Text: Acts 24
Title: Paul on Trial, Again
Truth: Like Paul, we should testify for Christ at every opportunity.
Date/Location: Wednesdays 4/9 & 16, 2014, and 4/16 & 23, 2025

Introduction

Paul was beaten by a mob, rescue-arrested by the Romans, testified to the mob, barely escaped a flogging, tried by the San Hedrin, rescued by the Romans again, subject to a plot against his life, and moved from Jerusalem to Caesarea for another trial, which we read about in chapter 24. The main characters are:

1. Ananias, the high priest in Jerusalem. He was the one who ordered Paul to be struck in the Acts 23 trial. He was joined by a number of the Jewish elders.

2. Tertullus, an orator. He is not a lawyer, but rather a rhetorician.

3. Governor Felix who was stationed in Caesarea, 52 miles from Jerusalem by air and 74 miles by modern roads.

I. Accusation by Mr. Tertullus, v. 1-9

The accusers do not bring much of substance, even though verse 1 says that they "gave evidence…against Paul." Instead of an airtight case, he:

A. Flatters Governor Felix, v. 2-4. In his introduction, he extols Felix's wise rule and courtesy which result in peace and prosperity. I am going to guess that this is lying flattery because the Jewish people did not generally like the Roman occupation of their land. There is some debate about whether Felix was able to bring a level of peace to an area that had been in upheaval and violence for some time. Regardless, for purposes of this trial, you can understand why he would start this flattering way.

B. Badmouths Paul, v. 5. They say (and probably believe) that Paul is a plague and a divisive man, but he is in fact no such thing. The English word *ringleader* certainly has a negative connotation and is accurate to the sense that Tertullus is speaking, though the Greek word is not necessarily so negative. They are the troublemakers. If they would just sit back and take it all in, mind their own business a bit more, and focus on the work they are supposed to be doing, they would not be chasing a Nazarene, a former student of Gamaliel all over the Roman empire trying to kill him. They are obsessed with Paul.

C. Lies about what happened, v. 6. He did not *try* to profane the temple; they had initially accused him of *actually* profaning the temple. They did not seize him to judge him; they seized him and set about to kill him! Claudius Lysias' stretch of the truth in his letter 23:26-30 looks pretty good in comparison to this outright lie.

Actually the Jews tried to kill Paul *two times*, a fact which Tertullus conveniently leaves out. He would probably say that he compressed the events. But Felix knew a bit more from the report written by Lysias. The flawed report was enough to cast doubt on what Tertullus was saying.

D. Asserts vague charges, v. 5-6. The charges reflect more upon the Jews than upon Paul—how is *he* a creator of dissension? Is that worthy of death? Could they not just ignore him or ask him to depart from their meetings and be done with it? The profaning of the temple is a substantial charge in terms of the combination state-church that existed in Israel from ancient times, but they did not prove the charge with eyewitnesses. Remember—asserting a charge and proving it are two different things!

The other Jews (Ananias and the elders) agreed with the charges Tertullus listed.

E. Uses exaggerated language, v. 7. The commander came by and "with great violence" took Paul. Actually, there was no more violence than what the mob had already started. And, they did not merely *take* Paul, they rescued him from death.

II. Paul Defended Himself, v. 10-21

A. Paul expresses trust that the governor will rule properly in verse 10. I believe Paul would have a proper respect for the ruler despite the fact that he is a Roman ruler. Paul reminds Felix that the charges are quite amazing given the short time for all of it to have happened, only 12 days! And most of those days Paul has been in custody!

B. Paul denied their charges of raising a ruckus in Jerusalem. He was there quietly. He asserted they cannot prove the charges, and they certainly have not done so with any kind of evidence.

C. Starting in verse 14, Paul "confesses" but not as if confessing a sin or a crime. He is instead "testifying" that he worships according to Christian teaching which is consistent with Jewish teaching throughout the Hebrew Bible. He speaks of all things written in the Law and Prophets,

and focuses on the hope of resurrection from the dead. The resurrection encompasses both the just and the unjust.

Because there will be a resurrection (and judgment), Paul wants to live with a clear conscience. Such a conscience will not have an un-addressed offense toward God nor man. He is living righteously, and has no fear of a successful or righteous contradiction by the Jewish authorities. He is, as Proverbs 28:1 says, "bold as a lion."

Application: We already stated in this series (see 23:1) that we too must strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and people.

Notice how Paul uses the opportunity to tell others of faith in Jesus Christ. His defense not a self-centered defense—he is looking to extend the reach of the gospel to others even as he defends himself. What is more important to him than his own deliverance from prison or death is the proclamation of the gospel.

Application: Have that same mindset: Christ first, self second.

Conclusion

On that note, I would like to conclude this message. What is it about? Adding to our earlier lesson about maintaining a clean conscience, we see this time that **Paul exemplifies how we should have a Christ-first mindset**. We would probably tend to think that if we are in custody and in court, our highest priority is to defend ourselves so we can go free. That is not the case. Our highest priority is to honor Jesus Christ. One way we can do that is to speak the truth about what we believe. The resurrection is a good place to start, since if we were to perish in custody, we have full confidence of living again.

One further thought. In the "so what" category about what this passage means for us, we should consider that Paul did not go crazy about the injustice of it all. He took it in stride as part of the will of God for him. By avoiding this personal "victim" focus he was able to advance the cause of Christ rather than hurt it. Let us look for opportunities to advance the cause of Christ too.

Continuing…

D. In verse 17, Paul returns his defense to the circumstances surrounding his arrest. Instead of harming the nation or being a creator of division, he was coming to bring it financial help and was living peaceably. His accused had turned his good work into an alleged bad work!

He calls upon the opposition to produce witnesses if they have them, or to testify themselves if they can as to Paul's misbehavior, because they cannot. He does point out that he spoke of resurrection which served to divide the group along preexisting lines, but that was *after* being arrested. And, since he repeated the statement of his hope in 24:15 just as he did in 23:6.

III. Felix Did Not Make a Decision, v. 22-27

A. Felix, whose name was Antonius Felix, said that he would wait until he heard directly from the commander about the case. Did he really need more information? That is doubtful, particularly since he heard both sides and had "more accurate knowledge of the Way." This indicates that he already knew something about Christianity and knew that it was not a political or military threat.

Did he ever call for Lysias? If he did not call for him, he misled Paul and the others. If he did call for him, and Lysias came down sometime before two years was up (v. 27), then Felix lied when he said "<u>when</u> he comes down, I will make a decision." Either way, he failed in just leadership.

B. Happily for Paul, Felix recognized that he was not a desperate criminal who needed solitary confinement or torture to stay in line. He let his friends care for him without hindrance.

C. Let us suppose that Felix was just "innocently" procrastinating. While it might be hard to make a decision like this, decisions must be made, and by the guy charged with making them. **Procrastination is not going to help**. This decision was easy: Paul had done nothing worthy of death, so Felix should release him and warn his accusers not to harm him.

Often when you make a decision, someone is not happy. You should be clear as to *why* you decided the way you did, and be clear that you are doing right, but you should also be aware that someone may hate you for doing so.

D. Felix later brought his wife Drusilla. She was actually his third wife, was stolen from another man, and was not yet 20 years old. Drusilla had first married at 15 years old to Azizus King of Emesa in about 51 AD. Felix sent a sorcerer from Cyprus named Simon to woo her to Felix, and they were married in 54 AD. Their lone son was Agrippa, who died in AD 79 due to the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. (*Lexham Bible Dictionary*, s.v. Drusilla, Daughter of Agrippa). Felix had previously been married to a granddaughter of Marc Antony and Cleopatra. Felix obviously needed a good dose of righteousness.

E. Paul spoke to him concerning "the faith" in Christ – Christianity, v. 24-25. The context suggests that "faith" refers to the body of truth, which includes that personal faith is required of each and every person.

1. Paul spoke about righteousness. We do not have it, we need it, God provides it in salvation. See Rom 3:10, Hebrews 12:14, and Rom 3:25.

2. Paul spoke of self-control. This has to do with sanctification. The lack of it can indicate the need for salvation as well. Perhaps old Felix needed a good dose of self-control regarding his marriage life. This issue has come up repeatedly in recent times in my own ministry. Perhaps I am just sensitized by a confluence of circumstances that self-control is a real issue among Christians, and all people for that matter. We need self-control in emotions, in eating, in watching, in working, in talking, in passions, and in all areas of life.

3. Finally, Paul spoke of the judgment to come (Acts 17:31). A time of accountability is coming. You cannot live without consequence.

4. Other key issues in the conversation had to include faith and repentance (24:24, 17:30).

5. Something that I glossed over last time I spoke, but seems to be certainly on Paul's mind, is his hope of the resurrection, both of the just and the unjust (24:15). What does that mean? I suppose we can easily grasp the hope of resurrection for those who are *just*. They are rewarded for being just(ified by faith) and enjoy eternal blessed life.

   But what about the hope of resurrection for the *unjust*? It would seem it is not a very *hopeful* event, certainly for the unjust. It is filled with grief and sorrow and negative judgment. But for the believers in the world, it is hopeful in this sense: those people will receive their just due for rejecting Jesus. They may not have received it during their lifetime, but they will at that time be judged according to the gospel (Romans 2:16).

F. Felix became alarmed when he heard what was coming in the future. He put off not only a judgment in Paul's case, but also his personal decision to believe in Christ. He claimed that when he had a convenient time he would call again for Paul.

Listen: it is most often the case that it is *not* convenient to think or talk about sin and death and final judgment. The way of life is narrow and difficult. But the "convenient for now"/procrastinating way is broad and leads to destruction. Do not take the road of convenience! Take the road of truth!

G. Felix sent for Paul frequently over the course of the next two years. Perhaps they did not talk about religion and politics? I cannot imagine that Paul did not talk about Christ at every opportunity. Even if a "direct gospel presentation" did not come up, everything Paul said and talked about was colored with Christianity.

H. Felix is obviously not a principled man. So I suspect that he was not just innocently procrastinating. Here are two proofs of his poor character that give credence to what I am saying:

1. Felix was greedy. We know that because he wanted a bribe, v. 26. Felix kept calling for Paul, probably not specifically asking for money, but just hoping for it. Paul could not do that because it was not lawful either in Roman or Jewish law, and it is not Christian either (see Exodus 23:8 and Deut. 10:17 and many other places in the Old Testament). Paul was not naïve and probably very well knew what Felix was angling for, but used his non-payment and the delay thus caused to make use of more opportunities to witness to Felix and his wife, and undoubtedly those all around.

2. Felix's second flaw was that he used Paul as a token to please the Jews, v. 27. He left him in jail for two full years until his term expired and another governor named Porcius Festus took his place.

Conclusion

Paul will face trial before Porcius Festus and King Agrippa (Acts 25-26).

Obviously we have been reading the narrative about the specific situation of Paul, so it is not a didactic text. But Paul's conduct as an apostle does give us some good examples about how to live today. Felix provides some guidance as well but from the negative side. Following are some lessons to apply in your service for the Lord.

If you are in such a situation as Paul, **just tell the truth**, like Paul does, and explain why it *really* is that you are called into question, namely, for your Christian faith. However, do not do so just to cover up if you are really doing something wrong. **Make sure your conscience is clean**.

Cultivate decisiveness where you can decide the right thing as each situation dictates. I am not advocating off-the-cuff decision-making, but before too many days elapsed, Felix should have thought it out and decided to free Paul. Certainly before two years passed! There was not much substance to the case presented against Paul, and so Felix should have acquitted him and been done with it. Indecision can lead to a lot of

wasted time and resources and worry. Certainly you will sometimes make the wrong decision, because that is life in a sin-cursed world of sinful people who do not know everything. But do not let that stop you from doing *something*! If it is a righteous and/or merciful thing you do, that is good.

Do not let other factors cloud righteous judgment. Felix was clouded by greed for money, thus he wanted the bribe. He was also mixed up with the **desire to please other people** for political gain (power). Forget about money and power, and decide on the merits of the case. Other factors like greed just add sin to the mixture and make a mess of things.

Do not be afraid, like Felix, **of dealing with the matters of eternal life**. They are true whether you like it or not. You need righteousness which only God can provide; you need self-control, and you need to deal with the fact that judgment is coming.

Finally, notice how **Paul used opportunities to proclaim the truth** of the gospel even though these opportunities were not "comfortable" ones. He was in jail. He was being used as a pawn. He was expected to give bribe money. But he let none of those things discourage him. He kept at telling Felix and others about Jesus Christ. Notice the ground of this proclamation: Jesus told Paul in 23:11, "Be of good cheer, Paul…" The Lord was *with* Paul and was the source of his strength in this trial. The Lord can help *you too* to live this way in whatever way becomes necessary.

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