

Hillside Fellowship Church
November 8, 2020

Gospel Confidence - Acts 23-24

Captions Provided by:

MW

[worship]

Pastor Dave: And Father, thanks that we can come celebrate that you've given us proof that you've defeated death and the grave through your son, Jesus Christ. So we gather as your children simply to say that you are our king, eternal, immortal, invisible and thank you for establishing the King of kings, Jesus Christ our Lord.

And so we come, and I pray that as we open Your Word, that Your Spirit would point to Your Son, who reigns forever and ever and that truth might still our hearts in the middle of a chaotic world. With elections that disappoint, Father, we ask that you would still our hearts and cause us to realize that you're unchanging. You have won, are winning and will win.

And I pray you may give us peace through that truth. In Jesus' name, amen.

Well, welcome. Before I jump in and deal with the elephant in the room; elections . . .

[Laughter]

. . . that don't go the way we want or some of us want or

maybe one way or the other. Whatever. A couple of announcements. Number one, Hillside Fellowship has an app on your phones. I have it. Our gonna want it and I don't know how you should get it.

[Laughter]

So, I think you can go on your phones to the app store. Look up Church, Hillside Fellowship and it's going to pop up. It's going to serve you. It's going to bring a lot of the information together at your fingertips to get the information that you need. App. I have it. You want it. I don't know how you can get it.

[Laughter]

Number 2 -- isn't that good? That's how I create curiosity so you'll actually go look. I could walk you through and say, this is how you get it. That's boring. The app. I love the app. Danny and Amanda did an awesome job. You're gonna want it. Good luck finding it.

[Laughter]

Number 2, Wednesday is Memorial Day, I think. So if you've ever served in the military, thank you.

Members: Veteran's Day.

Pastor Dave: What did I say?

[applause]

Members: Memorial Day.

Pastor Dave: See, this is what happens when you speak without notes. It's not Memorial Day. That would take us back. It's Veteran's Day. Veteran's, you've stood for us long enough. Let us stand for you and give you a big round of applause and thank you. If you've ever served, stay seated.

[applause]

Good. Thank you.

Number 3, I've met a lot of first-timers. If you're here, welcome. So glad you're here. This is Hillside Fellowship. We believe Jesus changes everything. He has been, is and ultimately will change everything for all eternity. We've been looking at the book of Acts to see how he has historically changed everything. We're going to look at Acts 23 and 24 today.

So if you'll open your Bibles, I'm going to read the first five verses in chapter 23. And I will call this, election 2020 survival guide.

[Laughter]

Not kidding you. Enjoy it. It's an impossible task. I don't have a timer up but I'm going to try to keep it to 35 minutes. Two chapters I'm going to show you. Unless you understand how God keeps score, you're going to be depressed. Let me read it to you.

Chapter 23, verses 1-5. God says, Luke writes this, 1 "Paul, looking intently at the Council, (Sanhedrin) said, 'Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before

God up to this day.' 2 The high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth. 3 Then Paul said to him, 'God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?'

4 But the bystanders said (to Paul), 'Do you revile God's high priest?' 5 And Paul said, 'I was not aware, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, (Exodus 22, 28) 'YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF THE RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.'"

Now, I think this will best help you before I get into the big theological picture and a little theological picture on our 2020 Election Survival Guide. I took a class called Lifetime Sports when I was in college. And in that class, we did different low impact sports like, golf. I could understand golf. You hit the ball and that counts as a stroke. Simple. One-to-one. Get it.

Soccer? Simple. You kick a goal and you get a point. Very, very straightforward. And as we went through, I got most all of the sports. Even tennis. It was a little weird. Love-love. Love-15. But it's French. I give the French grace. They do a lot of things weird, amen?

[Laughter]

But when it came to bowling, I have never been able to figure out --

[Laughter]

No. In all honesty. How many of you have bowled? Okay.

Almost 100%. How many of you know how to score a bowling? There's a few. Okay. This is an above average group.

[Laughter]

No, in all honesty. This is why bowling alleys, they put in automatic scorers, because they realize, listen, y'all, when it just comes to counting seven pins here, eight pins there, we can do addition. But after the strike and spare, heaven help us.

[Chuckling.]

And if you get two strikes or two spares, good luck, yo. Because you don't know what your score is. You gotta wait 'til the next frame and then bring up ladder frame -- it's bazaar. I never did, even after taking the class, I still don't know how to score golf.

Members: Bowling.

Pastor Dave: What did I say?

Members: Golf.

[Laughter]

Pastor Dave: This election has me really twisted up, doesn't it.

[Laughter]

You see it and it's okay. I know how to score golf. One-to-

one. Bowling though is a different thing. Here's what I'm going to tell you. If you don't understand God's score card, you're never going to enjoy the story he's writing. It's going to be frustrating. You're going to feel day after day after day that you're losing, because you don't understand the score card God is keeping.

Let me walk through these two chapters in this way. Big theological picture. God's sovereign, he's in control and God is winning. Problem is, it constantly looks like he's losing, amen? Small theological picture. Satan is incredibly weak. He's losing. The problem is, it looks like he's winning.

In the gospel, this book -- if you're not a Christian and you're here -- this book tells us one story. It's called Good News of how God humbled himself, emptied himself and then His Son, Jesus Christ joined us and he showed us what victory looks like.

Now, it's upside-down from what the word says. You see, if you want to be great in the kingdom of God, learn to be the servant of all. Winning looks like being a servant. You want to be first? You've gotta be last. God's score card is incredibly upside-down. And if you don't understand that, you're going to lose joy. You're going to stay up at night worried about elections. You're going to be frustrated.

I'm going to show you. From chapter 23 on, it looks like Christianity is losing, it looks like Paul is losing. Nobody gets saved. Paul's on trial constantly. Losing, losing, losing, losing. And what I want you to know is, when it looks like God's losing, he's just up to something big. You've gotta give him time.

I'll show you. Here's your 2020 Election Guide. We'll start out verse 1-5. We're going to look at character, because apparently God is more interested in changing what's inside of me than changing what's around me. He's actually interested in changing our character; who we really are.

I'll show you. Verses 1 through 5. I'll read it to you. We just read it. Paul gets popped in the beak. Verse 1. Watch how unfair this is. And I'm going to show you how God's winning.
1 "Paul, looking intently at the (Sanhedrin) . . . "

Suddenly they're against him.

He looked at them and said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day."

Now that angers them because that was basically Paul saying, and I know you're rejecting Jesus so you're not living with a good conscience. You want to hold onto your power. I get that. Well, as soon as Paul said that, 2 "The high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him (to punch him) in the mouth."

Now I don't know if you've ever been popped in the beak, punched in the face, punched in the mouth. It hurts. And something is going to come out. Watch what comes out of Paul.

3 "Then Paul said to him, 'God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall!'"

[Laughter]

Why do you laugh at that? That's not even the funny part

yet. The funny part is, in every translation -- doesn't matter if you have the NASB, NIV, King James, New King James, the Greek -- God's going to strick you, you whitewashed walls is exactly what it says. There's no other way to translate it. It's like, you're a decrepid wall. You painted white on it to make it look good, but you're falling down, bruh. You're old.

And so the high priest is like, "punch him." And then he says, " 'Do you sit to try me according to the Law, in violation of the Law order me to be struck?' 4 But the bystanders said, 'Do you revile God's high priest?'. . . .

You're speaking against the high priest.

5 "And Paul said, 'I was not aware, brethren, . . . ' The high priest had changed. He hadn't been to Jerusalem for years. He didn't know this cat was the high priest. 5 "Paul said, 'I was not aware, breathin, that he was the high priest; for it is written (in Exodus 22:28), 'YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.'"

You see what just happened? Paul thought they were violating the Law, so he was righteously indignant. You violate the very Law you're using to try me. When he found out that he was the one in violation of the Law by speaking evil, you see what he did? Forgive me. I was wrong. I'm sorry.

Profound. Here's the bottom line. What's inside of you matters. What's inside of me matters. What's inside of us matters. Now you don't know me. If we can just get honest. You know what I put out before you. But you don't really know Dave Tooker. You know what I want you to know. And we all function that way. We function according to a self-

made identity.

Here's what I want people to think about me. Do you know God looks at me very differently than you do. We look at outward appearances, but God looks at the heart. And what's in our hearts deeply matters. I call it the Chocolate Principle. How many of you have ever bitten into a piece of chocolate only to find out there was something nasty inside of it?

[Laughter]

Okay. I didn't know if this was universal. People are still like, Dave, why don't you like chocolate? Well, when I was a kid, somebody gave me a box of chocolates and I'm like, chocolate is delicious. I bit into it and it must have been cognac cherry or something. Because to a kid, I started heaving. Like it was disgusting. I still struggle with chocolate. I don't trust chocolate, because you don't know what's inside of it.

[Laughter]

Honestly.

Member: Life *is* like a box of chocolates.

Pastor Dave: Yeah, Forest Gump said it. Totally. Life is like a box of chocolates. You don't know what's inside. Do you know what it takes to find out what's inside of chocolate? Some pressure. You've gotta squeeze it.

[Chuckling]

Honestly, you do. You see, that's exactly like us. God sees what's inside of my heart and he's actually interested in changing what's inside of me more than he is interested in changing what's around me. And I know this is really hard. But if you don't get that, you'll be frustrated at elections every four years. There's a lot to be frustrated. And you will be frustrated unless you realize that God is actually interested in changing what's inside of you. Your character.

So, I would just start there. If I had time to unpack this, I would look at James, chapter 1. "Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance." And then I would jump over to Romans, chapter 5, verses 3 and 4. That these trials and this pressure that is crushing the chocolate is actually producing proven character.

If you want to survive this election, first, you've gotta realize that Jesus is more interested in changing what's inside of you. To my reformed friends who are here, I would say, he's less interested in the electoral college than he is in the character of his elect. He longs for us to be changed and look more and more like Jesus Christ.

So, watch where he goes next. What comes out of Paul is beautiful. Watch 6 through 10. Here's the contrasting conjunction. So Paul humbles himself even though he's wrongly on trial. Things aren't going the way he wants. He's just in a bad place. Sometimes you do the best you can every day and you end up in horrible circumstances. Anybody been there?

It's like I'm not even sinning and I end up in the middle of chaos, confusion and a fight. I just wanted to tell people

about Jesus. Watch what happens here.

6 "But perceiving that one group were Sadducees (that would be liberals) and the other Pharisees, (that would be the conservatives -- democrats, republicans) . . . "

Realizing he's like, I've conservatives over here, liberals over here. But both of them want to kill me, and this is a bad thing because my enemies have joined together against me.

" . . . Paul began crying out in the Council, 'Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of a Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!'"

Emphatic, exclamation point.

Verse 7. "As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. 9 And there occurred a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the pharisaic party stood up and began to argue heatedly, saying, 'We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?'

10 And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks."

Sometimes, by no fault of our own, we end up in the middle of chaos and confusion. In a fallen world, in a broken system politically, in a country, oftentimes, we're just caught in the backwash. It's not that we've done anything wrong per

se. It's simply that we live in the kingdom of darkness. This world is falling apart.

But here's what I want you to know. I call it my Trash Compactor Principle. Anybody ever seen Star Wars, they get onto the Death Star to save Princess Leia. It's Han Solo, Luke Skywalker, Chewbacca, R2D2, C3P0. They're there to do good. To save Princess Leia. But in the process, they realize they're outnumbered, outgunned, outmanned. They're running around the Death Star and they end up in the trash compactor of the Death Star. They end up in the garbage can of the Death Star.

And they're fighting with each other. And they realize there is nothing we can do. So they start blaming each other. I find this to be true in elections. It's like, well, the pastors didn't do enough. The Christians didn't vote. We start blaming one another. Here's what I want you to know. Trash compactors of life teach us to trust Jesus.

The trash compactor. When you're powerless, it's actually the point you might realize, I need to learn to trust Jesus. You see, the truth is -- and if I had time to unpack this, I'd unpack it for you -- the chaos and confusion is often the canvas our creator uses to create his masterpieces. Chaos and confusion are the canvas on which He paints his masterpieces. Don't believe me? Read Genesis 1 and 2. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void."

Interesting Hebrew words. It was chaotic and confusing. And what did he do? That was the canvas on which he created the masterpiece of our universe. So whatever chaos and confusion you're in, realize God wants to use that to

create a masterpiece. It's where he starts. It's where he's always started. In the fallen world, it is the only canvas he has to create masterpieces.

So this was an epic fail for Paul. Read through Romans. He would've gladly gone to hell if his brothers would have receive Christ. He was heartbroken he didn't get to preach Jesus. Watch. I'll show you verse 11. Here's another comfort.

Verse 11. "But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, 'Take courage;'"

Why would he need to tell Paul to take courage? Why would Jesus need to literally come stand by Paul and say, 'Paul, take courage?'. Because Paul has lost courage. He was discouraged. He was depressed. He was in Jerusalem hoping that the people he loved would receive Jesus. Hoping they would vote in the right way. Hoping that they would turn to Jesus and say, we've sinned. We've loved our position, our prominence, our power and our pleasure more than the person of Jesus Christ. It didn't go the way he wanted and now he was discouraged and he was depressed.

So much so that Jesus had to stand by his side and say, take courage. As you've testified and witnessed for me in Jerusalem, you are going to testify or witness for me in Rome. You see, Christians, most days, in a fallen world feel like failure. Let me say this again because I don't feel like that landed. Most days feel like loss, feel like failure. And most days, if we're honest -- if I had time just to sit with moms, the moms would say, I'm overwhelmed with mom guilt. I just feel like I've failed. I haven't shown up enough.

If dads were honest and safe, most husbands and dads would say, I don't feel I can do anything right. I feel like a failure. Most days feel like failure, AND on top of that, we have to face the world that hates us, the flesh that harms us and the devil that throws and hurls insults at us. Most days feel like loss. And this is purposeful. You see, this is one of the enemy's favorite tools.

You know what the easiest enemy is to defeat is? The enemy that doesn't show up to battle. If I can get you just to give up, tap out, then I win the war without ever having to fight. Fabian principle. War of attrition. If I can just get you to tap out, I win. The basic principle here is don't forget May 31, 1999. I've told you before, it's the Memorial Day miracle.

The Spurs were behind the whole game.

[Laughter]

Literally at one point, they were down 18 points. This is a playoff game. You've got Sean Elliot who's got a kidney issue. He shouldn't even be playing. The team is hobbled. They're demoralized. Don't forget May 31, 1999, because they were behind the entire game. People left. People in this audience right here left the game early.

[Chuckling.]

They're not going to win. It's over. Eeyore. Why do I always lose my tail? They left. Some will email me after. It's a city wide secret the people that walked out of the stadium. They're like, I was one of those who left.

[Chuckling]

There are people here this morning who were there at the game. Please don't forget the last second. Buzzer beater. Sean Elliot hits the 3 and we win. You see, it always has looked like loss. Jesus says, take courage. I'm not done writing the story. Don't you give up. Don't tap out and don't lash out. Simply allow your life to be poured out. It makes a difference. Take courage, Paul. I'm not done.

Watch what comes next, because we go from bad to worse. I'm going to read straight 12 to 22. Watch what happens next, because you're like, listen, Dave. It can't get any worse than this. My candidate lost. It's horrible. No, it can get worse and it most likely will.

[Laughter.]

No, it's 2020. Have we learned nothing yet, y'all?

[Laughter]

Like, I'm still surprised when people are surprised. It's like, at some point we should be like, I should expect the unexpected. You're right. You're right.

Watch. This is horrible. This is how God loves to use the common things. Paul's probably sitting there thinking it can't get any worse. I got popped in the beak, broken nose, now I'm in prison, nothing's going well. Praise God, Jesus showed up and encouraged me. That was nice, but now I'm still in prison.

12 "When it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and

bound themselves under an oath, saying they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul."

Anybody been there?

[Laughter]

This is 40 dudes, who are like, hey, we're on a shot clock. We got three days, because we're not going to eat or drink. We're going to kill Paul. I can tell you from experience, when you've got somebody who wants you dead, it's unnerving. Especially when they know where you are and where you live. Like, it's unnerving. You feel powerless. You're out of control.

Here's what happened. Verse 13 "there were more than forty who formed this plot. 14 They came to the chief priests and the elders and said, 'We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul. 15 Now therefore, you and the Council notify the commander to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation; and we for our part are ready to slay him before he comes near the place.'"

Paul has no power. Have you ever felt in the elections, I'm powerless, I'm hopeless, I can't do anything? I've got one voice, one vote. I can't do anything. And in this life I feel powerless. I feel hopeless and helpless. Watch this. God loves to use common people in common places doing common things to bring about uncommon results. Watch what happens. This is one of my favorite verses in all the Bible. Paul's powerless. He can't do anything. God, they're going to kill me!

Verse 16. Watch. You're not going to believe this. This is going to blow your minds. 16 "But the son of Paul's sister . . ." [Chuckling] whaaat? Let me read it. "But the son of Paul's sister . . ."

Paul's an uncle.

[Chuckling]

Uncle Paul.

[Laughter]

I've spent years in church. Every time I read through Acts 23, I'm like, wha? I didn't know Paul had a sister. Paul was like a machine to me. He just did stuff every day and he got it done. He's an uncle. He probably gave his nephew presents.

[Chuckling]

" . . . the son of Paul's sister heard about the ambush, and he came and he entered the barracks and told Paul. 17 Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, 'Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him.' 18 So he took him and led him to the commander and said, 'Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to lead this young man to you since he has something to tell you.'

19 Then the commander took him by the hand . . ."

Apparently he was a young kid. Come on, boy.

" . . . he took him by the hand and stepping aside, began to inquire of him privately. 'What is it that you have to report to me?' 20 And he said, 'The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down tomorrow to the Council, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more thoroughly about him. So do not listen to them, for more than forty of them are lying in wait for him who have bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready and waiting for the premise from you.'

22 So the commander let the young man go, instructing him, 'Tell no one that you have notified me of these things.'"

Most days feel hopeless, helpless and we feel powerless. We live in a very big world. The government's very big. What's going on around us is very big. And we're in control of very little, aren't we. I love Acts 23:16 through 22. I've just got written in my Bible, The Uncle Paul Principle. It's also closely related to the McGyver principle.

[Chuckling.]

God loves to use common people, common things, in common ways to bring about very uncommon results. See, this is what I loved about McGyver growing up. You and I would look at things on the floor like a Q-tip and paper clip and a bandaid and think, that's trash. McGyver looks at it and says, that's a nuclear warhead that I can take out Iran with.

[Laughter.]

And he does it. That's the first episode of McGyver. He

takes down Iran with nothing. See, there's some truth in that. God's never trapped. He's never in a corner. So why do you feel trapped? Paul may not be able to do anything so God takes a common young man and puts him in a common place while doing common things. Probably rolling jacks. And he hears something. And God uses him to change everything.

I would just write this down under the Uncle Paul Principle. Your God is at work even when you can't see it. And if you don't believe that, you're going to be anxious, frustrated, stressed, worried. You'll be angry. But please know this. Your God is at work even -- Paul had no idea that his nephew was even there. I'm sure Paul was just as surprised as I -- that's right. I'm an uncle!

[Chuckling]

And my nephew's here in town, rolling jacks right next to the Sanhedrin and he hears it. Watch how God takes the common things and brings comedy out of it. I'll read the next part. Watch this. You're not going to believe this but it's true. If you don't understand the Uncle Paul/McGyver principle, you're not going to understand the coyote/roadrunner principle either.

[Laughter]

Oh, you've watched it? One of my favorites. That coyote just wants to eat that skinny bird. He's never gotten him. He's just spends a lot of money at Acme but constantly gets blown up.

[Laughter.]

And it's a true principle. Watch what happens! These guys, they're not going to eat or drink until they kill Paul, but watch what it brings about. Roadrunner principle. Verse 23. I'm going to show you verse 24 and 35, because if you don't understand how Luke sandwiches the story, you're not going to understand God's comedic timing. You've got to get God's comedic timing and be patient for the punchline. Watch this.

This is the centurion. 23 " . . . [he] called to him two of the centurions and said, 'Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen" So you got ninjas. The warriors. The samurai. " . . . and two hundred spearmen."

That's a lot of troops, yo. He's got all kinds. Now watch this. 24 is where it gets really good. There's the comedic timing. 24 "They were also to provide mounts to put Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor."

So now Paul gets a horsey ride to . . .

[Laughter]

. . . no it really is. It's comedy. It's comedy written into the text. Read through Genesis 50:20. If I had time, I would unpack the truth of how God loves to use comedy. He's a judo expert. He will use the enemies momentum against him, and the rock always falls on the enemy. And the enemy doesn't get it. He's like, well, maybe next time I'll blow up the roadrunner. No, you're not going to get him. I've watched every episode.

[Laughter]

You're not going to get him. But pride blinds him. So Paul would have had to walk to Caesarea and he was already exhausted. God's like, hey, let me go ahead and give you a horse ride. But watch. I also have this under the horses and hotels principle. Watch where Paul ends up staying. This is the ultimate punchline. I'll read the letter.

He wrote a letter having this form. 26 "Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings. 27 When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came up to them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. 28 And wanting to ascertain the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Council, 28 and I found him to be accused over questions about their Law, but under no accusation deserving death or imprisonment.

30 When I was informed that there would be a plot against this man, I sent him to you at once, also instructing his accusers to bring charges against him before you.' 31 So the soldiers, in accordance with their orders, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. 32 But the next day, leaving the horsemen to go on with him, they returned to the barracks. 33 When these had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also present Paul to him. 34 When he had read it, he asked from what province he was, and when he learned that he was from Cilicia,

35 he said, 'I will give you a hearing after your accusers arrive also,' giving . . . "

Here comes the punchline. " . . . giving orders for him to be kept in . . . " Yeah. It's up there. It's okay. You can read it.

". . . Herod's praetorium."

Yeah, praetorium. We don't use that word in English. He is going to be put in Herod's private room. Herod the great. See, we don't understand history. Christmas is not far away. At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Not a trick question. When Jesus was born, this bad dude wanted to kill him. Remember his name?

Members: Herod.

Pastor Dave: Okay. Now we're on the same page. Well, Herod, wicked smart dude, he built palaces and temples. He actually, he and his crew, came up with concrete. So he built the nicest of places all while trying to kill Jesus. He spent a lot of his life trying to kill Jesus. So now, did he ever get to kill Jesus? Nah. He died a pretty gruesome death.

But now, Jesus rose from the dead. He ascended. Now Jesus' witnesses are going out to tell people and now the very palace that Herod built for himself, guess who's getting to stay there? There's your punchline. Wait for the humor of God to be displayed. Listen, comedy is really hard work. It really is. You think comedy is easy. It's not. It's all about surprise and timing and juxtaposition and getting people to see two different things and delivering it in a way they can understand.

God loves comedic timing. Please, don't forget about the knock knock principle. Gives time to God to get to the punchline. He'll get there. He loves to laugh. Have you read through Psalm 2, Psalm 37? You read through the Psalms. How many of you enjoy a good belly laugh? You enjoy laughter. It's because you were made in the image of

God. God loves to laugh too. And he loves to take the enemies momentum and totally coyote him; use it against him.

Be patient for the punchline. Most of us want things done now. God builds the plot and when the punchline comes, man, it's good. Watch what comes next. Here's the calm. I'm going to show you. Chapter 24 is a flowing section. Verses 1 through 27. I don't want you to miss this. I typically have you for 18 to 27 seconds. It's just true. You can tell. That's why I'm constantly looking around.

It's going to take me 3 1/2 minutes to read this. So I'm going to tell you where I'm going so I don't lose you in the middle of reading it. Here's where I'm going. Verse 23, "Then he [the commander] gave orders to the centurions for him [Paul] to be kept in custody and yet to have some freedom, and not to prevent any of Paul's friends from ministering to him."

Verse 27 "Two years passed." Let this sink in. Paul was there imprisoned at this place two years. "Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned."

For even longer. Now let me read the chapter to you. This is just going to be to, how to be calm when things don't go the way you want them to. Chapter 24, verse 1 through 27. "After five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with an attorney named Tertullus, and they brought charges to the governor against Paul.

2 After Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying to the governor, . . . "

Watch how this is just manipulation. It's gross. I don't even like reading it.

" ' . . . Since we have through you attained much peace, and since by our providence reforms are being carried out for this nation, 3 we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness. 4 But, that I may not weary you any further, . . . "

I mean, he's just being a lawyer.

[Laughter]

He's just . . . not, ugh. I'm so sorry I said that to the lawyers here.

[Laughter]

Uh, an ambulance chasing lawyer. I think we can -- anyway. It doesn't matter. Doesn't matter.

" . . . But that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing."

Now here comes the actual charges.

5 "For we have found this man a real pest . . . " [Laughing]

[Laughter]

That's not a legal argument, yo. This dude bothers us, Your Honor. Literally, he's like a virus.

[Laughter]

Watch this. " . . . he's a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, . . . "

I mean, it's hyperbole. " . . . and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes."

He's part of The Illuminati, Your Honor. It's literal nonsense.

6 "And he even tried to desecrate the temple; and then we arrested him. [We wanted to judge him according to our own Law. 7 But Lysias the commander (that worked for you, judge) came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands, 8 ordering his accusers to come before you.] By examining him yourself concerning all these matters you will be able to ascertain the things of which we accuse him.'

9 The Jews also joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so."

Now watch Paul. Paul didn't even have a lawyer. 10 "When the governor had nodded for [Paul] to speak, Paul responded: 'Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, . . . "

That is, I can see you're breathing, so I will make my defense cheerfully. I mean, it's just straightforward. I love Paul. He doesn't even have to butter him up. He says, 11 " . . . since you can take note of the fact that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. 12 Neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city itself did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot.

13 Nor can they prove to you the charges of which they now accuse me. 14 But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; 15 having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

16 In view of this, I always do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men. 17 Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings; 18 in which they found me occupied in the temple, having been purified, without any crowd or uproar. But there were some Jews from Asia- . . . "

And here he pauses. Probably looks around the court. He says, 19 " . . . [they] ought to have been present before you and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me. 20 Or else let these men themselves tell what misdeed they found when I stood before the Council, 21 other than for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, 'For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today.' 22 But Felix, (who is judging the case) have a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off, saying, 'When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case.'"

Now here we go. Watch this. 23 "Then he gave orders to the centurion for him to be kept in custody and yet have some freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from ministering to him. 24 But some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.

25 But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, 'Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you.' 26 At the same time too, he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse with him. 27 But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned."

God put Paul on the bench. Literally. He just took him out of the game and for years, he left him there. Isn't that troubling? This is our top player. This is our top player and God pulls him out and benches him. Why would God pull us out of the game and bench us? Why would God pull Paul out of the game and bench him? You see, he's just going to sit here for two years.

I can tell you why. It's the Popovich Principle. You ever heard of Greg Popovich? Listen, I don't have time to go through this whole truth, but it is true. If you take every NBA coach of all time and put them on a spectrum, do you know Greg Popovich stands head and shoulders above every other coach who has ever coached in basketball.

When you measure it against games that he won that he never should have won on paper, there's no reason he should have won them. You see, please don't forget 2013. It was game six, Spurs versus Trailblazers. No, this was Spurs versus the Warriors. 2013. It was the 4th quarter. Spurs were not playing well. Greg Popovich did something in the 4th quarter, late into the 4th quarter that had everybody up in arms.

He pulled Timmy Duncan out of the game and he benched him. Timmy Duncan is inarguably one of the top 10 players of all times statistically. And you're in the 4th quarter of game six of the playoffs, and when you, as a coach, pull your best player out of the game and put him on the bench, people were up in arms. Popovich's response was simple. He said, "It's not about Timmy. It's about the team. Sometimes I pull my best players so the team can step up and do what each individual member was intended to do."

Sometimes God benches us, and he does that because it's not about us and our score. Sometimes he sidelines us because it's not about us. It's about the body of Christ being the body of Christ and actually showing up. You see, for years, we've wanted to win elections. If we could just win elections. And we'll get together and we'll look at the government and we'll say please just let us win elections. When you trust in horses and chariots, you're putting your trust in the wrong things.

You want to make a difference? Focus on God's scorecard. His scorecard is completely different. You want to make a difference? Realize that when the body of Christ functions like the body of Christ, it is a beautiful aroma to a world that doesn't understand how to love. When we love one another, when we serve one another, when we function according to God's scorecard, when we don't seek to be first but we seek to be last, when we want to be great so we learn to be the servants of all, when we learn to lay our lives down for one another, that's when the world will look and say, how do you guys do it?

You see, the world functions according to their own

scorecard. We want to win. Popovich Principle says it's not about Timmy. It's about the team. Did you see what they did to Paul? For two years God sidelined him and they came and ministered to Paul. You see, all of us are needy and all of us are needed. And when we learn to love one another, we'll start playing by God's scorecard, and although it will never make the headlines like the election will -- you understand, when we function according to God's scorecard, it'll never make the headlines.

It'll never make the headlines that an 80-year-old dude came to church, gave his life to Christ, and it changed everything for him. That'll never make the headlines. It should, shouldn't it, Lee? Like it will never make the headlines that the gospel conformed a marriage that was on the brink of destruction, but God saved it by his grace and it transformed that family generationally. That'll never make the headlines. But it should, shouldn't it?

You see, when you play according to God's scorecard, you realize he's more interested in changing what's inside of me than what's around me. It's always looked like God's losing. Let me walk you through it and then I'll land this plane.

The cradle. We call it Christmas. Looks like epic loss, doesn't it? The world's burning and a baby's your answer? We call it Christmas. Yeah, it looked like failure. The world's burning, and the cross, we call it calvary, is your answer? Yeah, it looks like loss but there was never a greater win. The world's burning and a coffin putting Jesus in the ground? That's your answer? Yeah, for three days. You see, you gotta wait for the punchline, don't you?

Be patient. Wait for the punchline. It's not over. He's still

writing the story and it's big enough to fill all eternity. Will you trust him with that today? Let me pray.

Father, God, thank you so much for your word that just beautifully outlines your perfect plan. And so would you open my eyes to the reality that you really are more interested in changing what's inside of me than changing what's around me. Sometimes you bench us. Sometimes you allow things to happen so we might learn how to not put our trust in horses or chariots.

But truly to function according to your scorecard. So I pray that you let us function according to that scorecard. That husband's would go home and love their wives sacrificially. That wives would go home and submit freely and love and serve and that families would be brought together as we say, wait. Watch him. Be patient for the punchline. Jesus isn't done writing the story.

Would you give us peace in a world of panic as we adore you in a word of anxiety? Father, would you do that work in us and be glorified? I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Ending song]