

FACING A MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE? II

Acts 24:10-21

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Nineteen days ago, on Wednesday evening, June 17, 2015, one of the most heinous crimes in recent history took place. By his own admission, Dylann Roof, out of racial hatred for black people, shot and killed nine black Christians as they worshipped and participated in an evening Bible study at the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in downtown Charleston, South Carolina. Included in the dead was the Senior Pastor and State Senator of South Carolina, Clementa C. Pinckney.

This side of heaven, it matters not if this mass murderer Dylann Roof gets the death penalty for his crime, because nothing will bring back the unjust loss of nine innocent people, beloved by their family members as well as by their church family. They will still have to fight back against hatred and bitterness toward the Dylann Roofs in this country who express their racial hatred toward them.

Last time, we looked at a situation in **Acts 24**, in which we found the Apostle Paul living in the midst of a serious personal miscarriage of justice that threatened to take his life. Having been wrongly arrested and falsely accused of something worthy of death, he now found himself facing a second trial in which his life lay in the balance.

One of the conclusions we were reminded of last time as we considered Paul's unjust persecution came from Jesus' warning to his disciples and us in **Matthew 18:15-16**, that unjust suffering in this world is to be expected. Major wrongs, such as the carnage that took place in Charleston, South Carolina, will not stop on earth this side of heaven. Only when Jesus comes again to establish His Kingdom on earth will justice finally and fully reign. In the meantime, we as followers of Jesus are forced to work through the major and minor injustices we face every day, in order to remain faithful ambassadors of the Gospel amidst a world that desperately needs Jesus.

Last time, I mentioned that in our study of this event over the next two messages we would observe two things: how to face such injustice when it occurs, and how to avoid being accomplices to common miscarriages of justice. Last time we simply looked at the problem of our being party, perhaps unwittingly, to injustices brought down upon others because we did not search out the facts. We talked

about our bent to spreading rumors as though they were true and the harmful results it can have on others who are innocent.

In summation, we said that in order to not become participants in injustice, we should not consider as true any information offered about another person or an event they have allegedly been a part of unless it passes the test of Scripture, which requires the proof of two eyewitnesses.

This morning, we want to observe Paul's life and how he responded to, faced, and dealt with his situation of injustice. Last time, in **Acts 24:1-5**, as Paul stood before the Roman governor Felix, he had to listen to Tertullus, a hired professional speaker whose job it was to make a skillful presentation on behalf of the Jewish Sanhedrin. He stroked Felix's ego and ignited fiery accusations against Paul, all the while clouding the facts to the end purpose that Felix would turn Paul over to the Jews to be put to death.

Our scene takes place in Roman courthouse in Caesarea by the sea. In **verses 1-5**, Tertullus presents his case against Paul. We read:

¹After five days the high priest Ananias came down [to Caesarea] with some elders, with an attorney named Tertullus, and they brought charges to the governor against Paul. ²After Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying to the governor, "Since we have through you attained much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation, ³we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness. ⁴But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing. For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. ⁶And he even tried to desecrate

the temple; and then we arrested him. [We wanted to judge him according to our own Law. ⁷But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him (Paul) out of our hands, ⁸ordering his (Paul's) accusers to come before you.] By examining him [Lysias] yourself concerning all these matters you will be able to ascertain the things of which we accuse him [Lysias].” ⁹The Jews also joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so.

In those verses, Tertullus presented four accusations against the Apostle Paul. The first two charges were that Paul was “**a real pest**” and an agitator of worldwide dissension. To be called a “**pest**” meant that Paul was the spreader of a plague of discontent everywhere he went. These two charges had political overtones and would be taken seriously in any Roman court. One of Rome's greatest desires was to maintain order, the Pax Romana or the “peace of Rome” throughout its empire. No Roman leader was to tolerate any form of dissension by people under his authority.

The third charge was a religious charge--Paul was a “**ringleader of a sect.**” Rome would not tolerate any new religion. Hence, Tertullus was making the point that Paul was representing an unacceptable new religion, and that it had nothing to do with Judaism, one of the few religions allowed.

The final charge of Tertullus against Paul was the most serious and the one for which Paul, if found guilty, could be executed. It was a civil charge. This was the accusation that Paul had brought a gentile, a non-Jew, into the Temple in Jerusalem. A gentile entering the Temple was seen by Rome as an unnecessary cause for instigating a riot, and thus it would violate the peace of Rome. Hence, Rome had granted the Jews permission to put to death any gentile found guilty of entering the Temple. But the law never stated that if another Jew invited or took a gentile into the Temple, that the Jew, guilty of such action, could be put to death. This was the case against Paul. The Jews wanted to have Felix decide what to do in this situation. So legally, the first step was to prove that Paul had done this. If the Jews could not prove that Paul had brought a gentile into the Temple, there would be no cause to put Paul to death.

In our text for this morning, we will look at Paul's defense against each of the four charges brought against him. But before we do, we should remember that Felix had received a letter from the Roman commander in Jerusalem, Claudius Lysias, which provided him with a number of facts. So Felix knew several things about Paul and the case before he ever met him. He knew that:

Paul was a Roman citizen.

The charge against him concerned a matter of Jewish law.

The Jews wanted to kill Paul.

Paul had done nothing to deserve the death penalty or imprisonment.

There had been a Jewish plot by terrorists to assassinate Paul.

So when Tertullus had finished his presentation against Paul, with a nod in his direction, Felix gave Paul permission to speak. Let's read Paul's defense, and then work our way back through it. Beginning with **verse 10** we read:

¹⁰When the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul responded:

“Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I

cheerfully make my defense, ¹¹since you can take note of the fact that no

more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. ¹²Neither

in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city itself did they find

me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot. ¹³Nor can they

prove to you the charges of which they now accuse me. ¹⁴But this I admit

to you [Felix], that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve

the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with

the Law and that is written in the Prophets; ¹⁵having a hope in God,

which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a

resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. ¹⁶In view of this, I also

do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men. ¹⁷Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings; ¹⁸in which they found me occupied in the temple, having been purified, without any crowd or uproar. But there were some Jews from Asia—¹⁹who ought to have been present before you and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me. ²⁰Or else let these men themselves tell what misdeed they found when I stood before the Council, ²¹other than that for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, ‘For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today.’”

First, note how relatively brief (half a verse) are Paul’s words of respectful address to Felix; while Tertullus’ eulogy is lengthy (three verses). Also note that Paul’s words are limited and true, not false flattery like Tertullus calling Felix a “**man of peace**,” which Felix knew was not true of himself.

Second, note Paul’s emotional state. Most men, having gone through what Paul had to go through for days, and then having heard a complete stranger and windbag falsely accuse him, would be blazing with indignation. And yet, he is not. Instead, Paul graciously states, “**I cheerfully make my defense.**” He now takes the opportunity to give a factual reply.

But how could he do that? How could he respond in such a manner? I think Paul is empowered by two things: First, he has a clear conscience before God and men and even Ananias, whom he had disrespectfully spoken to days earlier. Having apologized already, Paul’s conscience is clear, and he wasn’t carrying around any debilitating guilt that tends to weaken the soul.

Second, Paul was empowered and courageous based on Jesus’s promise to him in the Jerusalem jail that he would not die but be sent to Rome to preach the gospel there. Furthermore, Paul knew that the Jesus, the all-just Lord, would take care of

the truth in the end. Hence, Paul has great reason to be cheery and positive about the outcome of this event.

In **verses 10-13**, we have Paul's defense against Tertullus' first two charges--stirring up an insurrection around the world.

There was absolutely no factual evidence that Paul had a history of inciting the Jews. He had only been in Jerusalem for twelve days at the time of his arrest. Twelve days was scarcely time enough to organize a rebellion. Furthermore, the Jewish pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem for Passover were not typically rabble-rousers. In addition, of those twelve days, Paul had spent about seven in jail under Roman custody. Finally, before having arrived in Jerusalem, Paul had been absent from the province of Israel for years. So when would he have been able to put together the disturbance for which he had been accused? Where were his supposed followers who would have assisted in this worldwide terrorism? What kind of evidence did his accusers bring to this trial to substantiate their charges? None. There were no eyewitnesses.

Furthermore, according to **verse 12**, there is no record of Paul debating with the crowds. He is never seen lecturing even a small group of people. He was never witnessed having a dispute with anyone. There is no mention of his having been in any synagogue. Paul had avoided public appearances. Except for making the proper arrangements for his purification, he had stayed away from the temple.

One grammatical sidebar comment is that Paul's testimony, "**My accusers [did not] find me arguing with anyone or causing a riot among the people,**" is emphatic. In his statement, he uses three successive negative conjunctions showing his alarm with the charge against him. He refutes the fact that he gathered people together to do such with the words, "***Neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city itself.***"

Furthermore, Paul makes it plain in **verse 23** that his only reason for being in the Temple was for his personal worship of the Lord, the very God his accusers also professed to worship. Yes, there had been a disturbance and quite a crowd in the temple area, but it was the Asian Jews from Corinth who presumably had followed Paul and wanted him dead who incited the riot, not Paul. If the Romans wanted to charge someone with disturbing the peace, they had best look to his Asian accusers.

By the way, where were Paul's Asian accusers? Weren't they the logical ones who were supposed to make the accusations against Paul in the court? At this point, Paul

quickly put Tertullus and the Jewish leaders on the defensive by challenging them to prove their accusations by the verification of two or three witnesses, which Jewish Law prescribed (**Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15**). Paul's opponents were unable to support their accusations.

In **verses 14-16**, Paul responds to the third charge, that of being part of some kind of sect, non-legal religious group. This charge moved from the first two political charges to a religious charge.

Paul would not deny his affiliation with the group called "**the Way**," but he never would have referred to it as a sect. He presented himself to be a follower of "**the Way**," the true and only way to the Lord for his Jewish people. Paul's faith was no offshoot tangential faith but was right at the center of Jewish religion. Just like the Pharisees, he believed the Scriptures—the Prophets as well as the Law. Just like the Pharisees, he shared a "**hope in God**," a reference to the future resurrection of the dead, the total resurrection of the wicked as well as the righteous.

The category of the "**righteous**" refers to the resurrection of all believers in Jesus Christ (**1 Thessalonians 4:16**), the dead believers of Old Testament times (**Daniel 12:2**), and the future followers of Christ who will be martyred during the period known as the Tribulation (**Revelation 20:4**).

The resurrection of unsaved dead will occur before the Great White Throne judgment and results only in a sentence of eternal death, separation from God and others, and placement in the lake of fire (**Revelation 20:11-14**).

The bottom line is that Paul proved he was loyal to his ancestral faith. He stood squarely in mainstream Judaism. In the end, he defanged the accusation that his activity broke religious Roman law.

In **verses 17-19**, Paul moves to his defense against the fourth charge made against him. This charge is more civil than political or religious. Yet it was the most serious of all the charges: Paul was accused of desecrating the temple by bringing into it a gentile.

Paul explained to Felix that he had two purposes for coming to Jerusalem: First, he came to bring "**alms to my nation**." This refers to caring for the poor Jews who were persecuted and poverty-stricken because of their faith in Christ, unable to find work or buy food.

Second, as it concerns the meaning of “offerings,” Paul is referring to the personal presentation of his thank offerings to God as part of his Nazirite vow. That’s why he was in the Temple on the day of the riot he was accused of stirring up. Paul mentioned this to Felix to refute Tertullus’ accusation that he had tried to desecrate the temple. Paul was “**without any crowd or uproar.**” He was privately and peacefully engaged in a personal ceremonial rite. They did not see him stirring up a crowd or provoking a riot.

Paul was obviously quite incensed by the statements of his accusers, as is indicated by his breaking off his thought in midsentence at the end of **verse 18**. They should have been there and brought charges against him face to face. Their absence was a serious breach of Roman law.

At this point, Paul could have rested his case. Indeed, Felix had been given enough information to release Paul. But, Paul added his own charge in **verses 20-21**. It was the charge of having spoken up about the truth of Christ’s resurrection from the dead. In doing so, Paul was highlighting the fact for Felix that the root issue, the thorn in the crow of his accusers, was not political or civil, but a theological issue, one for which Felix had no business presiding over. I believe that Paul fully expected the judge to dismiss the case and set him free right then and there. But, as we will see next time, that was not the case.

So, what can we take away from this passage of Scripture? What can we learn about handling injustice and false accusations?

First of all, let’s consider who is being accused here. The Apostle Paul was a man of integrity. Few, if any, would have surpassed him. And yet, he was unjustly treated and falsely accused. It was an absolutely unfair situation. So, we must conclude that a life of integrity will not shield you from being falsely accused. It did not for Jesus or Paul. People of character, men and woman who freely and whole-heartedly serve, will be misjudged. Just look at the recent editorials written by some citizens of Grants Pass concerning our recent Serve Grants Pass event. Some have accused us of ulterior motives, when we have been totally upfront with our why and wherefore for wanting to come alongside our community. In all our publications we have pronounced our motives: “Good works leads to good will and opportunities for sharing the Good News.” We have asked for no favors, brought our own people, and invested our own money. Over the past several years, the church in Grants Pass has invested millions of dollars of labor and material to make our schools and community a better place to live. So, it is hard to understand their problem.

If this world were made up of basically good people, a person of integrity would be well loved and have no enemies. But since this world is made up of sinners who love darkness rather than light, and since a life of integrity exposes their evil deeds, sinners will often slander the person of integrity. We are naive if we think that if we live with integrity, we will be protected from false accusations and slanderous attempts to bring us down.

So, just recognize that wanting to do good for others and being a person of integrity will not shield you from being unjustly accused or mistreated.

As we consider Paul's example, we see that he models for us six ways to work through injustice.

First, Paul said, "I cheerfully make my defense." Cheerfully? How did Paul keep his emotions in check, so as to not walk in the manner of the wicked? When buoyed by the facts and a clear understanding of what the Scriptures say about what one can expect for living an upright life in a fallen world, we don't have to fear people. Refuse to be caught up in the emotion of the charges. We don't have to allow our souls to be entrapped by our concern with what others think. We can choose to release injustice to the Lord and defuse emotion that can easily cause us to walk along side of and in the way of the wicked. Our God is just, and he will deal with those who are unjust. We may not see all of God's justice today, but one day we will, and we will be satisfied.

Second, when you read Paul's testimony, you see that he stayed with the facts. He did not embellish the events. He did not speak of other's motives. People will always try to read between the lines that are not there. Circumstantial evidence is not always proof of wrongdoing. The worldly wisdom of "Where there's smoke there's fire" is often not true. To avoid that, Paul basically said, "You can check my record. Twelve days ago I went up to worship."

Closely related to that is that Paul told the truth with a clear conscience. When you are being accused, avoid falsehoods, omissions, or the embellishment of the truth. If you've already breached the truth, go back now and correct it. Admit your wrong. Stepping over a lie, presenting a half or incomplete truth, or ignoring a misdeed weakens your case. As in Paul's situation, "It may take time for the truth to catch up, but it always catches up!" Knowing this, Paul could fearlessly defend himself, because before God, his conscience was clear.

Next, Paul was able to identify the original source of the criticism. When you can do that, then you at least have a fighting chance to get the situation turned around, in spite of the speed with which rumors spread. Anyone who has ever been in ministry for more than five years has experienced painful and often unjustifiable criticism. I have rarely been hurt by the original source of unfair criticism. When I have been able to go back to the source of a rumor or accusation against me, often times I have been able to set the record straight. Sometimes, no matter what you do, you learn to live with the false accusations, knowing that the Lord knows the truth. My deepest wounds have been inflicted by second or even third-hand sources. Following this suggestion will not guarantee that you can stop the slander or end the injustice, but it can help, as it did in Paul's case.

Fifth, do not become impatient or bitter; instead, apply a great amount of forgiveness toward the wrong doers. As we will see next time, for two years Paul pounded the drums of truth before Felix, and nothing happened in his favor. It was only after Felix was forced out of office that Paul's case moved forward to justice. Two years is a long time to be held captive against your will when you have done nothing wrong. And the only thing that can defang the bitterness and impatience is forgiveness. Later, while in prison in Rome, Paul, with experience, wrote these words in **Ephesians 4:31-32**, **“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”**

I think of the words of Nadine Collier, who was one who lost a beloved family member at the hands of the racist murderer Dylann Roof. In court, shortly after his arrest, Nadine did something that few could ever do unless filled by the Holy Spirit as a follower of Jesus Christ. She told Dylann to his face after he was caught, “You took something very precious from me, but I forgive you. It hurts me. You hurt a lot of people, but may God forgive you.”

Because of God's sacrificial act of forgiveness, we can have confidence in our Savior, Jesus, who advocates for us in the heavens. Justice will be served, and we will be given the ability to forgive, if we chose to abide in Christ and obey God. The family members in Charleston can only believe in the God about whom Moses wrote to the children of Israel, **“God goes before you and will fight for you, as He did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes” (Deuteronomy 1:30).**

Finally, Paul remembered the Lord's promise made to him in years past. As a result, he chose to stand on the promises of God. When times get confusing and

make little sense, I will hold tightly to this favorite promise of God for many:
**“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; lean not on your own understanding.
Acknowledge Him in all your ways, and He will make your paths straight”
(Proverbs 3:5-6).**