

✠ Catching up to our story

- **57 AD. Depending on how you date it, 27 or 24 years since Acts 1, resurrection/ ascension of Jesus Christ.**
- **Paul has returned to Jerusalem after the conclusion of his third missionary journey**
- **In a period of just around two weeks...**
 - **Paul arrived in Jerusalem and realized just how unstable the city was,**
 - **He participates in a highly devout Jewish religious ritual, in hopes of calming the tension caused by his arrival in the city,**
 - **Is accused of desecrating the temple by bringing a gentile with him on the last day of his ritual, sparking a very deliberate riot by his opponents,**
 - **He is arrested, imprisoned, nearly flogged before he claims his rights as a Roman citizen,**
 - **Appears before Sanhedrin where another riot breaks out**
 - **Learns of a plot to kill him, and is protected by no less than 470 Roman soldiers, spearmen, and horsemen as he is escorted by night to Caesarea, where he is held under guard in Herod's palace.**
- **Now, it is 5 days later, and Paul is brought before Felix, the Roman Governor of Judea, to stand trial for the accusations brought against him.**

✠ The case against Paul

Acts 24:1-9 Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. ² When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: "We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. ³ Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. ⁴ But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.

- **So essentially the Chief Priests bring in a hired gun- a lawyer (literally, a 'pleader') to sum up the Sanhedrin's case against Paul.**
- **Tertullus lays it on thick- this is what you call insincere buttering up. In reality, the Jews- even the politically motivated Sadducees, hated the Romans, and they especially hated Felix.**
- **Tertullus cuts to the chase- saying "We don't want to weary you with the details" is another way of saying "we can't back up anything we're about to say"**

⁵ "We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him.

- **If you're really paying attention, you might notice something odd right here. Unless you have KJV, Verse 7 is missing- actually, second half of V6 thru first half of V8. Here's V6-8 with 7 included:**

⁶ He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law. ⁷ But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took *him* out of our hands, ⁸ commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him."

- **So, why is this not included? Some claim that new versions of the Bible, specifically the NIV, purposefully have removed some verses from the Bible because they didn't like what they said. This is NOT THE CASE. Rather, for a variety of reasons, when studying the**

oldest Greek manuscripts we possess of this text, most translation scholars agree this was not part of the original text. There are multiple examples of this in the NT, some better known than others... Little bit of Bible translation info for you there....

– In any case, Tertullus proclaims:

⁵ *“We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him. By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him.” The other Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.*

- The word for ‘troublemaker’ is very strong- literally means ‘pestilence’... Tertullus compares Paul to a plague threatening society itself, and must be stopped.**
- Chief threat of the Paul pandemic was that Paul was a threat to the peace- and Felix’s primary role as the Roman Governor was to keep the peace!**
- By calling followers of Jesus a ‘sect’, Tertullus is claiming Christianity was a corruption of Judaism, an offshoot that began in the region of Nazareth.**
- The only proof Paul’s accusers claim is that Paul tried to desecrate the temple- which he didn’t do. Interesting Tertullus pointedly doesn’t say HOW he supposedly tried to do this- ‘Felix, Paul tried to desecrate the Temple by bringing in a gentile- you know, someone like YOU’... might not have helped their case.**
- And so everyone joins in, assuring Felix all the accusations were true. AND, as we’ve discussed a few times already, all these accusations were FALSE.**
- NOW, as we’ve seen, riots and disturbances DID follow Paul almost everywhere he went- but it wasn’t because Paul- OR any of the believers or other church leaders- were inciting trouble, demeaning, or fighting against the local authorities. I’ve said this before, but there is NO EVIDENCE at all that Paul or the apostles ever sought to advance their cause through political resistance or violence. They were model citizens!**

Reality! The reason riots and disturbances followed Paul was the power of the GOSPEL to change lives.

- If you remember back in Ephesus, the massive riot there happened because people were finding hope and new life in Christ, turning from Idolatry, and throwing away their idols and religious paraphernalia- so much so it was threatening the business of the idol makers.**
- For the Jewish authorities, THEY were the gatekeepers of the temple, the law, and means to God- in their religious system THEY had all the power, and they viewed the Gospel as a direct threat to their authority and power, as the Gospel proclaimed that hope, forgiveness, and a relationship with God was received through faith in CHRIST, not through the law, the temple, or religious rituals such as circumcision.**
- This couldn’t be tolerated, so Paul had to be silenced! NOW, we see...**

✠ Paul’s defense

Acts 24:10-13 *When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: “I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense. ¹¹ You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. ¹² My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. ¹³ And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me.*

- **Basically, Paul’s defense boils down to this: “I was minding my own business!” And he was. This isn’t just Paul’s defense here, this was his philosophy of ministry. Paul sums this perspective up in his letter to Titus.... As a person representing the Gospel- representing Christ in the midst of a hostile adversity...**

Titus 3:1-2 *Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, ² to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.*

- **And so to both his accusers and to Felix, Paul says- YES! Look at my life! This is what you will find.**
- **But Paul doesn’t stop there. Having made his defense, he goes on to make a confession:**

✠ Paul’s confession

Acts 24:14 *However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets*

- **Paul first declares that ‘They Way’ or the gospel, is not a new religion, not a sect, but in fact he worships the same God as the God of Israel.**
- **When he said “I believe everything said by the Law and Prophets”, almost certainly Paul is referring to how both the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament all pointed to the coming of the Messiah, who is Jesus.**
- **Paul essentially is saying- not only is ‘The Way’, Jesus Christ’, NOT a corruption of Judaism-- it is the fulfillment of Judaism’s greatest hope!**
- **THIS HOPE, is the hope of RESURRECTION**

✠ The hope of the Resurrection

Acts 24:15 *and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.*

- **Paul’s statement here is a bit unique, as he describes the Hope of God- which went all the way back into the very roots of the Old Covenant/ OT- as the hope of the resurrection of BOTH the righteous and wicked.**
- **We want to be careful not to take this statement out of context, because we know- from the rest of NT theology, the NEW COVENANT- that our righteousness before God is NOT our own, it is from God, on the basis of our FAITH in Jesus Christ.**
- **We also wouldn’t automatically associate the resurrection of the ‘wicked’- which apart from Christ also describes all of us- as a source of HOPE, but rather judgment.**
- **Right here in this situation, Paul is describing the Jewish understanding that at the end of time there would be a resurrection, followed by the judgement of all people.**
- **Paul does NOT share the gospel at this time, but his statement here points toward the HOPE that God is just, that He can be trusted. And from the broader teaching of the NC we know God’s justice is a source of HOPE, NOT of fear, for the basis of our judgement before God is now the Grace and Mercy of Jesus Christ, not our own righteousness or merit.**
- **We’ll be pushing more into this next week, and maybe later this summer... but right now let’s wrap up today’s text, as Paul speaks to...**

† The power and peace of a clear conscience

- Paul has just said “I live in the hope that there will be a resurrection of all people... therefore...”

Acts 24:16 *So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.*

- Here in front of Felix, Paul emphasizes that his conscience is clear, that he is not lying- something his accusers, the religious authorities, could not say.
- But in a larger context, the concept of a clear conscience is a big deal in the New Testament.
- A clear conscience means there is nothing to diminish our experience of God's goodness and presence. We truly can live at peace with God.
- A clear conscience also is a powerful antidote to fear and anxiety in our relationships with other people. A clear conscience allows us to live without looking over our shoulder, or fearing the consequence of hidden actions. MARK TWAIN is said to have said “If you never lie, you don't have to remember what you said”.... You don't have to keep track of your lies, because you have a clear conscience. That's peace!
- For the NT though, the most important reason for a clear conscience before other people is the sake of the Gospel.
- THE MOST IMPORTANT reason for me not to create a barrier by my behavior is so I can clearly represent the goodness of God to those around me.
- In our day of hyper-divisiveness and instinctive animosity at those different from us, this is a calling the church must remember and embrace...

1 Peter 3:15-16 *But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*

- This scripture is a challenge- not of guilt but of redemption- to search our hearts, and ask- before God, is our conscience clear regarding our behavior, our relationships, to the people around us.

NEXT WEEK we will finish Paul's testimony before Felix.. again, I would value your feedback... love you, have a wonderful week, see you next Sunday.