

PAUL'S TRIALS (2)

ACTS 24-26



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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

Paul's Trials (2): Acts 24-26
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Introduction to Acts 24-26

For two years Paul was delayed in Caesarea while he awaited the outcome of his trial. He would appear before two governors and a king, but only when he finally appealed to the emperor would he be delivered from the hands of his enemies and packed off to Rome.

In this section we see Paul standing firm on the facts of his trial and continuing to exert bold witness for the Gospel. He is completely unafraid and totally at peace in the Lord's sovereign care. He knows he's on his way to Rome, and he even plays his Roman citizenship trump card again to make sure he gets there.

His enemies, who'd hoped to silence his witness, had only instead enlarged it. Two governors, a king, and the Roman Emperor would hear the Gospel because the enemies of Paul plotted against him. The Lord knows how to take the bad intentions of wicked people and use them for the good purposes of the ongoing work of Christ.

We hope you find this study of Acts instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Like He Says

Pray Psalm 62.1, 2.

Truly my soul silently *waits* for God;
From Him comes my salvation.
He only *is* my rock and my salvation;
He is my defense;
I shall not be greatly moved.

Sing Psalm 62.1, 2.

(Germany: [*Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness*](#))

My soul in silence waits, O Lord – safely I stand within Your Word!
You are my Rock, my Stronghold true, and my Salvation, Lord, are You!

Read and meditate on Acts 24.1-9.

Preparation

1. What did Tertullus say about Paul?
2. What did he want Felix to do?

Meditation

The Jewish leaders engaged a Roman lawyer to plead their case. They had five days to prepare – five days! (v. 1) And this is their case? Innuendo? *Ad hominem*? Hearsay?

Tertullus tried to flatter the governor (vv. 2, 3), hoping for a quick judgment and an easy paycheck. He made three charges against Paul (vv. 5, 6), none of which were true. The Jews chimed in with “Like he says!” (v. 9). Tertullus invited the governor to “examine” Paul, but I don’t think he really expected him to do so (v. 8). He misjudged Felix, for that is exactly what the governor did, as we shall see. Rome persecuted Christians (“Nazarenes”, v. 5), but Roman law had to be followed where Roman citizens were concerned.

Felix intended to offer Paul a fair hearing and all the protection of Roman law. We can see the common grace of God at work here, restraining by civil statute and authority the evil intentions of wicked men. The enemies of the Gospel will always find that they can only act as God permits. They are at all times constrained by His Word and purposes. “Like He says.”

This little flourish by Tertullus – big city lawyer trying to impress regional governor – did not accomplish the desired effect. But it set the stage for Paul’s testimony. Paul was alert to what was going on around him, and always looking for the best way to make others’ words and deeds work for Christ and the Gospel. He was preparing his witness just by remaining silent and letting others speak. The more they talked, the further out on the limb they scooted. Soon, Paul would hand them the saw of their own words (vv. 12, 13).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Give us help from trouble, for the help of man is useless.
Through God we will do valiantly, for it is He who shall
tread down our enemies” (Ps. 60.11, 12; 108. 12, 13).

The help of man, whether he be a lawyer, or a banker, or a political leader, or a religious leader...you name it; whatever this person’s perceived place of power or credibility, it still renders them useless to relieve us of our troubles. Only God can tread down our enemies and do valiantly for us.

David knew this. Jesus knew this. Paul knew this. And we know this, too.

But do we really believe it?

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Prov. 3.5, 6).

“Be still, and know that I AM GOD; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” (Ps. 46.10)

“Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor the fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls – yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Hab. 3.17, 18).

“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!” (Lk. 24.5, 6)

“...just as He said” (Matt. 28.6 NIV).

“Your Word is truth” (Jn. 17.17).

And in that truth we rest and find security and peace.

For reflection

1. How would you explain to a new believer what it means to rest in the truth of God's Word?
2. Why should it not surprise us when unbelievers say false things about us or about what we believe?
3. Today, you might need to help a troubled friend rest in the truth of God's Word. How will you do that?

There were three basic charges against Paul: political treason, religious heresy, and temple desecration. His opponents argued that Paul had been causing riots throughout the empire, that he spoke against the Law of Moses, and that he had brought a Gentile into the Jewish temple courts. Earl Radmacher (1931-2014), NKJV Study Bible Note on Acts 24.5

Pray Psalm 62.5-12.

Wait on the Lord in silence as you think through the day ahead. Where will you especially need Him to guide, keep, or empower you? How do you need to grow in your salvation? Where do you need more power to work your Personal Mission Field?

Sing Psalm 62.5-12.

(Germany: [Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness](#))

My soul in silence waits, O Lord, hoping in You, and in Your Word.
You are my Rock, my Stronghold true, and my Salvation, Lord, are You!

Paul's Trials (2): Acts 24-26

On You my hope and glory rest, Rock of my strength, and Refuge best.
Trust always in our God, the Lord; take refuge only in His Word.

Trust not in men of low degree; lighter are they than breath shall be.
Do not rely on strength or gold; trust in the Lord, Who rules from old.

Once God has spoken, twice I have heard: Power belongs alone to the Lord!
And lovingkindness, Lord, is Yours; You recompense us for our works.

2 Just the Facts

Pray Psalm 35.27, 28.

Let them shout for joy and be glad,
Who favor my righteous cause;
And let them say continually,
“Let the LORD be magnified,
Who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant.”
And my tongue shall speak of Your righteousness
And of Your praise all the day long.

Sing Psalm 35.27, 28.

(Creation: *Exalt the Lord, His Praise Proclaim*)

Let all rejoice triumphantly who would our vindication see.
Let them exalt the Lord above who love the ones that Jesus loves.
And let our tongues declare Your praise, and worship Jesus all our days.
Let those whom You are pleased to bless forever declare Your righteousness!

Read Acts 24.1-21; meditate on verses 10-21.

Preparation

1. What facts did Paul present for Felix?
2. To what charge did he confess?

Meditation

In his defense, Paul first explained that he did not resent this opportunity; rather, he welcomed it (v. 10). He said that Felix could verify his claims. Thereby he nodded toward the governor's fairness, even as he reminded the court of how Roman justice works: accusation, facts, evidence, verification, then judgment.

The facts of the case included Paul's reason for being in Jerusalem (v. 11) and the circumstances surrounding his visit (v. 12). He challenged his adversaries to prove their case rather than simply assert his guilt (v. 13). Paul admitted his involvement in the Christian movement (v. 14), but he insisted this was completely in line with the hopes even his adversaries embraced (vv. 14, 15). Paul asserted that he was settled in his *conscience* (v. 16). He was not troubled about anything he'd done, whether toward God or toward men.

Then Paul turned the tables: “Where, by the way, are these Jews from Asia who started all this ruckus anyway (vv. 18, 19)? Has anybody noticed – have *you* noticed, your honor – that anyone who might have *any* facts to substantiate the charges of my opponents is not present here? No? OK, then how about these gentlemen here: What *fact-based* charges – as opposed to these flimsy accusations – can they present (v. 20)?”

Paul dared them to introduce their facts. “Oh, well, OK, here's something horrible I did: I cried out a word about the resurrection from the dead (v. 21).” That surely elicited a laugh from the Roman court. “That's a transgression worthy of death?” That reported *fact* allowed Paul to crack open a door for the Gospel, almost as if to say to Felix, “Dare ya to ask for an explanation of that.” Paul was using this situation to the advantage of the Gospel, because he *thought* Gospel all the time.

Wouldn't it be great if we thought Gospel all the time?

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Paul was using this situation to the advantage of the Gospel, because he *thought* Gospel all the time.”

And this is how, in the midst of this trial, he was able to use the accusations against him to speak a cogent defense of the Gospel. He began with this confession of what he agreed was his guilt and transgression:

“I confess to this:

1. I am part of the Way which they call a sect.
2. I worship the God of my fathers.
3. I believe all things which are written in the Law.
4. I also believe all things that are written in the Prophets.
5. I have hope in God.
6. I believe in the resurrection of the dead.
7. I believe that the resurrection is for the just and the unjust.
8. I strive to have a good conscience without offense to God and men.
9. I am being judged for my belief in the resurrection.”

(Acts 24.14-16, 21)

How did he do that? How can we learn to do that? How can we be ready for this perpetual *thinking* of the Gospel?

We must be saturated in the Word (Ps. 119.11). We must be fully dependent upon the Holy Spirit (Mk. 13.11). We must always be ready (2 Tim. 4.2).

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1.7).

“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him...I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me...forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3.8-14).

Just the facts.

For reflection

1. What are the facts of the Gospel?
2. What should you do each day to make sure you are ready to go into your Personal Mission Field?
3. What are some facts about the way the Gospel has changed your life?

If blamed for being more earnest in the things of God than our neighbors, what is our reply? Do we shrink from the accusation? How many in the world would rather be accused of any weakness, nay, even of wickedness, than of an earnest, fervent feeling of love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and of devotedness to his service! Can such think that He will confess them when he comes in his glory, and before the angels of God? Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 21.10-21

Pray Psalm 35.1-8.

As you pray, remember that you are continuously involved in a ferocious spiritual warfare, in which the enemies of the Lord seek to devour your soul and frustrate your work. Pray that God will shield and protect you against all temptation and spiritual strife. Pray the same for all believers everywhere.

Sing Psalm 35.1-8.

(Creation: *Exalt the Lord, His Praise Proclaim*)

Contend, O Lord, with those who strive with me; my shield, my strength and buckler be!
Engage with spear and axe to fight and rescue me with all Your might!
My soul with Your salvation soothe, and vanquish all who oppose Your truth.
Let those ashamed and humbled be who would destroy and humble me.

Let all my foes be blown like chaff, and let Your angel take my behalf.
No cause have they to hide their snare or for my fall a pit prepare.
Upon them let destruction fall; disperse, destroy them one and all!
And let the net which they have made be for their doom and judgment laid.

3 No Recess

Pray Psalm 57.1-3.

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me!
For my soul trusts in You;
And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge,
Until *these* calamities have passed by.
I will cry out to God Most High,
To God who performs *all things* for me.
He shall send from heaven and save me;
He reproaches the one who would swallow me up.
Selah
God shall send forth His mercy and His truth.

Sing Psalm 57.1-3.

(Faben: *Praise the Lord, Ye Heavens Adore Him*)

Lord, be gracious, gracious to me, for my soul retreats in You.
In Your shadow keep me safely till the storms of life are through.
I will cry to You, the Most High; You do all things well for me.
You will save me when I thus cry, routing all who threaten me.

Read Acts 24.1-27; meditate on verses 22-27.

Preparation

1. Why did Felix put Paul's trial on hold?
2. What did he hear from Paul, and how did he respond?

Meditation

Felix put the trial on hold for the time being (v. 22), in fact, for two years (v. 27). He apparently intended to send to Jerusalem for Lysias, perhaps in the hope he might be able to verify Paul's statement of the facts. But either he did not send for him or Lysias was unable to come, since we have no record of his arriving.

Felix was generous to Paul, allowing his friends to visit and provide for his needs. He also entertained him not infrequently, albeit with mixed motives (v. 26). Given the opportunity to explain his views more fully, Paul didn't hold back. The Gospel is about the resurrection of Jesus and the coming of His Kingdom, and that means righteousness, self-control, and preparation for the coming judgment (v. 25).

We note that Paul didn't merely preach to Felix and his wife; he *reasoned* with them, thus implying a give-and-take that must have been more like an extended conversation (vv. 25, 26). What kinds of topics might you use to begin a conversation like this with people in your Personal Mission Field?

Felix was alarmed at what he heard. The warning of judgment to come can have that effect on people. Felix dragged this out as long as he could, hoping for a little money out of it all, until at last he was replaced by Porcius Festus (v. 27).

We see here no grumbling, complaining, or impatience on Paul's part. The Lord told him he was going to Rome, and he was content to let the Lord unfold the timing. Meanwhile, he made the most of every opportunity to proclaim Christ and the Kingdom. No recess there.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

We never know who will be moved by our confession of faith. Paul's confession seems to have ministered most to Felix. Our text today says: "But when Felix heard these things, having [now a] more accurate knowledge of the Way, he adjourned the proceedings..." (Acts 24.22).

Felix wanted his wife to hear what Paul had to say. Out of love for her, was he bringing her to hear the truth of the Way? That was certainly how many of the disciples were brought to Jesus. Andrew first found his own brother, and said to Peter, "We have found the Messiah." And he brought him to Jesus. (Jn. 1.40-42)

"Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, 'Surely we did not know this,' does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps our soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?" (Prov. 24.11, 12)

"Open your mouth for the speechless, in the cause of all who are appointed to die. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy" (Prov. 31.8, 9).

Drusilla, Felix's wife was Jewish, and may have had a background knowledge of this Way. We don't hear about her response to Paul's reasoning, but we do read that Felix "was afraid" (Acts 24.25). Maybe Drusilla was able to comfort him with a better understanding from the Old Testament about the Way, and the resurrection? Maybe they accepted the truth, maybe they didn't.

What they decided was not Paul's responsibility. That's the Holy Spirit's work. Paul's responsibility, as is ours, was to speak the Word of confession to the truth: "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession" (Heb. 4.14).

"We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: 'In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6.1, 2).

"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision" (Joel 3.14).

We too must make the most of every opportunity we have to confess what we believe. We don't know which unexpected person in our Personal Mission Field will hear it and be changed! No recess for us either.

For reflection

1. What would you say are the keys for making the most of every opportunity to share the Gospel?
2. In leading people to the Lord, we have our work and God has His (1 Cor. 3.5-9). Explain.
3. Why do we say there's "no recess" for us who know the Good News about Jesus and His Kingdom?

And look at Paul, although he is talking with a ruler, he says none of those things that are likely to amuse, but rather he speaks "about justice," it says, "and future judgment" and about the resurrection. And such was the force of his words that they even alarmed the governor. John Chrysostom (354-407), Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 51

Pray Psalm 57.4-11.

The antidote to all fear, doubt, and hesitation is praise. In silence, preview your day and all its activities, challenges, and temptations. Give praise to God for His Presence with you throughout the day, and for His grace and power to help you praise Him before others. Pray for a steadfast heart as you go into your Personal Mission Field.

Sing Psalm 57.4-11.

(Fabien: Praise the Lord, Ye Heavens Adore Him)

Send Your truth and lovingkindness; raging lions seek my soul.
Threats and sland'rous words without rest they against me fiercely roll.
Be exalted o'er the heavens, let Your glory fill the earth!
To Your Name all praise be given, let all men proclaim Your worth!

Nets and pits they set before me; overwhelmed, my soul bows down.
Let them all in their own works be thrown and scattered on the ground.
Let my heart no more be shaken, I will sing Your praises, Lord!
Harp and glory, now awaken to extol God's faithful Word!

Praise and thanks among the nations I will sing with all my might!
For Your truth and love are stated far above the highest height!
Be exalted o'er the heavens, let Your glory fill the earth!
To Your Name all praise be given, let all men proclaim Your worth!

4 Wise as a Serpent

Pray Psalm 141.1, 2.

LORD, I cry out to You;

Make haste to me!

Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You.

Let my prayer be set before You as incense,

The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

Sing Psalm 141.1, 2.

(Truro: *Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns!*)

O Lord, we call to You in prayer! To us come quickly; hear our cry!

Receive our prayer as incense sweet, our lifted hands as a sacrifice!

Read and meditate on Acts 25.1-12.

Preparation

1. What did Festus say to Paul's accusers?

2. How did Paul respond to the suggestion to go to Jerusalem and be tried?

Meditation

Festus must have thought, "Great. I can't even get organized and I have to deal with this situation." His role was to keep peace, and Felix handed him this firestorm, just waiting to break out. Festus wisely decided to keep the trial on less flammable turf (vv. 1-4). The Jews could come to Caesarea if they were that serious about this matter. And they did (vv. 5-7).

Their argument had not changed – they still could not prove their lies and slanderous accusations (v. 7). Festus was clever. He made push-come-to-shove by testing Paul's confidence in his case. Was he so sure of his innocence that he'd be willing to return to the scene of the alleged crime and argue his side there? (v. 9)

Paul once again played his Roman citizenship trump card, demanding his citizen's right to have his case heard in Rome by the Emperor (vv. 10, 11). Festus must have lit up with joy to hear this. We can almost hear his "Whew!" as he agreed to ship the apostle off to the Emperor (v. 12).

Jesus had promised Paul he would get to Rome to preach there. But it was taking what must have seemed like an inordinate amount of time. The unfolding of the Lord's will might tarry sometimes, but our duty is to understand His promises, wait on His timing, and, in the meantime, act in each situation as seems appropriate, according to the will of God. That's what Paul did, and it launched the final leg of his mission to Rome.

Paul knew that Jesus was sending him to Rome, so he couldn't risk a retrograde movement in his progress. He understood his rights as a Roman citizen, so he simply invoked them at just the right moment to ensure he would not be shipped back to Jerusalem, and those forty or so hungry would-be assassins.

Wise as a serpent, harmless as a dove.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Rage against righteousness is an interesting thing to behold.

Porcius Festus, in all his pomp and glory, sashayed to Jerusalem where one of the hot topics was still Paul. After all this time, two years in fact, the folks in Jerusalem were still seething about Paul and petitioned the new leader to help them kill him. But Festus declined to participate in that scheme. He suggested instead that they do what they had already been invited to do, and that was to come to Caesarea and put their unsubstantiated case forward there. Same song, second verse.

And amazingly, the very first order of business for Porcius Festus was the case of Paul. Was Caesarea really that law-abiding that there wasn't another case on the docket? Nothing more sinister than this? Apparently rage against the righteous took precedence over everything else.

Reminds one of the cries to free Barabbas. Pilate offered to free the innocent Jesus to the crowds, but they screamed for the release of a robber and rabble-rouser instead (Jn. 18.38-40). The preference for evil over good never ceases to be the case (Jn. 3.19, 20).

But because Paul always kept his eyes on the prize (Phil. 3.14), he probably found this whole scenario mildly amusing and comforting. He did truly believe that there is a resurrection of the dead (Acts 24.15), and that he was called to preach Christ in Rome (Acts 23.11), and that he would be fulfilling his calling with joy and testifying to the Gospel of God's grace (Acts 20.24). So really, all these peripheral circumstances were fine with him. We can almost hear him say with the greatest amount of respect, "Whatever. Knock yourselves out!"

"Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven with the saving strength of His right hand" (Ps. 20.6). Paul learned the truth of this from watching Stephen die.

"Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Rom. 8.37). We learn this from watching Paul live.

When our righteousness is raged against we have Paul's example to follow (1 Cor. 1.11). "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast..." (Heb. 6.19).

*In times like these you need a Savior,
In times like these you need an anchor;
Be very sure, be very sure
Your anchor holds and grips the solid Rock!
This Rock is Jesus, yes, He's the One!
Be very sure, be very sure
Your anchor holds and grips the solid Rock!*
(Ruth Caye Jones, 1944)

For reflection

1. Paul remained cool, civil, and confident because he kept his eye on the far horizon of his life. What would living like this mean for you?
2. How should we respond if people explode in rage because of our witness for Jesus?
3. What are some precious promises of God's Word that you cling to for peace, boldness, and comfort?

These words God certainly placed in the mouth of Festus, so that the Word of the Lord would be fulfilled that was spoken to Paul: "Be comforted, Paul, for as you testified of me in Jerusalem, so also must you testify in Rome." Johann Spangenberg (1484-1550), Brief Exegesis of Acts 25.12.15

Pray Psalm 141.3-10.

Ask the Lord to prepare your mouth to serve Him and others today. Pray for Christian friends, that you might encourage them and be encouraged by them. Call on the Lord to make His Presence known with you throughout the day.

Sing Psalm 141.3-10.

(Truro: Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns!)

Lord, set a guard upon my mouth; let not my heart to evil bend,
nor let me work iniquity in company with wicked men.

Lord, let a righteous man rebuke –a kindness this shall surely be.
Like healing oil upon my head, Your sweet rebuke shall be to me.

When to the judgment wicked men by God are cast, our words shall tell:
Like broken sod or fresh plowed ground, so shall their bones be cast to hell!

We lift our eyes to You, O Lord, and refuge seek; Lord, save our soul!
From every trap and snare redeem; deliver us and make us whole.

5 Handoff (Again)

Pray Psalm 115.1-3.

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,
But to Your name give glory,
Because of Your mercy,
Because of Your truth.
Why should the Gentiles say,
“So where *is* their God?”
But our God *is* in heaven;
He does whatever He pleases.

Sing Psalm 115.1-3.

(Plainfield: [*Nothing But the Blood of Jesus*](#))

Not to us, O God, not us, but unto Your Name give glory!
For Your love and faithfulness, ever to Your Name be glory!
Why should the nations cry, "Where is their God on high?"
You rule us, Lord, on high: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Read Acts 25.1-27; meditate on verses 13-27.

Preparation

1. Who came to Caesarea to welcome Festus to his post?
2. What did Festus say about Paul?

Meditation

Agrippa arrived in Caesarea to *greet* Festus, that is, probably to welcome him to his post and make sure he understood who was boss (v. 13). Festus did, and in reporting on the state of things in his jurisdiction, the situation involving Paul came up as a matter of course (v. 14).

Festus was completely baffled by the situation and not sure how to proceed (v. 20). He did not have the same kind of familiarity with Christianity as Felix (v. 19; cf. 24.22). Agrippa, we shall see, is rather more in touch with these matters, and even interested in them. So Agrippa decided to hear Paul's case for himself (v. 22).

On the very next day Agrippa and Bernice arrived with much pomp (v. 23). There is a difference here, however: This time Paul's accusers are not present. Had they given up? Or starved?

Festus summarized the case against him, then turned the matter over to Agrippa, who, he hoped, would advise him what to write to Rome in sending Paul on to the emperor (vv. 23-27).

The story is slowing down, but the original story line continues. Luke is communicating the message of the ongoing work of Christ in more ways than just preaching the Gospel, starting churches, and making disciples. He is setting forth a pattern of the sovereign working of Christ which will be ongoing beyond Acts into the days in which we live. As we rest in His sovereignty – even over powerful civil governments – and keep our eyes on Jesus, we will fulfill the calling He has appointed to us.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him” (Acts 25.27).

Did that sentence make anyone else smile? It did me.

You have a prisoner, whose enemies want him dead, but you cannot for the life of you discern what he has done. And so, you have nothing to write home about. Except that the prisoner is a Roman citizen and wants justice. Plus, as an aside, he seems eager to go to Rome to stand trial before Caesar. But for what? What crime has he committed? How has this all gotten so out of hand? And Porcius Festus does not want to appear unprepared in his new posting. Roman displeasure could take a deadly turn. Not much tenure-track in the noble city. Et tu, Brute?

And then there is Paul. He is content to watch God's will and plan unfold. We know this to be true because we have his words declaring it: "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4.12, 13). Content (Phil. 4.11).

He can respectfully wait while they try to put together a case against him because he wholeheartedly believes this: "Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (Rom. 8.33, 34). Resting in God's sovereignty.

While the Jewish and Roman leaders struggled to condemn him, Paul just waited. And watched. And trusted.

And maybe remembered and hummed a learned psalm:

"I will praise You, O LORD, with my whole heart;
I will tell of all Your marvelous works.
I will be glad and rejoice in You;
I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.
When my enemies turn back,
They shall fall and perish at Your presence.
For You have maintained my right and my cause;
You sat on the throne judging in righteousness.
You have rebuked the nations,
You have destroyed the wicked;
You have blotted out their name forever and ever.
O enemy, destructions are finished forever!
And you have destroyed cities; even their memory has perished.
But the LORD shall endure forever..." (Ps. 9.1-7)

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (Jn. 14.27). And Paul wasn't troubled, nor was he afraid.

If we are ever handed off, like Paul, we too can be content, with no need to be troubled or afraid. Because all Paul's remembered psalms and verses are equally valid for us!

For reflection

1. Why is it so important that we always remember, no matter what happens, that Jesus is in charge, Jesus does all things well, and Jesus works all things together for the good of those who love Him?
2. Can you think of a verse of Scripture that especially helps you to remember that Jesus is sovereign? How might you use that verse today?
3. Which believers will you encourage today to keep their eyes on Jesus and their trust in Him?

... the pomp of this appearance was outshone by the real glory of the poor prisoner at the bar. What was the honor of their fine appearance, compared with that of Paul's wisdom, and grace, and holiness; his courage and constancy in suffering for Christ!
Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Acts 25.13-27*

Pray Psalm 115.9-18.

Thank God that He thinks of you always. Pray that He will increase in and through you as you work your part of the earth in your Personal Mission Field. Praise Him throughout the day.

Sing Psalm 115.9-18.

(Plainfield: [*Nothing But the Blood of Jesus*](#))

All who trust in Jesus yield – ever to His Name be glory! –
find in Him their help and shield – ever to Your Name be glory!
O Israel, trust the Lord! He helps us evermore!
Fear Him obey His Word: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Blessings from our gracious Lord – ever to Your Name be glory –
will attend us evermore – ever to Your Name be glory!
Bless all who fear You, Lord, all who obey Your Word,
all who Your Name adore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Grant us, Savior, great increase – ever to Your Name be glory!
Bless us with eternal peace – ever to Your Name be glory!
Heaven and earth are Yours; let every soul adore
and bless You evermore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

6 Who's on Trial Here?

Pray Psalm 107.1-3.

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!
For His mercy *endures* forever.
Let the redeemed of the LORD say *so*,
Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy,
And gathered out of the lands,
From the east and from the west,
From the north and from the south.

Sing Psalm 107.1-3.

(Faithfulness: *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*)

Lord, You are good, we give thanks and we praise You!
Your steadfast love will forever endure.
Let the redeemed, who from trouble You rescue,
gather and say that Your mercy is sure!

Refrain vv. 1-3

Lord, for Your wondrous works, and for Your steadfast love,
we give You thanks, we exalt Your great Name!
We who from east and west, north and south gather,
boldly redemption in Christ we proclaim!

Read Acts 26.1-32; meditate on verses 12-32.

Paul was glad to be able to testify before the king (vv. 1-3). He raised a pertinent question concerning the resurrection (v. 8). God is certainly capable of such a feat, as we see in the Old Testament prophets (with which Agrippa was familiar). The point of Paul's detention had nothing to do with the temple or Jewish Law. It was about Jesus and the resurrection, so Paul got right to the point with Agrippa.

In verses 12-23 Paul recounted his experience of coming to Christ and the mission to which the Lord appointed him. It was because he was obeying a vision from the Lord that he was detained by the Jews (vv. 19-21). But Paul insisted on the truth of the Gospel (vv. 22, 23).

Festus blurted out in verse 24, which outburst Paul regarded as an interruption in his message to the king (vv. 25-25). Notice how Paul quickly dealt with this interruption, then got right back to his message, calling on Agrippa to think through all that he knew about the prophets, and to consider the "truth and reason" of what he proclaimed.

We begin to see that this isn't about Paul. Not anymore. It's about Agrippa. The king is on trial here: Will he bring to full fruition what he's known so well all these many years (vv. 26, 27)? Agrippa deflected Paul's pressure by suggesting that the apostle couldn't really expect him to become a Christian – how'd he know that word, we wonder? – in such a short space of time (v. 28). But yes, in fact, Paul did expect it, at least, he hoped it earnestly. Paul pleaded with the court, not to vindicate him, but to reason through what he had said and embrace the Gospel: "Become like me, a Christian!" (v. 29)

The king was either uncomfortable or he'd heard enough to know that Paul had done nothing deserving detention, much less judgment. He could have been set free (v. 32), but Agrippa sent him to Rome, as he wished.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Oh, love the LORD, all you His saints!” (Ps. 31.23)

In this passage there are two examples of extreme love; the kind of love that exists because of God. The first example is this: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 26.14, 15). Jesus is so embedded and invested in us that when we are persecuted, Jesus feels it! Can we even comprehend that? I find it overwhelming. He experiences the pain we are experiencing. “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4.15). He takes our problems to heart, understands us, and loves us. Deeply.

The second example of extreme love is from Paul: “I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains” (Acts 26.29). There he was, fettered and unfairly judged, and his main concern was the salvation of those who were hearing him then, and for those of us who would hear him later. Paul loved us too.

Paul didn't let his ego get in the way of his ministry. Festus called him crazy (Acts 26.24). If anybody wasn't crazy it was Paul. He was the sharpest knife in that drawer, and yet, for everyone's sake, he stood there and took the abuse. “For the love of Christ compels us” (2 Cor. 5.14). Indeed it did.

We are loved so dearly by God the Father: “You did not choose Me, but I chose you...” (Jn. 15.16). And by Paul. And by all those who came before us, who lived and suffered and died so that this Good News would get to us.

Who is waiting to hear about this amazing love from us? Do we have this same extreme love for others? Love that looks a little like the undeserved love that has been shown to us? “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5.8). That kind of love.

Jesus says, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (Jn. 14.15). And loving those in our Personal Mission Field is an excellent way to show Jesus that we love Him. Because He loves them, too. And is just as invested in them as He is in us. And Paul showed us how to do it.

We, too, are being sent by Jesus “to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me” (Acts 26.18).

We are called to imitate God's demonstrated love! (1 Cor. 11.1)

For reflection

1. How can you grow in love for the people in your Personal Mission Field?
2. What can you do throughout the day to remember how much God loves you?
3. Whom will you encourage today to realize more of the love of Jesus?

Paul urged that it was the concern of every one to become a true Christian; that there is grace enough in Christ for all. He expressed his full conviction of the truth of the gospel, the absolute necessity of faith in Christ in order to salvation. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 26.24-32

Pray Psalm 107.33-43.

Read quickly over Psalm 107.4-32. Which of those vignettes best describes where you were when Jesus found you? Praise God for His sovereign greatness and His saving mercy. Offer yourself to Him as a living sacrifice, and call on Him to meet your needs today.

Sing Psalm 107.33-43.

(Faithfulness: *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*)

You make the desert a river o'erflowing;
You make a wasted life fruitful and strong!
You bless the hungry with fields for the sowing.
Bless and increase us who to You belong!

Refrain v. 1-3

Lord, for Your wondrous works, and for Your steadfast love,
we give You thanks, we exalt Your great Name!
We who from east and west, north and south gather,
boldly redemption in Christ we proclaim!

When we are low, are oppressed and in sorrow,
You pour contempt on our fierce, angry foes.
We will rejoice at the hope of tomorrow:
He shall be wise who Your steadfast love knows!

Refrain v. 1-3

7 Obedient to the Vision

Pray Psalm 138.1-3.

I will praise You with my whole heart;
Before the gods I will sing praises to You.
I will worship toward Your holy temple,
And praise Your name
For Your lovingkindness and Your truth;
For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.
In the day when I cried out, You answered me,
And made me bold *with* strength in my soul.

Sing Psalm 138.1-3.

(Regent Square: *Angels from the Realms of Glory*)

I will give You thanks and praise You, God of gods, with all my heart.
I will bow before Your temple, grateful praise to You impart.
For Your Name and for Your glory, You have magnified Your Word!

Review Acts 24-26; meditate on Acts 26.19, 20.

Preparation

1. What “vision” had Paul received?
2. How did he respond to it?

Meditation

We have compressed our reading over these past few installments to see Paul in action under pressure over a two-year period. He has demonstrated many desirable attributes including patience, civility, courage, consistency, and boldness in his witness for the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. He carefully recounted the vision of Christ he experienced on the Damascus Road, and he insisted that all his actions from that day forward were in line with what Christ called him to do. “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,” he explained, thus declaring his loyalty to Christ above the authority of the Jews and the courts of the Roman empire.

We do not require a vision from Jesus to know what He has called us to do. It’s clear from His Word, and He wants us to be immersed in His Word, not hanging around waiting for some flash from the skies before we get busy in our calling. Jesus has called us to seek His Kingdom and glory in everything we do and think (Matt. 6.33; 1 Thess. 2.12; 1 Cor. 10.31; 2 Cor. 10.3-5). He has sent us into the “as-you-are-goings” of our life to make the most of the time of our lives by being His witnesses and making disciples (Eph. 5.15-17; Acts 1.8; Matt. 28.18-20). He commands us to be sanctified by the Word of God (Jn. 17.17), to grow in knowledge of Him and His grace (2 Pet. 3.18), to shine by our good works and true words like a city on a hill (Matt. 5.13-16), and to be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within us to anyone who asks (1 Pet. 3.15). And over and above all, Jesus instructs us to love God with all our soul and strength and our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22.34-40).

Let us get that firmly fixed in our minds, each facet of it. Let it be like a radiant garment of glory to be draped in day by day. Let Christ’s calling be so clear and compelling that it becomes a vision beckoning us on to fill our Personal Mission Field with His Presence, promise, and power. Let us begin our day reviewing and preparing to seek this heavenly vision and calling (Heb. 3.1), and let us retire at night thanking God for all He

has accomplished in and through us, so that, whatever may have been our trials or challenges, we may say back to him every night, "I have not been disobedient to the heavenly vision."

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Christmas of 2021 saw the arrival of two new identical throw pillows to our family, one for our daughter Ashley and the other for us. Not too long after their purchase, much to Ashley's horror and chagrin, she noted that an apostrophe was misplaced on her pillow. Out came her sewing basket, and the repairs were made. She is, after all, the grammar sheriff of our family, so of course it had to be tended to. Next, our pillow. Over she came with needle and thread, and soon ours was repaired as well.

In some respects, Paul was like these pillows. As Saul, he was a person. He was religious. He was zealous. But he had an outsized "misplaced apostrophe" of hatred. And out came Jesus' sewing basket and dramatic repairs were made. At last Paul was ready for service.

The original word from Jesus to all His disciples was this: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1.8).

But Paul needed extra tending. He needed another word, which was this: "But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you" (Acts 26.16). And Paul understood that message to mean that he should: "...declare first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles..." (Acts 26.20).

The truth is, all of us at one time had a huge, "misplaced apostrophe". Paul was good to remind us of this: "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." (Rom. 3.23) And all of us needed the workmanship of our loving Savior to repair the mistake. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6.23).

The message given for the repaired Paul to proclaim is the very same message that we proclaim: "...repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance" (Acts 26.20). "LORD, I hope for Your salvation, and I do Your commandments" (Ps. 119.166). "For we are His workmanship [repaired and restored], created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2.10).

Are there people in your Personal Mission Field who need a little repair? Are you ready with your needle and thread to help mend their apostrophes? We can only do this properly when "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5.5).

But in His power, we can go forward with Paul, repaired and restored for obedience to this vision.

For reflection

1. How does God work to bring repentance into our lives? How have you experienced this?
2. Are you aware of any "misplaced apostrophes" in your life? What should you do when you are?
3. What is the most important lesson you've gained from watching Paul endure these trials?

Therefore, he teaches us by his example that we must obey God more than people and that we must make no delay or put off, as soon as we are certain what his will is. Whoever follows this rule frees himself from great anxiety and care. Rudolph Gwalther (1519-1586), Homily 164, Acts 26:19-23.10

Pray Psalm 138.4-8.

Pray that God will give you words today to encourage other disciples and bear witness to the lost. Trust in Him to revive and renew you and to “perfect” that which concerns you in all your ways.

Sing Psalm 138.4-8.

(Regent Square: *Angels from the Realms of Glory*)

On the day I called You answered, made me bold within my soul.
When I walk in troubled places, You revive and make me whole.
For Your hand will gently shield me, and my fearsome foes control.

All the kings of earth will praise You when Your words of truth they hear.
Of Your ways, of Your great glory gladly they will loudly cheer.
For the proud shall not approach You, yet You hold the lowly dear.

Your Right Hand will save and keep me; all I need You will supply.
For Your love is everlasting reaching from beyond the sky.
You will not forsake or leave me; You will save me when I cry.

Paul's Trials (2): Acts 24-26

For reflection or discussion

1. Jot down everything you've learned about the sovereignty of God in the progress of the Gospel from Paul's arrest in Jerusalem to his testimony before Agrippa. How should this encourage us in our own witness for the Lord?
2. What is the Gospel? What did Paul include as *crucial* for sharing when we're proclaiming the Good News?
3. Is it our job to convince people to *believe*? What *is* our job when it comes to the Gospel?
4. Why aren't Christians today as bold, clear, and urgent as Paul seems to have been in his witness for the Lord?
5. What's the most important insight or lesson you've learned from Acts 24-26?

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.