

55—Acts 24.1-27—The Courageous and Wise Defense of the Gospel

I. Introduction

- a. This whole scene here, is somewhat discouraging because it displays the broken world, we all live in. It pulls back the veil to show “Court Cam” as it was in a first century Roman court. It shows us how leaders who have authority act and can be manipulated by money and favors. A corrupt legal system is in full view. We see the need for redemption in every sphere of life and our longing for justice for Paul seems unattainable.
- b. Yet, there is a Governor of governors behind the scenes working to accomplish his purposes. So, not only do we have a “Court Cam” to see what’s going on there, we also have a “Heaven Cam” to see Christ give courage and wisdom to his witness to defend the gospel before these mighty men of the world.

II. Main Point

- a. Since it’s possible that Paul wrote Philippians (the prison letter) during his stay in Caesarea, I have pulled from the main point from that letter: Doing all things through Christ who strengthens us—the word is never imprisoned.

III. Outline

- a. 1-9 Paul is formally Charged
- b. 10-21 Paul makes his defense
- c. 22-27 Felix tries Avoids Disaster

IV. Exposition

- a. As we begin this next section in Acts 24, the trials continue. We saw last week that the commander sent Paul to Caesarea under Roman guard to the governor, Felix. He also sent a letter stating what happened and that he had found no reason for imprisonment or death. However, the commander heard of the plot to kill Paul and decided to send him to the Felix because he was at a loss of what to do about it. After 5 days, the leaders of Israel arrive in Caesarea to formally charge Paul before the governor, Felix.
 - i. In the back of your mind, you are wondering if justice will prevail and will everyone involved do the right thing. Let’s see.
 - ii. The leaders from Jerusalem are listed there in verse 1.
 1. The high priest, Ananias came down with some of the elders and a spokesman named Tertullus.
 - a. Tertullus is a lawyer. While these leaders from Jerusalem may have spoken Greek, it would not have been very smart to enter such a courtroom with less than a full command of the language, Roman law, and the cultural norms.
 - i. It’s hard to say whether Tertullus is one of them or not. He does refer to the situation in the plural—we enjoy, hear us briefly, we have found, we seized...you get the picture.
 1. That doesn’t prove anything. We all use the royal we that way. And it makes a more compelling case.
 - b. When Paul arrived five days ago, Felix promised to hear his case when his accusers arrived.
 - i. A Roman governor is more right than the leaders of Israel in the first trial. They did not wait for his accusers to come.
 - ii. Strictly speaking, what does accusers mean? If I’m thinking of that rightly, that should be those who saw Paul in the temple and accused him of bringing a Gentile inside.
 - iii. Let’s just be clear upfront. Those men are not among this group.
 - iii. Tertullus begins with his opening statement there in verse 2.
 1. Governors like Felix are persuaded by flattery and this attorney knows it. This is the first hint that justice may be foiled because of flattery. Let’s see what happens.

2. He begins with this idea that Felix has kept the peace they all apparently enjoy. Every word he speaks is fitting and clearly motivated to accomplish his task.
 - a. If Felix has been able to maintain peace (pax Romana) then he will gladly want to restore the peace that Paul has disrupted. The charges coming up will make him feel like he doesn't have control of these matters but if Felix doesn't do anything about it, the Jews will get word to the Emperor that Felix is unable to maintain the peace.
 - i. This is very crafty. He has backed Felix into a corner with this flattery here in a public arena.
 - ii. This flattery borders on blasphemy when he says they enjoy much peace because of his foresight.
 1. That word foresight is usually reserved for God. It can be translated as providence.
 2. Only Jesus can bring real, lasting peace and only God has foresight.
 3. They claim Felix had made reforms for the nation of Israel.
 - a. Obviously, they mean those reforms made life better for them. However, Felix was well known for snuffing out every rebellion among the Israelites even the Egyptian spoken of earlier and his cult. At this point in history, they are only a few years from all-out war with Jerusalem in which the temple was torn down and remains in ruin (70 A.D.).
 - b. Yet, only God can reform us. They praise this pagan governor for God-like qualities who can be persuaded by flattery. Something doesn't seem right about this fawning over Felix.
 - i. Especially when he seems to be praised and Paul condemned.
 - ii. Just know that God cannot be persuaded by flattery and we should resist it too.
 - c. If that's not enough, Tertullus speaks on behalf of all Jews everywhere to say, "in every way and everywhere we welcome this with all gratitude."
 - i. Every way and everywhere?
 - ii. They gladly receive his rule and decision making? Really?
 1. The unspoken condition is—if you will rule in our favor.
- iv. Now, the three charges which are very calculated.
1. The first one is that Paul is a pest. He's one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world.
 - a. This is a serious charge. Rome had no tolerance for rebellion. This charge was that of sedition. They don't go so far to say that he's an insurrectionist but a rabblouser throughout the empire is enough to get the point across.
 2. Second—to build on this first charge, he claims Paul is part of a sect or even better a cult. Again, the words are selected carefully that makes it sound like he's leading a revolutionary group.
 - a. There was no King but Caesar in the Roman world. Yet, Paul had no desire to overthrow Caesar's throne. He was making disciples of Christ through sharing the gospel. Christ is King over Caesar and one day that will be fully realized.
 - b. But this charge is especially tempting to act on if it is true. Usually if you dispose of the leader, the sect will scatter and end.
 3. The third charge is very serious too. They claim that Paul profaned the temple.

- a. Rome seemed to have given the Jews some liberty to deal with those who did this. They didn't have to get the okay from the Roman commander to put someone to death for this.
 - b. It was plainly posted on the dividing wall in the courtyard of the temple that if a Gentile entered the temple, he did so under pain of death.
 - c. This could have easily been enough to put Paul to death without any witnesses. He would have been in a pauper's grave before anyone knew about it.
 - d. Again, that's why it is clear that Jesus was working in every detail. The commander noticed the ruckus before they were able to put him to death.
 - v. So, what do you think of the prosecution's case?
 - 1. The flattery coupled with these charges has Felix in a jam.
 - a. Paul is a social menace
 - b. ...a leader of a cult
 - c. And he profaned our temple
 - i. Stephen died for speaking against the temple back in Acts 7.
 - 2. Will Felix keep the pax Romana before this gets out of hand?
 - a. Tertullus wisely turns the burden of proof to Felix by claiming that if he examines him, he will be able to confirm the truth.
 - i. But they have no evidence. What will the governor do? Does he not see what they are doing?
 - vi. God is not like this.
 - 1. He keeps perfect justice and he will not be persuaded by flattery.
 - 2. You can trust the Lord to do what is right today and everyday forever and ever.
- b. Felix is the governor and judge in this story. He can decide to proceed however he wants. He could give his verdict and the sentence and it would be all over. We've heard the flattery and the charges. But he decides to give Paul the nod and hear his defense.
 - i. Before we examine Paul's defense, I would suggest that upon finishing this story you will see that God was the one in control here. With that flattery and those charges to a very violent Felix who was known for quick and deadly punishment, we can't help but see the sovereign hand of the Lord in this.
 - 1. I share that because I don't want to be afraid when I'm in front of lesser crowds with the possibility of bearing witness to Christ. I hope this gives you courage to do so as well.
 - 2. I can't help but trust this: (Prov. 21:1) The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.
 - ii. Paul's defense is very wise and courageous. Imagine going into this courtroom with your life on the line with no lawyer yourself.
 - 1. I would certainly remind you that he has a lawyer with him who is far better than Tertullus—namely, Jesus himself.
 - 2. Paul too begins with the rightful acknowledgment of Felix's years as judge of this nation. He doesn't flatter the governor but he does feel confident that Felix is very capable of doing his job and therefore Paul gladly makes his defense before him.
 - a. However, Paul doesn't stretch the truth. He maintains the cultural norm to speak kindly of the governor without saying things that he cannot say in good conscience.
 - iii. Paul takes on each charge one by one in the order given.
 - 1. There in verse 11, he starts with the first charge. He simply states he arrived in Jerusalem only 12 days ago which isn't much time to start a revolution since at least five of those days he has spent in Caesarea.

2. Instead of rioting he was worshipping.
 - a. They did not find him disputing with anyone or stirring up the crowd as they claim.
 - i. And that wasn't limited to just the temple but Paul had not disturbed the peace in temple nor in the synagogue nor in the city.
3. All this was verifiable truth. Witnesses were available. There were at least those four men under a vow that he was with the whole time.
 - a. Paul points out that his accusers have not proved this but only stated this claim.
 - i. Unlike Jesus' trial where they searched high and low for anyone who would testify against him, here there are no witnesses.
 - ii. This is false witnessing. They have broken the commandment of lying against their neighbor.
 1. Will the unrighteous prosper and get their way forever?
4. What's so amazing about this scene is how Paul finds a way to speak gospel truth in his defense and stand toe to toe with the skill of this professional speaker.
 - a. By God's grace, he does the right thing even in this difficult trial. How do you undo the lies?
 - b. We often feel inferior to others. Paul doesn't fold under the fancy speech nor is he intimidated by this fancy suit and winning smile.
 - i. He trusts in the Holy Spirit of God to lead him. I don't mean to say that Paul is some dumb, uneducated man. He is a learned man BUT he relies on the Spirit.
 - ii. That's the same Holy Spirit that will help us too. We should be a people who think well too.
 - c. Paul's ability to unravel their claim to be in a sect of the Nazarenes is amazing.
 - i. He makes clear that what they call a sect is no new religion or cult that has deviated from what Jews have always hoped for.
 - ii. He rather worships the God of the Jews, though he does follow the Way.
 1. He believes all the promises of God in the law and the prophets.
 - a. We should believe them too.
 2. I'm sure the accusers wanted Felix to think that Paul had rejected the law of the Jews but Paul doesn't allow that kind of thinking.
 3. He states that he has the same hope in God as his accusers who await it too.
 4. They too believe there will be a resurrection of the just and unjust and God will judge the hearts of every person.
 - a. We can be sure that God will settle all accounts at the judgment.
 - b. And all of his judgments will be perfectly just.
 5. He hasn't abandoned the faith but it seems the accusers may have.
 6. The Way is not a sect or a cult but rather the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption for Israel and the nations.
 - iii. Furthermore, Paul came to Jerusalem to bring alms to his nation and offerings.

1. Part of this reference is to the big collection the churches had been working on for some time. It was given to the poor because of the famine in Israel.
2. Also, when his accusers laid hold of him, he was presenting offerings in the temple for purification.
 - a. Instead of pestering people, he was purifying himself.
 - b. This is what they found Paul doing. This is what is true.
 - c. That is NOT what the Jewish leaders have presented.
 - d. This is such a sad but true reflection on humanity.
 - e. Paul came there to give but had these men given a thing to help the poor. They were know for taking even from widows.
 - f. Spiritual pride can make us think we are better than others. That's not to be so among God's people.
5. Paul has spoken the truth. He has been respectful. He has kindly countered each charge with clarity. Now comes the mic drop moment.
 - a. Those who found him in the temple are not there. They have no witnesses and no proof.
 - b. He calls on the high priest and elders who have come to say what wrongdoing they found in him.
 - i. He essentially backs them into a hole they can't get out of.
 - ii. Again, Paul does not hesitate to bring up the real reason for his arrest—the hope of the resurrection of the dead.
 - c. Will Jesus continue to take care of Paul in this situation? Who has all authority in heaven and on earth?
- c. Before the high priest and elders or their attorney can say anything, Felix tries to avoid disaster with the oldest trick in the book—kick the can down the road.
 - i. Verse 22 could have said, "And Tertullus replies...". I think that's why the verse starts with but.
 1. Instead, Felix steps in to speak. And he is not speaking in ignorance. He has a very good understanding of the Way which makes him even more responsible in this situation.
 - a. So, he puts them off
 2. He knows what's going on. He knows the dilemma he's in. He knows what he should do.
 - a. His excuse is that he needs more information from Lysias, the commander who saw all of this.
 - b. But we know that Felix already knows what the commander thinks. He wrote that in the letter.
 - ii. However, to release Paul would say he cares nothing about the peace of Rome and the desecration of the temple.
 1. Felix knows Paul is innocent. The commander said he was innocent. The Pharisees declared him innocent.
 2. But Felix thinks this move is genius. Peace is restored because he has Paul in custody.
 - a. He orders that Paul remain in custody with a measure of liberty.
 - i. This allowed his friends to come and provide the things he needed.
 - b. And it stopped any further disruptions of peace from Paul.
 - c. And one more thing...he just might receive a bribe from Paul.
 - i. His greed ended up giving Paul multiple opportunities to share the gospel with Felix and his wife, Drusilla.
 - ii. Only the Lord can cause such a turn of events.

V. Response

- a. This is an amazing work of God's grace in the life of Paul in a really difficult situation to display the power of the Lord to work in the midst of a chaotic world.
 - i. This whole scene is so disappointing. We know Paul is innocent. We hate seeing the lying and manipulation going on in a place where we hope to see justice prevail. So many times, it does not. That will not always be the case. Their end is coming someday.
 - ii. We can trust our all-powerful Savior and Lord to act for the glory and good of his great name. That's why we are here. We are Christ's servants.
 - iii. We can trust that God will settle all accounts in the end with perfect justice and righteousness. There will be no doubts on judgment day.
 - iv. We are all guilty and there are plenty of witnesses.
- b. I want to end with this response and it may seem unrelated—becoming a faithful and courageous gospel witness.
 - i. I know most of us do not see ourselves standing before a governor or a mob of people bearing witness about Christ and the resurrection. That is probably very true.
 - ii. However, I do not want you to think this is the only way we bear witness to the gospel.
 - iii. In fact, as Christians we ought to be preaching the gospel to ourselves every morning.
 1. We need the gospel every day. We need to fill our lamps with the truth of the gospel and be prepared for his coming.
 2. As you heard Paul say, there will be a resurrection of the just and unjust. Every human being will have to give an account before the all-knowing Judge.
 3. Therefore, our daily acknowledgement of our need of more grace to cover the failures of yesterday pours out each morning for new mercies in Christ and the well never goes dry.
 4. That's where it starts. Preaching to yourself the gospel until you have laid hold of Jesus.
 - iv. But also, we bring the gospel into our fellowship.
 1. When you are talking with each other about health issues that are scary, remind each other of the gospel.
 2. When you are talking and you are frustrated about something, remind each other of the gospel.
 3. There are some many places the gospel needs to show up in our lives on a regular basis and in regular conversations that we would do well to rehearse the good news with ourselves and each other often.
 - v. Let me end with this. You are preaching something to yourself if not the gospel. You're preaching something to each other if not the gospel.
 1. To those you talk to going through cancer or things like it. You either remind each other of the gospel or you lean on doctors and medicines or insurance companies that have so often failed us. Take the medications. Go to the doctor but rest in the gospel.
 2. You may be saying...I've just got to do better. A vow to do better will fail. You will seek to do what only the Lord can do. He is the One who sanctifies. He is the One who strengthens. He is One who grows us.
 - a. You may find that you are not a Christian but a moralist who attempts to be good in your own strength. It will not work and it will not save.
 - b. I am sure some of you have some really troubling things going on in your life. You are ashamed and guilty and you don't know what to do.
 - i. You need someone to walk with you through this but you think we either do not want to help or cannot help or would be appalled to find out what's going on and who knows how we might respond to you.

- ii. There are some sins that cannot be beat alone. I am not here to condemn you but to help you. A problem comes when we do not think we should fight sin, that somehow it doesn't matter. And we refuse to repent. That's a totally different issue.
- iii. If you need help, please come to me or come to someone you trust in the church and ask for help and accountability.
- c. We must start with ourselves and each other. If that is the normal pattern of our lives together then it would be normal even before judges of this land but more importantly before God our righteous Judge.

Benediction: (Jude 1:24-1) ²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.