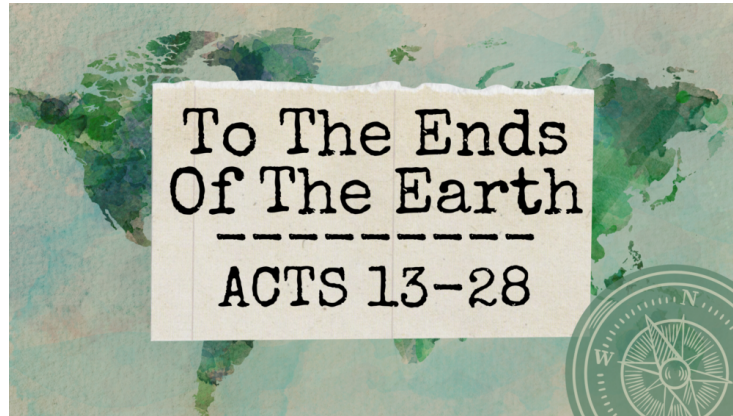


Are You Prepared to Defend the Gospel?



Acts 24:27–26:1

Bro Chris Lawrence

A few weeks ago, I turned on the TV and I felt old because a movie I really liked growing up came on and I saw that it was nearly thirty years old! It is a movie called The Fugitive where Harrison Ford plays a really successful, happily married doctor. In that movie, someone breaks into their house and kills his wife. It turns out that it is a setup to make Harrison Ford look guilty, but he was completely innocent. It goes to trial and he ends up going to prison. But something crazy happens in prison and he is able to escape. The rest of the movie is about him trying to evade law enforcement, and at the same time prove that he did not kill his wife. I think about what it would be like to be falsely accused and have to go to prison for something you did not do. After that movie, I read a couple of cases about people that actually happened to. They went to prison, days, weeks, months, years, and then evidence comes out later on and they are found innocent. What would your heart be going through if that happened to you?

This is what Paul is going through now as we see this journey in Acts. He is innocent. They can't find any charges against him, but he still finds himself in prison. We need to think about how that applies to us in the church and what it is like to possibly be falsely attacked. I read an article that talked about, from a church growth standpoint, how the culture has changed dramatically. In American culture, it used to be a positive thing, even if you were not a believer, to go to church. I even heard growing up that it could help your business if you go to church. That has since changed, especially in some of the urban areas in our country. It changed from a neutral position, probably in the early 2000's, where it was considered indifferent if you went to church or not. Recently, it has gone from neutral to negative, where now if you are going to church it could be seen as a negative to your standing in society. Who knows where things go in the future? No matter what the world says, or how the world becomes more and more negative towards a Bible believing church, in those times we have an opportunity to defend the gospel. That is what we are going to be talking about. Can you defend the gospel when you are getting attacked? We are going to read verses 13–19 in Acts chapter 25.

Scripture

"Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus. And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a man left prisoner by Felix, and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him. So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and

about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive."

How do we give an answer for the gospel when we are being attacked? I think the first place we go is Acts chapter 24, verse 27, "When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison." We learn that even though Paul has done nothing wrong, he is now stuck in prison for two years because the governor wanted to do the Jews a favor. How does Paul respond? I believe Paul sees this attack as an opportunity.

We see him take this opportunity in some of his letters that he actually wrote from prison. In Ephesians 6:16–20, Paul talks about putting on the spiritual armor of God. He says, "In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel..." What does he want the church to do? Pray for him. Why does he want the church to pray for him? So that he might present the gospel boldly. And he talks about his condition in verse 20, "...for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak."

In Philippians 1:12–14, here again Paul is in prison when he writes, "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." Paul has been attacked falsely, yet he sees it as an opportunity. This opportunity is for the church to come together and pray, pray that they might proclaim the gospel boldly.

I thought through my life, and every single time I have gone through some type of trial, do you know what it leads to? It leads to me calling brothers

and sisters in Christ, and they pray for me. As they pray for me, it is always amazing that it happens there is some opportunity for me to share the gospel. I talked to Coach Steve Duncan a couple of weeks ago. He is struggling with cancer. Do you know one of the first things he said to me? He said, "It has been amazing. I have literally felt the prayers of the people praying for me. What has been so cool through all this cancer stuff—even though it has been really hard—I have been able to share the gospel." When we think about what is going on in Ukraine right now, it has been an example of people, while being attacked, to show strength and courage. I saw one picture of Christians outside in the freezing cold praying together for their country, Christians hunkering down in bunkers to worship the Lord. Do you know what is happening there? Through an attack, the church is praying and the gospel is being spread. No matter what is going on in our lives, no matter how small or how big, we need to see attacks as opportunities to give a spiritual defense.

Paul's Spiritual Defense

In Acts chapter 25:1, we have a new governor. It says, "Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea." What Festus is trying to do here is get in the good graces of the Jewish leaders. Verses 2–3 say, "And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him, asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way." They didn't want a fair trial; they wanted to kill him. Now, Festus is wanting good favor with the Jews, but he is not going to get run over by the Jews.

Verses 4–8 say, "Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. "So," said he, "let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him." After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove. Paul argued in his defense, "Neither against

the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense.” Through this attack, Paul is able to give a defense, not just a defense, a spiritual defense. There is a difference. Every single time I have been attacked in my life, I have two options. I am either going to be defending Chris, or I am defending Christ. I am either going to be in the flesh, or I am going to be in the Spirit. Every single time I am in the flesh, I regret it. Every single time I am in the Spirit, I am thankful, and it leads to good fruit. That is where Paul is.

We see this again in Luke 12:11–12, “And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” No matter how you are attacked, you have the Holy Spirit to guide you and direct you. The question is, no matter how small or big, will you depend on the Holy Spirit when you feel like you are getting attacked?

I want to share two examples that are silly and embarrassing. Example number one—it’s the difference between giving a fleshly defense and a spiritual defense. My oldest son, Graham, is nine, will be ten this April. Brandy and I were reflecting on what it was like when he was born. When that little baby was born, I cannot begin to tell you how excited we were. We had so much love towards that little guy! At the same time, when we start to bring him home, reality sets in. We put him in the car seat, and there was this fear that came upon us. There is no longer a nurse we can call in the hospital—it is all up to us—like if we don’t do something right he is going to die! There was just this pressure there, this anxiety there, and you have to make sure you are doing everything right. Add to that, now we aren’t sleeping! The days of sleeping in are done and the little baby is getting up every few hours. Another thing about me is I am an extrovert. The more people I am around, it is like oxygen for me. But I was good. I took off work and stayed home to be with baby Graham. Brandy’s mom was there, my mom was there, but about three or four weeks in they were both gone. About that time, one of my best friends, Scotty, calls me and says, “Chris, it is the opening night of Batman, let’s go!” This is something Scotty and I have done for years for big blockbuster movies. We

would go on opening night. So, I thought... *This is good. I have been a good dad, a good husband, what is wrong with me going to a movie for just a few hours? I deserve a break!* Here I go, walking in the bedroom, "Brandy, Scotty called. What do you think? Would it be ok if I go see a movie?" I immediately saw the look in her face that she didn't want me to go. But she doesn't say anything and I don't either. Here again, I have a lot of energy. It is hard for me to sit still—I can't stop moving. I walk about for about a minute and I start pacing around my house. I feel mad, like I am being attacked. I think... *Why can't I go? What is wrong with me being able to go see a movie?* Then the Spirit's thoughts comes in (a little of my own thoughts as well)... *You are thirty-three years old and you are upset because you want to go see a comic book Batman movie. Chris—Ephesians 5! You are called to be Christ. Die to self and take care of your wife. Chris—your wife has been amazing. She is sleeping a lot less than you, by the way. She is doing a lot more than you, by the way. She is bearing a burden of raising this little guy right now and she needs you. Die to self, get over yourself, take up your cross. The world will still go on if you don't see The Dark Knight. You are going to be fine.* I walked back in there, and said, "I'm good. I want to be here for you." I really meant it; it was real. She looked at me, almost crying, and said, "I want you to go. I want you to be with your friend. I'm just nervous right now taking care of the baby." Now, my point is if I had spoken first, in the flesh, I would have done damage to our marriage. But because I got under the control of the Holy Spirit first, it led into one of the best conversations we had had as a married couple, and we grew stronger through it. Praise God that I didn't speak in the flesh!

There have been other times I have been in the flesh. Story number two—New York City, mission trip time. Contrary to what Kory has said in the past, the New York City mission trip is not a glorified vacation! So, we were in New York City and we were having a good time on this trip. It was the last day of the trip, we were at the hotel, and we were going to have a meeting with closing comments about the week we had and to glorify Christ because of the amazing things that had happened. For about the first thirty minutes to an hour, a conversation broke out about sports, as to whether LeBron James or Michael Jordan is better. Now, I have a

reputation to stir the pot a little bit, so for whatever reason, I jump in. Usually I just stir a little bit, but I jumped all in this time! Now, all of a sudden, it is getting heated. It is getting hot. So, as I am getting ready to start the meeting, I have a student yelling at me about LeBron James and Michael Jordan! I am like, what have I done! It was so silly. It was out of control, over two people we didn't even know, about who was the better basketball player—and this was leading right into the end of our mission trip and we were talking about all the great things that Christ had done! But in that moment, me debating that was not about Christ; it was about Chris. It was made evident by not only what I was saying, but in my tone. Everything was about making myself look like I was right. I regretted that. Fortunately, the Spirit got ahold of me, and as we finished our meeting, I had to reconcile with that young man. We grow closer through it, but there have been times in my life where I genuinely regret how I try to defend myself in the flesh. And, there has been so many times in my life when I am so thankful that I didn't defend myself, but I was under the power and control of the Holy Spirit.

Paul was not about defending himself. His spiritual defense was about defending the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yes, he did say he was innocent of breaking the law or profaning the temple, but all those accusation are based on him being in God's will. They are based on his argument that Jesus rose from the dead. How do we prove that? Let's continue on in the text. Acts 25:9–12 says, "But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?" But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar." Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, "To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.'" Paul is not afraid to die. As Kory said last week, his conscience is clean.

Why does Paul want to go to Caesar? There can be two thoughts. One is he knows if he goes back to Jerusalem the Jews are going to try to kill him. There is another thought. In Acts chapter 9:15–16, Paul is called to be a witness, “But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” This is a setup to where Paul is going to do all of that. Where has the Spirit led Paul to go? Acts 19:21 says, “Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” As he is appealing to Caesar, Paul now has his path to go to Rome where God has called him to go. Through this trial, through this attack, as Paul is giving his spiritual defense, it opens up the path for him to go where God has called him to go. He is in God’s will in the middle of this attack. Not only is he in God’s will because he is going where he is supposed to go, he is in God’s will because of what he truly is defending.

Defending the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus

We see what Paul is defending as we continue in chapter 25, verse 13, “Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus.” These people are bad news. They have a horrible family line and have done a lot of bad things. To keep this rated PG, Agrippa and Bernice’s relationship is not good at all. Verses 14–19 say, “And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king...” Festus is trying to figure out what to do because he knows Paul is innocent, but he has to keep the Jews happy. Let’s continue, “...saying, “There is a man left prisoner by Felix, and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him. So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. Rather they had certain

points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive." So, the whole debate, everything that is going on, is about Paul defending the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. That is what we are called to defend. That is what we are all about. That is our hope—that He died on a cross and He rose from the dead. When some Murray State student challenges me on something, I immediately always take it back to the resurrection. "What about evolution?" —"Before we go to evolution, we are going to focus on the resurrection. Did Jesus rise from the dead?" —"What about all these crazy miracles that happened in Scripture?" —"Before we deal with the miracles, let's go to the resurrection." —"What about all the bad things happening in the world?" —"Before we go to all the bad things and people dying, let's go to the resurrection."

So, why do we go to the resurrection? It is because if Jesus rose from the grave, that is the miracle of all miracles. If Jesus can defeat death, then no matter all of the bad things that occur, all the death that occurs, we now have hope because we have an opportunity to have eternal life. What does the evidence show? Here is the good news...the more and more people look at the death, burial, and resurrection, we see the evidence points to that it really did happen. Some famous preachers and teachers have said that when we go back two thousand years, there are three options concerning what Jesus did on the cross. The first option is that it is a complete lie. The second is that He is a complete lunatic. If it is one of those two options, then every single one of us in this room is wasting our time. We need to leave right now. But the third option is He is Lord. He really did do it, and that is what the evidence points to. If He did it, then all of a sudden, everything else can happen. No matter what comes our way, we now have hope. That is our defense! No matter how hard life gets, no matter how much we are attacked, we are believing He rose from the dead and that is what we defend. That is what we cling to.

That is what Paul is about. And what is amazing, as we see in Acts, is that now there is a governor and a kind discussing the resurrection. Through all these attacks and Paul going on trial, they are trying to figure out what to do with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is awesome! It leads into

another opportunity for Paul to share the gospel. Let's continue on. Verses 20–23 say, "Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, [speaking of Festus] I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them. But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar." Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," said he, "you will hear him." So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in." Do you know what I love about this scene? Paul is not thinking through an earthly lens he is speaking through a spiritual lens. Let's play this out. What would it be like to be Paul as he is ushered in. You have a king, a governor, and military folks. You have the who's who, the prominent people in the community, and here comes Paul. He is about sixty years old. Who knows what his body looks like at this point? He is covered in chains. He walks in there and sees all these important people looking at him...but he is not thinking earthly, he is thinking spiritually. It would be intimidating, right; there is a governor and a king. What would that be like?

This past weekend, we were at our spring retreat in Louisville KY. It was awesome. We had over a hundred students there. One of our former students, Blake Hodges, was the pastor who spoke, and then on Sunday we went to this church, Highview East. Anytime you have a hundred plus students walk in, it sort of gets the church's attention, so after church services, we are hanging out talking and this guy comes up to about thirty of our students and he wants to talk to them. I walk over there and hear him asking questions and then he takes a picture of the group. So, they answer his questions and then he leaves. Two of the students come up to me and say, "Chris! Who is that old dude talking to us?" I said, "That is our former governor, Matt Bevin." Their eyes lit up, like... *Oh, we're talking to the governor and we had no idea!* Now, I'm not justifying—they should know who a former governor is, but what I loved about those two students is that twenty-four hours earlier, they were having some of the most heartfelt conversations with me about people's souls. I'm not justifying them not knowing the politics of the state, but I loved that they were much

more concerned about someone's spiritual identity than their earthly identity. If we are not careful, with everything that goes on in our world, we can flip it and be much more concerned with someone's earthly identity instead of their spiritual identity.

View from a Spiritual Lens

You see, when Paul is looking at these people, he is seeing these people, not from an earthly lens but from a spiritual lens. That is how we need to see people. The question is how is Paul able to do this? How is he able to see them through that type of lens? Let's finish reading the chapter beginning in verse 24 and ending with chapter 26:1, "And Festus said, "King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him." So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense..." So, Felix is trying to figure out what to do and wants Agrippa's help. And here Paul is, wrongly accused, innocent, gone through trial after trial, and no one is giving him justice. He has every right to be absolutely outraged! He is stuck in prison, he has committed no crimes, and he knows the leaders know it. And it continues on! And now, he has another chance to defend himself.

Next week, you will hear that it wasn't just this outrage of being wronged; it is about pointing people to who Jesus is. Here is why—when he gives his defense, he is not focused on earthly judges he is focused on the heavenly judge. Paul is not afraid to die and he knows what is more important. No matter what these earthly judges do, he knows his heavenly judge. Paul can look at the Jewish people who are wanting to ambush and kill him, and he remembers who he was before Christ. He was no different. He was sinful, trying to kill Christians. He was guilty before his heaven judge, but

he met Jesus. When he met Jesus, his heart was changed. Instead of putting his faith in his works, he put his faith in what Jesus had done for him in dying on that cross and taking the penalty for sin. Now, Paul has a new identity. That new identity has changed him in such a way that he is no longer focused on earthly judges but on the heavenly judge. He knows this about his heavenly judge—he has been declared innocent because of what Christ did for him on that cross. Because he is now declared innocent, he wants others to be part of the Kingdom as well. Because of that spiritual lens, he sees people, not for their earthly status, but he sees them as sinners getting ready to fall into the hands of a holy, living, and righteous God. In the midst of that unfair trial, Paul's goal is to present the gospel to them so they might be ready for their trial to come when they meet Jesus.

That needs to be our hearts—that we see every attack on us as an opportunity to have a spiritual defense and to point people to Jesus, knowing what the endgame will be. The endgame is one day Jesus is coming back. I have a fleshly side in me. I can get fired up in a hurry. It is in my DNA. In my hometown, we would have parades sometimes and politicians would promote themselves. My great grandfather would get up and start lecturing the politicians while they were walking in the parade, no joke! He would start walking beside them telling them what they were doing wrong. So, it is in my DNA. When I see something on social media or on the news, I get fired up! It can be something small, but whatever it might be, there is something inside of me that if you hit the right trigger, I want to defend. In those moments, there are three passages that are just absolutely huge for me when I feel like I am getting attacked.

The first is 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10, “This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the Kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those *who do not know* God and on those *who do not obey* the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, *away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might*, when He comes

on that day to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed." I cannot fathom seeing the glory of God and then being separated from Him, not for a little bit, but for eternity as you get ready to face eternal destruction. Anytime I am ready to defend Chris, fight for Chris, put that person in their place, I should think of this passage. It softens my heart, because I know that no matter what I want to do, God is going to take care of it.

I was with a young man one time and he was really mad at somebody. I asked him this question: What needs to be done to make it right? He was like, "I don't know." I said, "Tell me. I'm tired of hearing all the drama. What needs to be done to make it right?" He didn't really know how to respond that. The point is—his frustration with justice, whatever he wanted to do to make it right will be nothing compared to what God will do to make it right one day. When we look at all the things going on around the world wondering why it is happening, this is what I do know—Jesus is coming back with flaming fire, and He will make everything right. All of a sudden, instead of defending Chris, when I reflect on this passage I want to point people to Christ. It is not about me any longer; it is about Him.

Christ gives me an example of what this looks like, which leads to the second passage that I go to when getting attacked, 1 Peter 2:21–25. I love this passage for every single relationship. "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." Every single believer has been called and Christ has left us an example so that we can follow in His steps. He committed no sin and no deceit was found in His mouth when "He was reviled." What do we want to do when someone reviles against us? We want to revile back. Jesus did not revile back. When He suffered, He didn't threaten. He didn't internalize it and not tell anybody, He kept entrusting

Himself to God. As He is on that cross, trusting His Father that everything will be made right, He continues to trust the heavenly judge as He hangs on that cross bearing our punishment for our sins. Why is He doing that? Because He is dying for His attackers!—So that His attackers, the ones who put Him on the cross, which includes the ones who did it, and you and me, might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds, all of us who attacked Him are healed, and because of the cross of Christ, we have returned to God!

When we are really living by the power of the Holy Spirit, we do not attack back. We trust the heavenly judge and even if we have to take on a wound, we glory in that because we get to become like Christ and we take up our cross. In the process of taking up our cross and giving a spiritual defense, people see Christ in us. Here is the glory...then maybe, just maybe, people would be pointed to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and they, too, may be healed of how they have attacked Christ! That is how we are called to live, that no matter what comes our way we remember what He has done for us. No matter what someone else has done to you or attacked you, He will deal with it. Leave the judging up to Him. At the same time, remember what we have done to Christ. We have attacked Him, yet we have been healed. Now, He is the Good Shepherd.

As believers, even when we still occasionally attack Him by the way we sin and disobey Him, He is still that Shepherd to bring us back into the flock, overseeing our souls. The result of that is no matter what comes our way we are ready to give a defense, which leads to the third passage, 1 Peter 3:14–17. “But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.” When we start seeing an attack as an opportunity for a spiritual defense to point people to the death, burial, and resurrection of

Jesus, we see through a spiritual lens and we are ready. We can give an answer, a Spirit filled answer that points people to Jesus.

Our spiritual growth strategy for this church should be representing Christ when we get attacked. Our temptation is to be like the world. It is really easy to raise our hands up when we hear our worship team praise the Lord. It's really easy to say we are Spirit led when we sing "our battle belongs to the Lord." The challenge is will you be Spirit led when the battle comes. In that moment, no matter how negatively the world might see the church, when we respond in a Spirit filled way, they will see Christ. I think that is what we have to wrestle with. If you are not a believer, it is time to lay it down. It's time for you to no longer be a fugitive. Christ knows your sin. He wants to forgive you. You can quit the fighting, come, and be a believer. The challenge as believers is, as we are sent out, as we are attacked, that we defend not just ourselves, we defend Christ. That will happen with your family, at work, or with friends, but in that moment, will you give a spiritual defense for the name of Christ? Suffering will come. We are seeing it with Ukraine right now. Sometimes we don't have answers for why those things occur, but we do know that even though the world might mean it for evil, God meant it for good, and He has a plan—and He is coming back. Whether it is a small little attack over a sports argument or you might be running for your life as the people in Ukraine are doing, we believe that Jesus died and resurrected, and He will make all things new. That is the thing we hold onto.