

Hope In God

Acts 24

Introduction

Have you ever felt lonely even if surrounded by people? Are you hurting inside right now with no relief in sight? Has it ever felt like the whole world is against you and no one is on your side?

Today's message is about Paul standing alone, on trial, falsely accused before the most powerful nation on earth. Today I want to show you how you and I can have hope in any situation. Paul on Trial, Felix on Notice.

Paul on Trial

Ch. 23 ended on a dramatic note with 40 assassins who made a blood oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. But Lysias, the Roman Tribune found out about the plot and in the middle of the night he ordered 470 Roman soldiers to escort Paul out of Jerusalem to Caesarea to Herod's Praetorium where Felix lived. Felix was one of the successors to the same position that Pilate held during the ministry and crucifixion of Jesus.

So after 5 days, the high priest Ananias, comes down with some elders and a lawyer they hired named Tertullus. Now, these Jewish leaders want Paul put to death because they hate the gospel and the cause of Christ.

We have to realize that at this time, the Romans were an unwelcome occupying force in Jerusalem. Essentially Rome had seized authority over the Jewish people and maintained a military presence in Judea in order to keep the Jewish people in subjection. The Jews hated the Roman occupation and their great hope was a military uprising that could overthrow Rome's might. So there was this constant tension of revolt and it was the job of men like Lysias and Felix to keep control and prevent any uprising.

So in order to have Paul killed they make false accusations against Paul to make the Roman authorities view him as a threat to peace. I want you to see what the Jews did here. They hired the best lawyer that money could buy. They spare no expense in seeking to have Paul slaughtered. So they hire a legal ace who's very skilled in presenting a case before the Roman authorities.

It's really crazy how far Tertullus stretches the truth. On the one hand he praises Felix for the peace he brought to Jerusalem when in fact, history records that he was a brutal ruler in Palestine who had no problem abusing the Jewish people to keep them in line. In the same breath, Tertullus falsely accuses Paul of stirring up riots and profaning the temple in Jerusalem. What's striking about that is not just that Paul is innocent, but that in reality it was the Jewish leaders who were stirring up the riots and profaning the temple.

You may say, how were they profaning the temple? The temple and everything in it were designed by God to point to the coming and the sacrifice of Jesus. The Jew's rejection of Jesus and the gospel was the ultimate desecration of the Temple because it denied the very things the Temple existed for.

So Paul is on trial. Standing before a world superpower, accused by the religious leaders of his own nation who have hired high powered legal counsel all for the purpose of having him put to death.

And here's Paul. Alone. No legal counsel. No defense. No friends. It's like it's the whole world against Paul. Paul stands before his accusers with an unshakeable confidence and an unshakeable hope.

Here's the question we have to ask ourselves... Why does Paul have hope in these circumstances? And how can you and I have hope when we face dark or hard circumstances?

The answer is simple. Paul's hope was in Jesus Christ. It might look like Paul is alone and it looks like the whole world is against him. But in reality, he's got the best friend, the strongest defense, and the greatest advocate of all time standing right beside him.

2 Timothy 4:16-17 At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! 17 But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

Friends I want to give you a key this morning that will unlock the prison of all your doubts, fears, and anxiety. The reason you and I sometimes experience fear and hopelessness is our failure to believe the gospel. What do I mean by that? Here's what I mean whenever we come to a difficult situation we experience hopelessness when we look to something other than Jesus as our defense. We look to something other than Jesus and his grace for our security and hope. Now, here's how this works...

You and I are fallen people in a fallen world. What that means is that we're always falling short. Even though we desperately need to sense that we measure up, in every relationship we fall short. We fall short of God's standards for us. We fall short of other people's standards for us. We can't even live up to our own standards for ourselves.

Maybe this is why even young children can sometimes be so cruel to each other? Sometimes even little school children will try to create or maximize the fallenness of other kids almost as a defense mechanism to hide their own fallenness and insecurity.

This is why at work they will always be cut throats trying to enlarge upon the faults of others while minimizing and hiding their own faults.

And this fallenness causes us to walk around all the time fearing being caught falling short. We always feel this sense of impending judgement and like we're right around the corner from being exposed.

And like Paul, we have our own accusers don't we? There are plenty of people in the world that are happy to point out our fallenness. Coworkers? Just the other day one of my coworkers caught me in an act of sin. I was on the way to work and I was speeding. And he was following me. And he waited until I got in a crowd of people before he informed me and everybody else how fast I was going...

But maybe your accusers are in your own family. Maybe right now your spouse, your parent, or your child is holding over your head the fact that you don't measure up.

We don't just have accusers in the world, but did you know that Satan is the accuser of the brethren? Satan is always making accusations against us and to us about ourselves and our fallenness. He's always at work to undermine God's redemptive work in our lives and rob us of the power we need to walk with Christ.

But do you know who our greatest accuser is? Your greatest accuser is probably yourself. At our core we're very insecure and we're in constant battle with ourselves. We are constantly pronouncing judgement over our own failures and scrutinizing them and making ourselves suffer for them. We so desperately long to measure up, and we hate ourselves for falling short.

And this is why we need the key of the gospel to free us from the prison of the bottomless pit of our own insecurity. Do you realize that only if you are in Christ, only if he is your hope, only if he represents you in the courts of this world will you ever be free.

The only way that you and I will ever measure up is in Christ. The Bible teaches that every person who trusts in Christ stands before the throne of God above, is pronounced righteous and perfect. If you have been united to Christ, God the Father chooses to regard you not only as though you had never sinned, but also as though you had always perfectly obeyed.

I have good news for you today. If you are in Christ today... You. Measure. Up! You are loved. You are accepted. You are free. This brings us so much freedom.

You can go to work tomorrow and be honest about not being perfect. And you can extend mercy and grace to your coworkers who are not perfect. Today you can go home and admit your faults and failures to your wife and ask for her forgiveness. When you mess up in your parenting you can admit to your kids that you're a sinner who makes mistakes and you need the blood of Christ and his grace.

Just yesterday I was talking to Carrie and Kara, and in a conversation I used a word that I've taught the boys I don't like them to use. And Ethan overheard it and he called me on it. And I said, "Yeah, bro. I probably shouldn't have said that." Well, he went on to tell me, "Yeah, I remember that time you said something mean to Mama too."

Friends, believing the gospel is the only thing that can silence every accuser you have.

Romans 8:33-34 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died; more than that, who was raised; who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Do you see what this is saying? If Jesus is standing with you, if he is your hope, no one, not even yourself can bring charges against you that will stick.

"Well may the accuser roar of sins that I have done, I know them all And thousands more, Jehovah knoweth none."

Even when it seems like you're all alone and the whole world is against you, you have a great Savior who stands by your side, in whom you have all the comfort, peace, and security you'll ever need.

That's Paul on trial let's look now at:

Felix on Notice

Felix hears the accusations against Paul and he can see, just like Lysias that there's no basis for the charges. But instead of giving a ruling, he stalls for time and says he's going to wait to render a verdict until Lysias comes.

He keeps Paul in custody but allows him to have a measure of freedom and allows him to have visitors. And we're given these details that Felix and his wife Drucilla had this ongoing relationship with Paul where they continued to send for him and hear him preach the gospel. This is fascinating. Look at Paul's message to them in vs. 24 and 25:

Acts 24:24-25 After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. 25 And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you."

Paul's message to Felix and Drucilla is very enlightening. Drucilla was a very interesting character in this story. Her father was Herod Agrippa I. You'll remember him all the way back in ch. 12. who laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He's the one who had the Apostle James killed by sword and who had imprisoned Peter. Her great grandfather was Herod the Great. He was the ruler who after the birth of Jesus had all the male children, 2 and under put to death. So her family has a long standing connection to Christianity. Interestingly, Felix was not her first husband. She left her first husband for husband for Felix. And Drucilla was Felix's third wife.

That makes Paul's message very bold. We're told that he reasoned with them about

Righteousness

Self-control

and the coming judgement.

Paul was very courageous to preach the gospel to them in exactly the way that they needed to hear it. Felix and Druscilla needed to hear that one day judgement was coming and that the proper response to the presence of unrighteousness and the lack of self control in their lives was to turn to Christ in faith and repentance.

But I want you to see Felix's response to the gospel.

He was alarmed (trembled, afraid)

But his fear was not enough to lead him all the way to faith and repentance

Instead of bowing down and submitting to the love and rule of Christ, he sends Paul away. And he says, when I get an opportunity I'll hear more about this.

And the passage tells us two things about Felix's motives for not releasing Paul even though he knew Paul was innocent. On the one hand, he was hoping Paul or some of Paul's friends would give him a bribe to let him go. On the other, he kept him detained because he wanted to do the Jews a favor.

Friends, we can't move past this before we see what a dangerous position Felix is in. He's a man who's been thoroughly acquainted with the gospel. And yet he keeps it at arm's length and puts off dealing with it until some later time. He's brought to the point of what almost looks like conviction, but he fails to turn to Christ.

I want you to see the error of Felix. He's hoping that he will either get a large sum of money out of Paul or he would get something from the Jews by keeping him in prison. When all the while something far more valuable was right in front of him. He's rejecting the infinite value of Christ for fleeting treasure which ultimately will only damn his soul.

There's a story of a man who was desperate for some cash, so he planned to rob a bank. He gets a gun and he goes and robs the bank and makes off with \$6,000. In short order he was identified and arrested. What the bank robber didn't know was that the gun he used to rob the bank was a rare antique that was valued over \$100,000.

Stop and realize the incredible value that we've been given in the gospel and a relationship with Christ. And we are fools if we are like Felix and look for riches in other places in the greatest treasure is right in front of our face.

Conclusion

If you're here this morning and you're not yet a believer Jesus. Maybe in this very moment you're just like Felix. Your intrigued by Christianity, but you're just not ready to commit. And like Felix you're about to send this message away and think that you'll have an opportunity in the future to deal with Christ and your need for repentance and redemption. Can I just say to you that now is the hour of salvation. You are not guaranteed tomorrow. Please don't play Russian Roulette with your soul. There may not come a tomorrow for you.

Not only that, what if you spend the next 60 years of your life struggling with that sinking feeling of always falling short and never measuring up? This very moment you can come to Christ and lay the burden of your insecurity down and find the peace that you know your soul is craving. Do not let the sun set today before you do business with God and turn your life over to him. And if God has been dealing with your soul, or if he's dealing with you right now, after this service I want you to talk to you, and pray with you, and help you.

I want to also say a word to the believer who is struggling right now. I want to talk to the person whose faith feels weak. Maybe you're thinking about giving up and that the Christian life is not working. I want to encourage you right now because it's not the strength or the greatness of your faith that counts. Be encouraged with this, the slightest drop of true faith in Jesus, no matter how small means that Christ is at this moment holding on to you. Sometimes I think the most honest thing we can say as Christians is to confess along with the man who cried out to Jesus, "Lord, I believe! Help thou my unbelief!"

If that's you this morning, I have good news for you. Even if you feel all alone. Even if you feel the weight of the world crashing down on your shoulders. If it feels like the whole world is against you, rest in this... That Jesus is here beside you and he has committed himself to never giving up on you! Just like Paul, no matter what comes in our lives, our hope does not depend on our circumstances or our feelings. Our hope depends on Christ who stands beside us.