. You're a child of God. I love you. I am for you. I'm working all things together for the good of those -- you begin to hear him describe and define you.

You see, sticks and stones can break your bones, but words can crush you forever and ever. Who gets to define you in your story? You see, this is why I love the block feature on the Apple iPhone. Anybody ever blocked anyone?

[Laughter]

Just let this sit in. I got people who say some mean things to me. So do you know what I do? I block 'em. I block 'em for the glory of God.

[Laughter]

And I'll let you know if I'm not answering your phone call, it's because I've blocked you.

[Laughter]

Because you say mean, hurtful, hateful things. I've had people call and say they wanted to kill me. I've had people call and leave messages saying they were intending to kill me. It's really foolish. So I'll use it against you in a court of law.

[Laughter]

And then I'll block you, because Jesus Christ gets to define me now in my story. Because I no longer am my own. I've been bought with a price. I've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and he gets to define me. Who gets to define you?

Watch where he ends off. I'll go 25 through 30. Not only am I his, but he gets to define me. Watch. Paul doesn't throw a fit here about how unfair this is.

25 "But when they stretched him out with jongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, . . . "

He asks him a question. Isn't that brilliant? "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?"

Brilliant question.

26 "When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, 'What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.'"

He's got rights. You can't just flog and scourge him. Like you can't stretch this cat out, use a cat of nine tails to peel the skin off his back. 27 "The commander came in and said to him, 'Tell me, are you a Roman?' (Paul) said, 'Yes.'

28 "the commander answered, 'I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money.' And Paul said, 'But I was actually born a citizen.'

We don't even know how, but God was preparing Paul's story before this, before Paul was even born. We don't know how Paul was born a Roman citizen, but he was.

29 "Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains. 30 But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble and brought Paul down and set him before them."

We live in a world that is discontent with pretty much everything. We are called to be a people that learn, as Paul says in Philippians, the secret of contentment in all things. You see, if you're writing your own story for your own name, your own fame and your own glory, you probably want it to

be a big story. You want to do something very big.

And typically, Hollywood gets to define what big is. The storytellers in our culture get to define bigness. And Hollywood gets to define that, so you probably want to be rich, be powerful, have position, prominence, a lot of parties and toys. That's going to be what you have set as your goal to be content.

Paul here comes back and says, I'm content right where I am. I don't even have to argue. How many of you have high definition TVs? 1080P? Have you heard of HighDef? 1080P? Did I lose you?

[Laughter]

Why do I bring up HighDef? High definition TVs are cool. They're pretty recent coming out. We don't know what 1080P means. It's just when we buy it, we want it to say 1080P, because it means good picture. We don't actually study to find out why, but 1080P means there's 1090 pixels this way and 1080 pixels this way. You multiply it out; it's about 2 million, 73 thousand, 600. Right around there. May be off by a few.

Do you know that every single one of those pixels, it offers a good picture because every single one of those pixels matter. Every single one of those millions of pixels matter. The light that they shine matters. Have you ever seen a TV with one pixel dead?

Member: Sure.

Pastor Dave: Where does your attention go? To that one

pixel. You see, we're a people who are going to be content, because when Jesus is writing the story we can surrender our stories and simply let our light shine. Your light matters in the picture of the story that God is writing. The question is not, who gets to right *the* story for America. The question is who gets to write your story. Today, will you humble yourself, take the U-turn he's put in front of you, and join his story? You'll find light and life and goodness and contentment and peace joining his story.

Let's pray. Father, God, thank you so much for your goodness to us. Thanks for your love that you've given to us in and through your son, Jesus Christ. And today, I pray that as we celebrate communion, Father, would you soften our hearts to join your story that tells of your goodness and your glory. And as you do, would you grant us contentment to let our light shine before men, that they might see our good deeds and glorify you, our Heavenly Father who's in heaven.

So would you use today, and would you be pleased as we simply remember the sacrifice your Son paid for us. It's in His name, I pray, amen.

Jim: Good morning. When you came in, everybody should have received one of these small cups. If you did not receive a cup, please raise your hand so we can get one to you.

My name is Jim Liffick, and I am one of the members here of the elder team at Hillside, and this morning we have the privilege to observe the Lord's Supper together. It's an opportunity to continue our worship as we honor Jesus, our Savior and Lord. We observe an open communion, which means everyone who trusts in the Lord Jesus as their Savior

is welcome to participate.

When we read or study any of the gospels, it soon becomes apparent that Jesus was like no other who had been seen before. The common people were amazed by him. His own disciples found themselves perplexed by his statements, and yet compelled to keep following him even when many times they did not understand it.

The Jewish leaders and authorities tried but could never entrap him with their arguments or accusations. Although there are many reasons we could suggest for why people thought Jesus was like no other, his evident authority stands out. Jesus had a command of the Holy Scriptures, he performed miracles, he spoke great wisdom, and expressed understanding and compassion for our human condition.

Jesus gave us a living demonstration of his loving kindness and grace extended to rebellious sinners. He took the initiative in calling people to come and follow him. He divided history when he was born into this world. Our Lord became a man to live, suffer and die. In the 53rd chapter of his book, the prophet Isaiah recorded some 700 years before Christ's birth how the world would see and respond to his suffering.

Beginning in verse 3, Isaiah writes, "He is despised and rejected by men. A man of sorrows, acquainted with grief and we hid, as it were, our faces from him. He was despised and we did not esteem him. Surely he has bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken; smitten by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our inequities. The chastisement for our peace was upon him. And by his

stripes we are healed."

Today, we obey the command given by our Savior to remember his sacrifice and resurrection through communion. Despite what the word says, life tells us that there is no such thing as a person without faith. All human beings place their ultimate trust for their faith in something. Whether a self-made delusion of religion, a false deity, an earthly leader or even their own abilities.

The Scriptures are clear, the content of our faith matters. What we place our trust in matters. And those who are not people of faith to Jesus, will be lost for all eternity. His work throughout his life, including his unjust and cruel death on a cross, fulfilled God's plan of salvation. Jesus merited perfect righteousness for all those whom the Father had given him. The last Adam came to do all that the first Adam failed to do.

He lived a perfect life and was not condemned because of his own sin. Yet he took our place as a substitute sacrifice to save us from the penalty of our sin. Jesus clearly focused on the priority of his earthly mission and his purpose of redemption continues even today. The Lord's supper allows us to have fellowship with the Father when we rest in the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

Truly, Jesus changes everything. In 1 Corinthians chapter 11, we read in verse 23, "For I received from Him, from the Lord, that which I also delivered to you. That the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed, took bread. And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'"

"In the same way, he took the cup after supper saying, 'This

cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

Please pray with me. Father, we praise you for your perfect plan to rescue your creation from the destruction and bondage of sin. The perfect expression of your love demonstrated through the gift of the Son. Thank you for the faithfulness and obedience of Jesus. Help us to rest in his once for all sacrifice, putting on his righteousness to become our righteousness. May we express our gratitude each day as we abide in the power of the Spirit. Amen.

[Ending song]