

Gospel Triumph – Defending the Way – Acts 24:1-27

There are unique challenges to planning a vacation over the internet. I visited the Caribbean on mission trips a couple of times in high school and I've always wanted to take Bethany on a trip there. We've looked at several options over the last couple of years but just haven't pulled the trigger yet. It's so hard to figure out how nice a hotel is online, how safe an area is, and how good the beaches will be.

Well, I talked to our missionaries, Pablo and Rebecca Pazmino this week on zoom, and they were describing a trip they recently took from Ecuador to the Dominican Republic. They were able to get away just the two of them for a couple of days and go to a resort, but they told me nothing prepared them for the red algae that is a major problem right now in the Caribbean Sea. They said it piles up on the beach every night and smells like rotten eggs. And they said you won't read anything about it online unless you specifically know to search for it.

That's certainly a negative experience but we've also rented a house before having only seen it online and been pleasantly surprised with how wonderful it is. The point is that it's helpful to have personal guidance when you are planning a trip.

Throughout the book of Acts we've seen the pathway of following Jesus designated by the name "The Way". Listen to Acts 9:1-2; 18:25-26; 19:9. This is because trusting in Jesus and following him is a unique way of life. It's a different path from those around us and there are both wonderful benefits and challenges. One of the reasons we gather on Sundays is to hear of The Way and to be encouraged to continue on The Way of Christ. And this morning we are going to read another story in Acts of Paul publicly defending himself and his defense will give us a clear picture of what to expect on the Way.

We'll be in Acts 24:1-27 and we'll see **4 Portrayals of The Way that Guide Your Walk with Christ.**

1. The Way is Controversial (vv. 1-9)

It's been two weeks since we were in Acts so remember where we are. Paul had arrived to Jerusalem with a gift for Jewish believers in need. He was seized in the temple and a mob tried to kill him. The Romans rescued him and he publicly

defended himself before the crowd and then was asked to speak to the Sanhedrin. This broke into more fighting and then there was a plot to murder Paul. Listen to 23:12-13. God sovereignly brings this plot to the attention of the Roman in charge and he ships Paul off with a ton of Roman soldiers and a letter to Caesarea to the governor Felix. Listen to 23:34-35. This brings us to chapter 24. Look at verse 1. Ananias was the guy who commanded Paul to be hit in the mouth just a few days earlier when Paul stood before the Sanhedrin. This time he has hired a professional lawyer to present his case against Paul. Tertullus follows the standard format for arguing a case at this time. Look at verses 2-4.

He's not just flattering Felix here. He intentionally describes him as a man of peace because he wants to paint Paul as a man inciting public riots and disturbing the peace. Look at the specific accusations in verses 5-6. He says that Paul is a disease, a public menace harming the cultural norms and upsetting the status quo. He does this by stirring up riots all over the Roman world and by being the ringleader of a sect. He uses the word Nazarenes here to describe Christians because it makes it clear that they are connected to Jesus the Nazarene. By using the word "sect" he's trying to separate Christians out from Jews and picture them as dangerous.

The final accusation in verse 6 sounds like a specifically Jewish thing, but no place in the Roman Empire had more potential for unrest and political violence than the temple in Jerusalem. If Paul was messing with the temple, then Felix would think he was intentionally trying to cause a problem for the Romans. Look at verses 8-9.

While Paul has not been causing riots intentionally across the Empire, they do keep happening and it's because of how "The Way" of the Nazarene comes into conflict with every other belief system and way of life. This is something we must learn to expect.

Now, here's the challenge for us. The controversial nature of Christianity can push us to two different extremes if we aren't careful to stay on "the Way". First, we can see how unique and different our faith is and lean into that and treat those around us as enemies to be beaten. We can take a hard opposition and withdraw from unbelievers to fire shots at them because we are different. Or, on the other

hand, we can see and feel that difference and begin to make accommodations to unbelievers in order to not feel so unique and on the outside. But what is faithfulness? What is The Way? We must see unbelievers as a mission field in need of the gospel and so we must draw close without compromise. We must be salt and light. That is the Way. Let's move on to our second portrayal of the Way.

2. The Way is Comprehensive (vv. 10-21)

Paul begins his defense before Felix by denying some of the charges of rioting and desecrating the Temple. Look at verses 10-13. But then he goes on to articulate the comprehensive nature of the Way. Look at verses 14-16. Notice what Paul does here. He looks back to God's purposes in the OT and he looks forward to the destination at the end of the journey along the Way, the hope of resurrection.

Paul tells them that those who follow the Way are actually the true people of God because they rightly understand the OT to point toward the Nazarene Jesus Christ. And they rightly understand all of this to point forward to the hope of the resurrection. And Paul seeks to live life according to this by keeping a clear conscience.

You can also see that Paul defends what happened in the temple and turns the tables on his accusers. But then he goes right back to the resurrection as the main issue. Look at verses 16-21.

When you consider what this life of being a Christ follower on the way entails, nothing is more basic than the manner in which The Way makes sense of the entire story. From beginning to end. From creation to consummation. The Way gives context and purpose. Meaning and hope. Your life fits within this. We can look back to the OT and see how it prepares for Jesus and then how Jesus is the centerpiece of the story with his resurrection providing our hope of eternal life. 1 Corinthians 15:20-26. My encouragement to you this week would be to remind yourself of your ultimate hope of resurrection to be with Christ at least once a day.

Some of you know the name of D.A. Carson. He's a theologian, author, and commentator. He's in his late 70's and suffering from Parkinsons disease. I read an article about his experience of the increasing difficulty of the disease and he

commented “In any case, I am not suffering from anything that a good general resurrection can’t fix.” That’s the comprehensive nature of The Way. It leads you in a direction with a hope. And that’s because of who is at the heart of it.

3. The Way is Christ (vv. 22-24)

Paul has been accused and made his defense and now it is Felix’s turn to decide. But he doesn’t. He puts it off. Look at verse 22. But in the mean time he keeps Paul in custody but also doesn’t treat him poorly. Military custody could be quite brutal during this time but Paul is allowed to be detained in a more comfortable situation with friends allowed to bring him food and help. Verse 23.

Felix isn’t simply unsure of how to rule. He has other motives. Look at the beginning of verse 24. Felix had an accurate knowledge of the Way, and his wife is Jewish. There was clearly some interest in learning from Paul. Look at the rest of verse 24.

Paul’s self-defense did not articulate the centrality of Christ as clearly, but he certainly takes every opportunity now, even before someone as powerful as Felix. This is a vital reminder that there is no Way without Christ. He is the way. John 14:6. He’s the path to forgiveness of sins and fellowship with God. You cannot have Christianity without Christ as the centerpiece. He’s the light that shines on everything else and makes it all clear. 2 Cor. 4:5-6.

If you are walking on the Way this morning and have forgotten the true nature of the way, that it is a relationship with Christ, let this remind you to go back to the basics. Learn of Christ. Abide in Christ. Fellowship with Christ. That is the Way. And being on the Way of Christ will not allow you to remain the same.

4. The Way Brings Change (vv. 25-27)

Look at verse 25. Paul begins by talking with Felix and Drusilla of faith in Christ, but then he moves on to the ramifications of being on the Way in daily life. Felix had a checkered history for sure. He was a Roman leader. A violent and promiscuous man. He had no righteousness and needed the righteousness of Christ through justification. He needed Christ to change him to be self-controlled,

and he needed to be warned of the coming judgment. Over time Paul laid all of this out, but apparently it made no impact on Felix. Look at verse 26-27.

He probably assumed that because Paul had brought money from Europe to Jerusalem that he had some serious connections that could help him pay Felix a bribe for his release. Of course, that didn't happen, and Felix continued to act just like we would expect a politically savvy Roman official to act. He passed Paul on to the next governor. Unlike Felix, you begin to walk on the Way through faith in Christ by grace, and you actually walk on the Way with evidence of a changed life.

Think of these four portrayals as pictures or signposts that help us define our lives as followers of Christ. The Way is controversial, but it is comprehensive. It is all about Christ and leads to a changed life. Let Paul's defense here reorient you to following Jesus and what that entails. And then walk in Joy and confidence in Christ this week. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 11/2/25

- Have you ever booked a vacation online and been shocked when you arrived in person?
- Describe how Acts 24 fits into the surrounding context in Acts.
- How do you see the Way of Christ as controversial in our culture?
- What does Tertullus, as representing the high priest, accuse Paul of in Acts 24?
- What are the two extremes we talked about regarding how we relate to the unbelievers and culture around us as Christians?
- Which of these two do you find yourself more tempted with?
- How can we learn to navigate the tension between these two extremes?
- How would you describe the heart of Paul's defense in Acts 24:10-21?
- In what sense is Paul's presentation of the Way comprehensive?
- What are some practical ways that thinking about the hope of the resurrection can change your daily life?

- Explain what this phrase means, “In any case, I am not suffering from anything that a good general resurrection can’t fix.”
- What does it mean that Jesus is the Way? What are some practical ways that having Christ as the centerpiece of our faith matters?