

~ Lesson 82 ACTS ~

Paul's Defense Before Felix: Hope in God

Acts 24:1-15

Today we start chapter 24 in our study of the book of Acts as Paul awaits the arrival of his accusers in Caesarea. And in our lesson today we will see Paul continue to stand for Truth and defend the faith and the Hope of the Gospel... the resurrection of the dead.

We left off last week as Paul was escorted up to Caesarea by 470 Roman soldiers bringing him safely to Felix after forty Jews had bound themselves under an oath to kill Paul. And we saw the providential hand of God protecting and guiding Paul to safety and God is using the Romans to do this.

Let's begin our study in chapter 24 with verse 1...

24:1) Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator named Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul.

Paul had been in Caesarea for five days waiting in Herod's Praetorium for his accusers to show up to present their case to governor Felix. Felix had been informed of the circumstances from the letter Lysias had written to him, Acts 23:25-30, but now to know more, Felix has set up a formal trial to hear both sides.

Five days earlier these forty Jews had banded together with the high priest Ananias to set an ambush to kill Paul. But their plan was thwarted when God used a little boy, Paul's nephew, to reveal their deceptive plot. You can imagine the shock when the high priest came to Lysias that next day to request that Paul be brought to their council but found that Paul was no longer in Jerusalem and had been escorted to Felix in Caesarea. At this point the high priest and the Jews with him were boiling, not only mad at the Apostle Paul, but we will also see their accusations against Lysias.

In Lysias' letter to Felix, we find that Lysias commanded the high priest come to Caesarea, Acts 23:30. Felix knows this and is awaiting the arrival of the accusers, Acts 23:35. This was a mandatory meeting to resolve the accusations against Paul, a Roman citizen. The Jews organize themselves relatively fast. It was at least a two-day trip from Jerusalem to Caesarea, maybe three, the first day is spent talking to Lysias; then they take two more days to arrange a prosecuting attorney, Tertullus, and finally arrive two days later in Caesarea. You can imagine the high priest Ananias, the other Jews, and this orator, the prosecuting attorney arriving in Caesarea with all their pomp and lies ready to deliver their apparent evidence against Paul. The meeting probably starts the following day and Tertullus begins by buttering up Felix the governor.

24:2-4) ² And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: "Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, ³ we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. ⁴ Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us.

His accusation begins with Tertullus laying it on thick by exalting Felix. As we discussed last week, Felix was not a good man. He was corrupt and lustful with unprincipled character. Tacitus describes him saying, "With all cruelty and lust he exercised the power of a king with the spirit of a slave." Felix was such a disgrace to even Rome that he was recalled by Nero and fell from his seat as governor of Judea in 60AD from which Festus took over. So none of these things Tertullus is saying about Felix are true, just as the false accusations against Paul.

Again, notice the title Tertullus gives Felix, *κράτιστε Φηλιξ*. Our translation says, "most noble," but it is the same exact phrase Lysias used in his letter, "most excellent." And is the same title Luke uses to address Theophilus in Luke 1:3. This is the title of a high ranking Roman official.

Also, something else to point out. Tertullus compliments Felix on his foresight, *πρόνοια*- “having a mind before.” Commending him for his wise insight to take care of Judea. The Latin translation for this is *Providentia*... our word providence. We have been talking a lot about God's Providential Hand working in Paul's life and yet here the enemy is buttering up Felix as the one who is providing for Israel through his providence. Tertullus continues with his accusations against Paul...

24:5-6) ⁵ For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. ⁶ He even tried to profane the temple...

Paul has brought the Gospel to the world, from Jerusalem to Rome, and many cities in between, to the Jew first and then the Gentile; and the Jews hated him for it. Not realizing that this is the plan of God, salvation to the whole world including Gentiles that was written in the Prophets. As Paul would travel throughout the synagogues in the world, the unbelieving Jews would follow Paul trying to discredit his ministry and his Apostleship from God. Paul addresses this specifically in two of his letters, Galatians and 2 Corinthians, and his defense is the same as what he will say before Felix, that he is preaching nothing new, only what the Scriptures have foretold would happen. That salvation has come to the whole world through the Messiah. And this Messiah is Jesus of Nazareth, the One who was crucified, and rose again and is alive seated at the right hand of the Father.

Notice the four accusations they are bringing against Paul: 1) he is a plague; 2) a creator of dissension; 3) the leader of the sect of the Nazarenes; 4) he tried to profane the temple. But with all these accusations they have no proof, only lies.

This term, “sect of the Nazarenes” is completely derogatory. This is the only place that Christians are referred to as Nazarenes and it wasn't meant to be nice. Nazareth wasn't held in high regard... “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” John 1:46. This word sect is *αἵρεσις*, we get the word “heresy.” The Jewish religion was protected by Rome and this prosecuting attorney is trying to accuse Paul as being a leader of a heretical group, a plague, and one who is creating dissension with the protected Jews. And verse 6... **He even tried to profane the temple**... This is what started the riots in Jerusalem. The Hellenistic Jews from Asia supposed Paul had brought Trophimus, an uncircumcised Gentile from Ephesus, into the inner court of the Temple, Acts 21:29, thus profaning the temple. Of course Paul did not do such a thing but Tertullus continues with his version of the story...

24:6-9) ⁶ ...and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law. ⁷ But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took him out of our hands, ⁸ commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him.” ⁹ And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so.

You can just picture the high priest and the other Jews sitting there nodding their heads in agreement to these accusations. But Tertullus doesn't know about the letter that Lysias wrote Felix, which tells of the violence of the Jews and the rescuing of Paul. And it even states Paul's innocence in Roman matters. Notice the Jews are extremely perturbed about Lysias interrupting their schemes. On four occasions, this commander has saved Paul's life and finally interrupted their murderous plot. And then to top it all off, the commander sent Paul to Caesarea and ordered them to travel 60 miles to have this trial. So here Felix has two sides of the story, one from the Jews and one from Lysias, now he will hear from Paul.

24:10) Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: “Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself.

Notice Paul doesn't butter up Felix. Titles don't mean anything to Paul, but instead he is going to let Truth speak. He doesn't need a defense attorney; God is his advocate and Paul stands with confidence in front of his accusers.

24:11) because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship.

He begins by acknowledging that Felix has been the governor for many years, 7 to be exact, from 52ad. And he says this to Felix to remind him that in all his years as governor, he has not once started a riot in Jerusalem. And now he has only been in this city for twelve days and the reason for his coming to Jerusalem is not to start a tumult, but to worship on the Feast Day, the Day of Pentecost. These twelve days do not include his stay in Caesarea. Some people try to add the seven days he was in the temple with the five days in Caesarea, but that doesn't account for the other days in between. He is only recounting the days from the time he came to Jerusalem, Acts 21:17 to the time he is escorted out by night to Caesarea, Acts 23:31. There were two days before Paul took the vow, then he was purified for seven days in the temple, then there were another 3 days afterward when Lysias gets involved and escorts him out of the city. This totals 12 days in Jerusalem. Paul continues his defense...

24:12-13) ¹² And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. ¹³ Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.

Paul had such a humble heart as he came into Jerusalem. He first had to humble himself to the weaker Christians who were still zealous for the Law, James included. Then as he was helping fulfill the Nazarite vow with those four men, going in and out of the temple, he still didn't dispute with any of the Jews. Which was quite rare for Paul. Paul never purposely incited the crowd to a tumult. In fact, it was the Hellenistic Jews who stirred up the crowd... not Paul, Acts 21:27.

But Paul says he didn't even dispute with anyone in the Temple. This word "dispute" is διαλέγομαι, "to reason or to thoroughly explain in a logical manner." This is Luke's favorite word to describe how Paul would teach the Jews, Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8-9. On many occasions Paul thoroughly explained the Scriptures. This wasn't wrong, even in the Temple, but it's interesting that he didn't even do that on this trip to Jerusalem. He pretty much kept to himself and helped the four men fulfill their vow and he stayed in Mnason's house at night. This was much different than how he acted 20 years earlier when he came to Jerusalem in 39ad three years after he was born again, Acts 9:28-29. But now he has come to Jerusalem and not even reasoned with the Jews, and they are still attacking him. So now Paul stands for Truth and gives a bold confession of his faith.

24:14) But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect (αἵρεσις- heresy), so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.

Paul's defense is that he is not doing anything new or heretical. This Way, the way of Christianity and following Christ Jesus, is not a heresy. It is not a faction against Judaism. In fact, it is the fulfillment of Judaism and all the Law and the Prophets. Paul says "I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets." That is a great statement of faith! I believe the Bible and I believe EVERYTHING written in the Bible! Not just some parts, but ALL things which are written. When you believe the whole Bible, you believe the story of Redemption. There is one main theme through the entire Bible... it is Jesus and the Salvation of mankind through our Savior. The entire Bible is about having Fellowship with God through His Son Jesus. It is about the Salvation of mankind through the Savior that was sent to this earth as a man, died and rose again, and administers life to all who believe. And that we too will be resurrected unto everlasting life with Him.

Paul says, "believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets." What did the Law and the Prophets write about? They wrote about Jesus! Jesus said, "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me." John 5:46. Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. This section of the OT is called "The Law." And it was given to Moses through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The same with the Prophets. Every book of the Prophets is about Jesus and our Salvation in Him. There were over 40 men

who penned the Bible over the course of 1,500 years, but there is only one Author... the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us that all Scripture is God-breathed, 2 Tim 3:16. Peter says the Prophets were written as God spoke and men were moved by the Holy Spirit, 2 Peter 1:21. The Bible is the Word of our Living God, Heb 4:12. His Word guides us, directs us, purifies us, sanctifies us, protects us, separates us from the evil one... that's just to name a few. The Bible is our Life, our sustenance, our daily bread, it's how we know our God and have a relationship with Him, Psalm 119:105, 1 Peter 1:22-23; James 1:21; 2 Tim 2:15; 3:16; Jer 20:9; Matt 11:28-30; John 8:31; 15:1-8; 17:15-17; Psalm 26:2-3; 139:23-24. If you humble yourself to the Word, it will keep your focus on Jesus and eternal life with Him. His Word will give you hope. Notice what Paul says next in verse 15...

24:15) I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.

Paul believes the Bible and because of this, he has hope in God. This is what the Bible does... it produces hope, **Colossians 1:5**. The Word is what we stand our hope on, Hebrews 11:1- *Faith is the substance, ὑπόστασις*, the foundation of our hope. And *faith comes out from hearing and hearing through the Word of God*, Romans 10:17. Faith comes out from hearing and understanding the Word and we stand our hope on that faith, and this hope tethers us to Jesus and the completion of our salvation in Christ. That is the best definition of hope... the earnest expectation of the final completion of our salvation in Christ Jesus. And the completion of our Salvation will happen when Jesus comes back, and we are resurrected together with Him in glory.

Again, notice the progression from verse 14 to 15. Paul says, "**believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God... that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.**" Paul had faith in the Law and the Prophets, he believed what was written in them, and it created in him a hope of his future salvation in Christ, **1 Peter 1:3-5, 13**. We must rest our hope fully on Jesus and the fulfillment of our Salvation when Jesus returns in glory. This is our Blessed Hope, when He returns in glory, and we are caught up to be with Him in glory forever, **Titus 1:13**; Colossians 3:4. So next time we meet, we are going to dive into this verse 15 and discuss the hope of our resurrection with Him in glory.