

Acts 24

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone.

My name is Tom. For anyone who doesn't know me, I'm one of the pastors here at Amazing Grace Community Church. We're going to read from Acts chapter 24 as we continue in our series in Acts. So if you have a Bible, or if you have a Bible app, you can turn to Acts 24, where we're going to read now. Okay, starting in verse 1.

It should also be on the screen that you can follow along. 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.

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. Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude.

[1 : 14] But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly. 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. When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied, You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship.

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. And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me.

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.

[2 : 26] 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. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this.

There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. But there are some Jews from the province of Asia who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me.

Or those who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin. Unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence, it is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.

Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the way, adjourned the proceedings. When Lysias the commander comes, he said, I will decide your case. He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard, but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.

[3 : 33] Several days later, Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ. As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, that's enough for now.

You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you. At the same time, he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him. When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the

Jews, he left Paul in prison.

Let's pray and ask for God's help as we look at this passage together this morning. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you that we can have it in our language, have it in a way that we can understand.

But Father, help us to go beyond just hearing with our ears that your spirit would take these words that we've heard and penetrate them deep into our hearts. Lord, that we would hear your voice and what you're speaking to us.

Please help us now. In Jesus' name, amen. Do you get annoyed when things aren't fair? Or does it not phase you too much?

[4 : 49] Maybe someone's cheating in a family board game. Are you the one to flip the board because it's so unfair and annoying? Or do you sit back? Well, I don't like things that aren't fair.

As a child, I was especially upset when things weren't fair. Maybe someone cheated in a race. They pulled a t-shirt and then I didn't win the race. And I think the mix of hyper-competitiveness and a desire for fairness made for a very upset child.

Well, I remember one time being at camp and playing a group game. I think it was one of these newspaper games. We all had different sheets of newspaper. And I could see one of the other teams cheating.

But worst of all, they were getting away with it. This was too much for me. I sat back in a huff, not even wanting to play the game.

It wasn't right. Well, this is a very trivial example. But injustice is everywhere in our world. People who are caught up in wars. People attacked for no good reason.

[5 : 52] People who are isolated and marginalized. It's not fair. We each experience times of injustice in our lives.

From big to small. And especially as Christians, we may experience this. And while we join Paul in Acts 24, as he's facing a trial before Felix, and we quickly realize this is not fair.

The trial is based on false accusations. And even the judge in the trial is unjust. Open to bribes. And really letting the outcome come down to who he wants to please most.

And this is the first of a few trials that Paul will face over the next few chapters in Acts. So the first thing I want to say for us, be ready for injustice.

Be ready for injustice. Now, I'm not sure if you're a fan of legal dramas. If you like that sort of thing, maybe you've seen an episode of Suits. Or one that we like is called Silk, where you watch a legal drama unfold in a courtroom.

[7 : 00] This can be fascinating and eventful, or maybe it's very boring and dull. Well, the lawyer for the prosecution from the Jews is a man named Tertullus.

And he stands up before Felix to lay out the charges against Paul. Here are the charges. He's a troublemaker. He stirs up riots among the Jews.

He's a ringleader of the Nazarene sect. Yet, he tried to desecrate the temple. Well, if you've been following the story so far in Acts, you'll know that these charges aren't fair.

They're not just. They're taken out of context. They're not real. We'll take a closer look in a minute how Paul responds and defends himself. But Paul was causing serious concern among the Jewish leaders.

And so, they were very upset with him. And there had even been a plot to kill Paul. That's how he's ended up in Felix's custody. But the accusations they level at Paul are not fair.

[8 : 07] They're not just. And like I said, not only were the accusations unfair, the judge, Felix, the governor, was not just.

It's quite clear as we read through the passage that Felix thought Paul was innocent. Yet, he doesn't allow him to go free. We see Felix had Paul in prison for two years, needlessly.

In verse 26 at the end, it says at the same time, he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe. We see he wanted to do the Jews a favor, so he left Paul in prison.

Listen, the accusations were unjust. The judge was unjust. Paul had to face injustice. This is the reality for us today.

We need to be ready for injustice. The world does not like the message about Jesus. It's not friendly toward Jesus. And so it's no surprise then when people or communities or governments or countries and leaders act unjustly and unfairly towards Christians.

[9 : 24] We need to be ready for injustice in our lives. Around the world, Christians are being mistreated because of their faith in Christ. Maybe for us, it will mean being misunderstood, unfairly treated by colleagues at work or your family about what you believe.

Maybe they think you're part of some cult or something that they don't understand. Maybe it will mean having accusations leveled against you that you're a bigot, that you're a fundamentalist or unloving because of the things that we believe about sex or marriage or abortion.

We need to be ready for injustice. Maybe you're facing something right now that's not fair.

Something that's not right and the odds seem to be just stacked against you. And the voice of reason is being drowned out by a louder voice that doesn't make sense.

It's hard. We need the Lord. We need the Lord. We need the Lord's help. Jesus knows what it means to be treated unjustly.

[10 : 41] He's the one who's been most unjustly treated. The one who committed no sin, yet tried and executed. So what did Jesus do in those times?

Well, first Peter tells us, When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

When we are facing injustice, we can entrust ourselves to the one who judges justly. The one who will ultimately bring justice.

He will vindicate us when we are wrongly treated. We keep our eyes on Jesus who also suffered as the one who will bring justice for us.

But we need to be ready. Be ready for injustice. Secondly, be ready to give a reason for your hope.

[11 : 46] Be ready to give an answer for your hope. Are you good at preparing to give answers? Maybe you've had a job interview in the past or an exam where you had answers.

Or maybe you're even going through customs and you're being asked awkward questions. Well, I work part-time for Amazon. And interviews at Amazon are a unique thing.

And preparation is the key. They want to hear stories about what you've done in your past work life. And they ask very specific, targeted questions.

So you need to be prepared. You need to look at the questions they're going to ask and come up with stories that are going to explain and show why you fit the job. Being prepared is key.

Well, in the midst of this injustice, Paul still manages to defend himself wisely and even have the opportunity to share the gospel with Felix and his wife, Drusilla.

[12 : 48] Paul begins his defense in verse 10. Look again at verse 10 where Paul begins to speak. I know that for a number of years you've been a judge over the nation, so I gladly make my defense.

Verse 11. You can easily verify that no more than 12 days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple or stirring up a crowd anywhere else in the city.

They cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the way, which they call a sect.

Jump down to verse 18. I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance.

Paul gives a clear timeline of his arrival in Jerusalem and answers the charges made against him. He wasn't arguing with anyone at the temple. He was not stirring up a crowd.

[13 : 51] There's no proof to the charges. He says he is part of the way, which was how the Christian group was first described. He said he was ceremonially clean when he was in the temple, so there was no reason to be concerned of his visit there.

And when responding to the accusation that he stirs up riots all over the world, he said, well, those Jews in Ephesus, if they have something against me, let them come and make their charge.

But they're not here. His defense is wise and clear and concise. He's ready to defend his actions and his faith. He dismantles the prosecution's case like an experienced lawyer in a courtroom responding to each accusation.

He's refuting any wrongdoing. He was ready to give an answer. And he continues to be ready because after the trial, we see Paul develops an interesting relationship with Felix.

Verse 24, Several days later, Felix came with his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, That's enough for now. You may

leave.

[15:14] When I find it convenient, I'll send for you. At the same time, he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him. Paul is in the place of unfair treatment, but yet God is opening the door for the gospel to be shared.

Paul has opportunities to regularly speak with Felix, and Paul spoke to him about faith in Christ, about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment.

Paul was ready in this setting as well to give a reason for his hope. And now we see that Felix, he responds with fear and being dismissive. Enough! Enough! You may leave.

I'll send for you if I want you. It was difficult for Felix. It's difficult for the rich and powerful to receive this good news.

They have wealth and power and status. Why would I need Jesus? Why would I change my lavish lifestyle? Why would I be accountable to someone higher and greater than me?

[16:22] Well, Paul was ready, and he spoke into the opportunity presented. What did he speak about? Righteousness, self-control, coming judgment.

Felix needed to hear these things even though he didn't want to. We must be ready to give an answer for our hope.

Maybe it will come for you in the midst of a trial or challenge, in the midst of injustice or suffering. Maybe it will come on a normal happy day. But we will get opportunities to defend our faith and share the gospel with others.

So we need to be ready to give an answer. And we see Paul defending himself to the charges against him in a trial. Now, we won't need to defend ourselves, our faith or actions in a courtroom most likely.

But we may need to defend ourselves when it comes to a stance that we've taken because of our faith. Or the way that we say that Jesus is risen. That we can defend that he's not dead.

[17:32] Or that other gods are not real gods. That we need to defend things that we say. Take marriage as an example. Maybe we're questioned at work or in school about our view on marriage.

We'll need to explain how the Bible teaches that marriage and sex are for one man and one woman for life. And that's not a popular view today.

So we'll be questioned, we'll be challenged on that view. But let's be ready to give an answer for what we believe. Ready to defend and actually how God's design is good.

How it's a blessing for us and for the world. Or there'll be other times where we maybe need to share very personally.

Like Paul did with Felix. Ready to share our faith in an ongoing relationship over years. Maybe with a friend or acquaintance that we meet regularly.

[18:33] Ready to speak into someone's situation. Like Paul did with Felix. We can speak into someone's broken situation. With truth and wisdom from God's word.

Take an example. Maybe someone you know is struggling with guilt in their lives. We can speak God's word into their lives. Sharing God's love and forgiveness.

Maybe that's what they need to hear. Or maybe someone is struggling with anger. Well we can share God's way of peace. And God's justice. That he deals with that.

And his character is slow to anger. And rich in love. So let's be ready to give an answer for our hope. Let's take those opportunities to give a reason for our hope.

And the third thing. The last one for this morning. Keep your conscience clear. It's an interesting one.

[19:39] I don't know if you spotted it there. That Paul said in verse 16. One sentence that may highlight a kind of motto that Paul had in life.

Look at verse 16 again. He said, In his personal life.

To tarnish his character. We might see this happening in life. If someone wants to undermine somebody. To get their way. They attempt to discredit them. They bring up dirt from their past.

Or highlight dubious actions. That they're involved in. Maybe we've seen that in celebrities. Or political debates. Where one candidate has to rely on mudslinging.

Rather than debating the issue at hand. Well they had nothing on Paul. Paul's motto was to always keep his conscience clear. Before God and man.

[20:59] He sought to live a blameless life. Before God. And before people. They'll be a witness to those around him. One writer. Said this.

The blamelessness of Christians. Was an important part. Of the case for Christianity. In New Testament times. The early Christians.
Not only out thought. Their opponents. They also outlived them. Not only did they out think them. But they outlived them.
Not by how long they lived. But the standard of life. That they took. The moral decisions that they made. The integrity. By which they lived their lives.
There was a strong defense. For Christianity. Through their changed lives. That were blameless before God. Before the nation. And before people.
[21 : 56] So keep your conscience. Clear. Adopt this motto for your life. Our pursuit of holiness is so important. What we say.

And share with others. Can be undermined horribly. By unwise actions. Or sinful decisions that we make. Isn't that one of the big complaints.
That we hear about Christianity. Well I like Jesus. But I can't stand Christians. People's walls go up. When they see hypocrisy. Among Christians. When they see us saying one thing. But doing another. We want to do all that we can.
Out of love for God. To be the aroma of Christ. That our lives. Would demonstrate. A new vision. For life. Life that is full of integrity.
[22 : 59] Obedience. Love. Humility. Repentance. The way we behave. As citizens. And residents. In our country. And our communities. It says something about what we believe.

And it gives a foundation. For those words that we speak. Into people's lives. How would it look. If we share. And we speak about the importance of integrity.
In the workplace. And it comes to light. That you've been regularly calling in sick. Even when you weren't sick at all. Or if you speak about being.
Loving and gentle. We want to be like Jesus. But then in school. Or at home. You're the one who's known for picking a fight. You're the one to start the argument.
We need God's help so much. By his word and his spirit. To keep our consciences clear. His spirit works in us.
[24 : 03] To convict us. Let him do that work. Ask him. Lord. Show me. Where I need to change. And then it's our job with him to change.

I find it such a relief. Was that right? Was that wrong? What about my attitude here? My actions there? Spirit. Show me. And he shows us. He helps us.
He helps us then to walk in freedom. And in peace. As we turn away. Keep your conscience clear. How we live has an enormous impact. On our ability to witness. And share the gospel with others. So let's pursue holiness. So that we would set the best foundation.
For the message of Jesus. To be shared. With people we know. We see that was Paul's motto. That he strove.
[25 : 03] To keep his conscience clear. At all times. Before God. And before people. So when we face injustice. And challenges.

And suffering. Let's be ready. Be ready for the injustice. Be ready to endure. With God's help. Be ready.
To give a reason for our hope. And let's be ready. Through how we live our lives. Pursuing holiness. Like God. Is holy.
Let's pray. And ask for his help in this. Lord we. Confess. That we do not. Get it right. That we. Say things. And believe things. That we don't follow through on. We mess it up. We make mistakes. So Lord we ask for your forgiveness.
[26 : 05] We ask that you would help us. To be people who pursue. Holiness. That we would seek. To have clear consciences. Before you. And before others. Lord by your spirit.

Work in us. So that you would change us. To be like you. Let that be a foundation father. Father. So that when injustice arrives. That we would endure. That trials would show. The hearts that are in us. That when questions come to us. That we would be ready.
To answer them. Lord we thank you. For your word. We thank you for your. Servant Paul. Who demonstrated. What it was like.
To live in this way. By your spirit. And we pray for help. That we too. By your spirit. Would be people. Who seek to be like you. We pray in Jesus name.
[27 : 02] Amen.