

How to Suffer - Part 2

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0:00] Well, as you're seated, please do grab your Bibles. We're looking at chapter 24 today. We've heard just the first 16 verses of it.

There's also an outline in your pew sheets, which you might find helpful. But let me ask you a question. I wonder if you've ever been falsely accused of something. Like I was the other day, I was falsely accused that I ate the last donut from the kitchen bench.

It was not true. It was not true. After some mutual blaming and accusing of each other in the family, we all discovered that it was the dog that ate the donut from the bench.

He's getting up taller and taller. It's really frustrating. But anyway, now we don't like being accused of anything, and especially when we're falsely accused, do we? I don't know about you, but I can become quite indignant when that happens to me.

But also when I see it happen to people who are Christians. You know how on TV shows, they often falsely label the Christian as the idiot, you know, the fool.

[1:10] That often happens on TV shows like Father Brown or the Christians in Vicar of Dibley or whatever. And these days we are falsely accused of being outdated and irrelevant, intolerant, unloving, bigots and so on.

Of course, some people who call themselves Christians sadly do act in some of these ways and give the rest of Christians a bad name. But how are we to respond when we're falsely accused?

When persecution comes? Because it will come. In fact, I don't know if you realize this, but in 2 Timothy 3, it says everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus, not might be, but will be persecuted.

It will come at some point. And so how are we to respond when it happens? Well, last week, Peter Young showed us how Paul responded at the first trial, the religious trial before the Sanhedrin.

Firstly, Paul shrewdly or wisely made the most of his civil rights as being a Roman citizen to protect him from unjust flogging, you might remember. And we can do the same by using our rights as Australian citizens to avoid unjust dismissals in the workplace or signing petitions to avoid unjust laws in our state.

[2:28] Of course, like Paul, it won't remove all persecution. It just might limit some persecution. And so more importantly, we also saw last week how the Lord Jesus stood near Paul.

Do you remember? Paul is not alone. And so he can take courage. And it's the same for us. The Lord's help may look different for Paul is protecting him from the plot to kill him.

For us, it might be being given the words to say or some sort of different protection in a different situation. Either way, we remember the Lord stands near us to help us. We're not alone.

So we can take courage. And this week, we'll see two more things as Paul moves from the religious court of the Sanhedrin to the civil court of Governor Felix.

And as he stands trial, we'll see that Paul is firstly ready to give a defense, but with integrity. Because secondly, he remembers the resurrection on Judgment Day.

[3 : 28] So we'll see those two things as we go through. But the trial begins with the Jews' dishonesty. So point one and verse one. So five days later, after the religious trial last week, 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, who was Felix. So it seems the Jews have hired a prosecutor, haven't they?

And they now bring their charges before the governor, who was Felix. Now, it's worth knowing that Felix used to be a slave, but has now become governor, which is pretty amazing, isn't it?

Although, you know, if this Hollywood star on the next slide, can you press the next slide? This has stopped working. There we go. If this Hollywood star, Arnie, can become governor of California, then anything is possible, right?

But as a former slave, Felix was exposed to the underbelly of society. He knew all the dirty tricks and was accustomed to violence.

[4 : 36] In fact, the Roman historian Tacitus writes this. Felix practiced every kind of cruelty and lust, wielding the power of a king, but with the instincts of a slave.

That's a dangerous combo, isn't it? In fact, he used such cruelty, it actually made the Jews hate him more, which makes the prosecutor's opening remarks reek of false flattery.

Have a look at verse 2. When Paul was called in to Tertullus presented his case before Felix, saying, We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation.

Everywhere, in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.

Blah! Blah! Blah! Blah! Blah! Blah! Blah! Blah! It was court etiquette to open with a compliment, but the prosecutor makes Felix out as a brilliant diplomat, when in reality he was a brutal dictator.

[5 : 43] And then comes the false accusations in verses 5 to 9. He said, We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among Jews all over the world, and he's a ringleader of the Nazarene sect, and he even tried to desecrate the temple.

So he sees him, and on it goes. There are three accusations here. The first, verse 5 to see, Paul is a riot stirrer. Second, he is a sect ringleader.

And third, he is a temple desecrator, by bringing an unclean Gentile, or non-Jew, into the temple, or so they claim.

But they are all false allegations. Because back in chapter 21, we read that when the seven days were nearly over of his ceremony cleansing, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple, and they stirred up the whole crowd.

Not Paul. It was them. And what's more, down towards the bottom of the screen, they saw Paul with a Greek, a guy called Trophimus.

[6 : 53] Verse 29, they had previously seen Trophimus, the Ephesian, the city with Paul, and assumed that Paul brought him into the temple to desecrate it. And so they've twisted the truth, haven't they?

And falsely accused. And people can do that today with Christians. Maybe not to us personally, but to Christians generally. Like accusing us of being unloving, just because we disagree with their view.

You used to be able to love a person, but disagree with an opinion. But you can't do that now, can you? Or accuse us of being hypocrites when we actually confess all the time that we are sinners that need forgiveness.

Or accuse us of having blind faith when we actually have good reasons to have faith, as we'll see next week. And so how does Paul respond when he's falsely accused like this?

You know, does he get angry and tell them off? Or on the flip side, does he say nothing at all when he's asked? Well, neither. He makes a defense with integrity.

[8:01] A speaking the truth with respect. So point to verse 10. 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.

And here we see Paul's integrity. By the way, he won't use false flattery to manipulate Felix. But we still see his respect. By the way, he follows court etiquette and acknowledges Felix's position as a capable judge.

And then he defends himself against the first charge of being a riot stirrer. Verse 11. He says, 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 the crowd in the synagogues or anyone else in the city. And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me.

Paul points out that it was only 12 days ago. And so Felix can easily find witnesses to verify the truth of Paul's story, not the Jews.

[9:12] The Jews have no witnesses, no proof. And so Paul is no riot stirrer. What about the second charge of being a sect ringleader? Well, verse 14, he goes on to say, however, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the way, which they call a sect.

Here, Paul doesn't deny that he follows Jesus, does he? Sometimes when we are put on the spot by non-Christians or when they accuse Christians of being this or that, we are tempted to kind of withdraw and distance ourselves from Christianity sometimes, aren't we?

To say, oh, I don't really go to church all that often or I'm not really into this Jesus kind of stuff. But Paul doesn't do that. He admits or literally the word is confesses that he is a follower of the way.

He is a Christian. He keeps his integrity, you see. But he also points out that this is actually no new sect.

It's based on the Jewish scriptures, which the Jews themselves believe. So the rest of verse 14 says, I believe everything that is in accordance with the law and that is written in the prophets.

[10:30] Paul says, I believe the same Old Testament scriptures that these Jews do, that the law and the prophets, which, of course, point to a Messiah, a Christ, a king who would die for sin and rise again, even if those Jews refuse to see it.

But they believe the same scriptures is his point. And in fact, they have the same hope. 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.

Now, this is a reference to judgment day, like we heard in our first reading from Daniel 12, where the righteous will rise to everlasting life and the wicked will rise to everlasting judgment, to shame, contempt, punishment.

But this was mainstream Jewish hope. It's in their Old Testament scriptures, like Daniel chapter 12. Of course, Paul believed the Messiah promised in those scriptures has arrived in Jesus.

That was the difference. And so the way to receive this hope of resurrection to eternal life was by faith in this Jesus. But his point is, it's all there in the law and the prophets.

[11:48] They believe the same scriptures. They have the same hope. And so how can they accuse him of being an innovator of some new sect, a ringleader?

He stands in continuity with their own faith. In fact, he even strives to keep a clear conscience like these Jews who are accusing him to.

So verse 16, he says, So I also, there should be a word also there, strive to always keep my conscience clear before God and man.

The word also is missing from the NIV translation. But Paul literally says, So I also, like these Jews, strive to have a clear conscience before God and man.

Why? Well, knowing there will be a judgment day. At what word does verse 16 start with? So, therefore, there will be a resurrection of the righteous and the wicked on judgment day.

[12:50] So, I always strive to keep my integrity, to keep a clear conscience. You see, there will be a day when we will all have to give an account to God.

Even us Christians. Do you realize that? Of course, as Christians, we are safe from any punishment that follows for the bad stuff we've done. Because Jesus took our punishment in our place.

But, as the Bible says elsewhere, we will still have to appear before the judgment scene of Christ. So that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

And what Christians will receive is not punishment. Christ has taken it. But it's reward or not. The things we've done or not done. And so, it still matters how we live now, doesn't it?

I remember my parents went away and left my two brothers and I at home for the first time on our own. And one of my brothers, I won't say which one, suggested we have a party like they do on the TV programs when the parents go away.

[13:58] But my mum has an eye for detail. And so, no matter how well we cleaned up, I knew my mum would know and we would have to give an account. Well, no matter how well we hide our sins, God knows.

And we will still have to give an account. Yes, we will be saved from the punishment we deserve. So, we need not fear that. But we'll still have to appear before Christ's judgment seat to receive reward or not.

And so, it matters how we live now. And what's more, it's worth living righteously now. Because the resurrection of the righteous will be to everlasting life, we heard from Daniel chapter 12.

Everlasting life in the world to come. And this will be so good that it's worth living righteously now. In God's kindness, we had some great weather when we were away up in Queensland.

And one day, I was on the beach and here on my feet. And I was looking out at God's creation in the warm sun with my family beside me, thinking, how good is this?

[15:07] And then I realised that everlasting life in the world to come will be infinitely better. It's hard to imagine, isn't it? And so, because of this, it's worth living righteously now.

It's worth keeping a clear conscience before God and man. Which, for Paul, here, includes how he speaks. He makes his defence.

He speaks with integrity. Keeping a clear conscience by speaking the truth. But with gentleness and respect. Which he does again in the third charge.

Of being a temple desecrator. Verse 17. He goes on to respond to this by saying, 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.

[16:07] He says, Far from being, you know, desecrating the temple. I was ceremonially clean at the temple. There were no unclean gentiles with me.

There was no disturbance around me. So again, this is a false accusation against me. And what's more, Roman law said that those who saw the crime and first brought the charges, like those Jews from Asia, who claimed he brought Trophimus, you know, the unclean gentile into the temple.

Well, they are meant to be present in court. To swear under oath before the governor that what they saw was true. But they're not there.

Verse 19. But there are some Jews, says Paul, from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you. And bring charges if they have anything against me.

But because they're not, then technically those charges should be dropped. Or those who are here, like some of the Jews from the Sanhedrin last week, should state what crime they saw.

[17:17] So verse 20 and 21, he says, all those who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin last week. Unless it was this one thing, I shouted out as I stood in their presence, it is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am trial before you today.

That's all they can accuse Paul of doing, you see. Shouting out about his hope. And since it's a mainstream Jewish belief, then really they don't have anything to accuse him of, you see.

He's not a riot stirrer. He's not a sect ringleader. They share the same beliefs. Nor is he a temple desecrator. He is Paul's integrity.

He doesn't give his defense angrily or aggressively. Nor does he keep quiet. But he's ready to give his defense with respect, keeping a clear conscience.

For he remembers there will be a resurrection of the dead where he will have to give an account. So it matters that he speaks rightly now. And where the righteous will enjoy life eternal, in a perfect will to come.

[18:28] So it's worth speaking rightly now. And so how will Governor Felix judge now? He's had years of experience, so surely he'll recognize Paul's innocence and let him go, right?

Wrong. Because Felix is dodgy. Point three, verse 22. Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the way, adjourned the proceedings. And he says, When Lysias the commander comes, whom we met last week, I will decide your case.

He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard, but to give him some freedom and meet his friends to take care of his needs. Paul remains in chains, but is given some freedom to have visitors and receive food and blankets and so on.

And this suggests that Felix knows Paul is innocent, doesn't he? As does the fact that the Jews are unable to provide any witnesses and prove their accusations.

As does the fact that the Roman commander, Lysias, just mentioned, said that Paul is innocent of anything deserving prison. In the letter last week, that we skipped over pretty quickly, the commander writes this to Governor Felix.

[19:44] He says, There was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. That's from the Roman commander. Felix knows Paul is innocent.

And so why does Felix stall and say he's going to wait for this guy, Lysias, to come? He's already got his letter. Well, ultimately, because Felix is dodgy.

As we'll see, he doesn't want to lose favour with the Jews, and he wants to make some money on the side here. So he just puts off making the decision. But that actually means that Paul gets to evangelise him.

So verse 24, Several days later, Felix came, several days after Felix put off the decision, Felix came with his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ.

And no doubt Paul mentioned Jesus' death and resurrection and the fact that we ought to have faith in this Jesus who has proved he is Lord. And then Paul tells Felix, while we all need to have faith in Christ, verse 25, as Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, that's enough for now.

[21 : 06] You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you. Paul tactfully doesn't accuse Felix outright of lacking righteousness and self-control and deserving judgment when it comes.

But he doesn't hold back talking about these things either, does he? He doesn't remove sin and judgment from the gospel to make it more palatable as some people do today.

But he speaks the truth of the gospel, which in this situation is pretty bold when you think about it. I mean, this is the governor. He's got a reputation for ruling brutally.

He holds Paul's life in his hands. And yet, Paul doesn't hold back. How can he be so bold and unashamed?

Well, no doubt remembering last week that Jesus stands near him, but also this week, the resurrection on judgment day, which not only helps him keep his integrity, knowing that Paul will have to give an account to Christ and that everlasting life is worth speaking the whole truth, but also remembering that the wicked like Felix will face everlasting punishment.

[22 : 22] He needs to be saved. You see, Paul isn't just defending himself because he's right. He's defending himself so he can testify to Christ that people might be saved.

Remembering the resurrection on judgment day, remembering the resurrection of the wicked who will face eternal judgment, punishment, that they need to be saved.

And so he testifies to Christ, not just because Paul will answer to Christ, but so that others like Felix might be saved by Christ.

Because at the moment, Felix is rightly afraid, isn't he? After all, he has not practiced much righteousness, but as I said earlier, he's ruled brutally.

And he's not practiced much self-control, but he has lusted insatiably. His wife, Drusilla, apparently was a real beauty of the day. I don't know who it is in your generation, that kind of Hollywood actress or whatever it is, but she was also married to another man.

[23 : 28] But it didn't stop Felix from having a fair and taking her away to be his wife. And so he's right to be afraid of judgment. And his fear seems to have rightly made him want to talk with Paul more, that perhaps he might escape judgment, punishment.

But sadly, his desire for money and status wins out. Verse 26 and 7. At the same time, he was hoping that Paul, at the same time as talking to him about the gospel, he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bride.

So he sent for him frequently and talked with him. When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Festus. But because Felix wanted to grant a favour to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

Felix wanted to make some money by way of bribery, you see. And also win favour for the sake of his political career. Because Roman law said you couldn't leave someone in prison waiting for a judge's decision for more than two years.

But just before Felix left, there was a violent clash between the Gentiles and the Jews in his city. And Felix sided with the Gentiles.

[24:43] And so the Jews sent strong letters of protest to the emperor in Rome. And now the emperor has recalled Felix from Caesar. It's kind of like when countries recall an ambassador for doing a bad job.

Well, Felix is recalled for doing a bad job. And so he's no doubt worried about his political career, his status in society, and so he sucks up to the Jews who wrote those letters of protest by leaving Paul, whom they hated, in prison, even more than the two-year maximum.

You see, Felix cared more about money and status in this world than life everlasting in the world to come. And sadly, his decision will mean everlasting punishment to come.

And so if you're here this morning, or whether you're online and you're not yet a Christian, then please don't be like Felix. Don't put money and status in this world above faith in Christ now.

Because we'll all have to appear before the judgment seat on the last day and give an account. And only Christ's death can save you from punishment.

[25:54] So do believe in Jesus. Do trust in his death to save you from punishment, won't you? And for us who have, then we're to be like Paul.

By first remembering the resurrection on judgment day. And we who believe in Jesus will enjoy everlasting life in the world to come, while the wicked will face everlasting punishment to come.

We're to remember those truths so that secondly, we might be ready to give a defense when we're able. When we're falsely accused as Christians.

That we might not shrink back, but unashamedly speak the truth. But with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience. It's what Peter says in his letter, in 1 Peter chapter 3, always be prepared to give a defense, is the word literally, to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, like Paul. That they might hear the gospel, even if it means we continue to suffer for Jesus, like Paul.

[27:04] He was left in prison, remember? Now, I doubt we'll ever appear before a civil court, and have to make enough defense, as Paul did in our passage today.

But we can end up in front of our friends, or family, or work colleagues, and they can falsely accuse us of Christians doing this, or doing that, or they can falsely accuse Christians generally, of doing this, or doing that.

Or they can say things like, why go to church? It's a waste of time. Or they can say, as one of my old neighbors in Sydney said, the church is only after your money. To which I replied, no, actually, we're after your soul.

No, I didn't say that. But I did try to give a gentle defense, saying, actually, the church only expects Christians to give money. And that's only because we want to see people hear about Jesus, that they might be saved.

The point is, we're to be ready to give a defense, not for eating the last donut, but for being Christians. And we're to give this defense, not angrily, or with shame, but unashamedly, with gentleness, and respect, keeping a clear conscience.

[28:19] And we're to do so remembering the resurrection on judgment day, so that it matters how we speak, that it's worth it that we speak, so that people might be saved by what we speak.

Let's pray we would do that. Let's pray. Gracious Father, whether we or other Christians are falsely accused or belittled by those around us, we pray that you might help us to be ready to give a defense, but with respect, keeping a clear conscience like Paul, and remembering the resurrection on judgment day.

This we pray that others might be saved. In Jesus' name. Amen.