

Acts 24:1-21

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[0 : 00] I invite you to open your Bibles to Acts chapter 24. We begin in verse 1. Some of you are visiting from out of town and some of town.

! Well, we all need a reminder where we're at in the book of Acts as we continue our sermon series here. So, here is where we are. This last section, the final act of the book of Acts, began in chapter 21 as Paul entered Jerusalem to preach the gospel there, encourage the saints there on his way for his last trip, his last missionary journey to Rome.

And just a quick outline of today's sermon. We're going to, this is actually a very straightforward passage. So, I will try not to confuse us in so simple a passage. So, we're going to talk about, here's where we've been, right?

Just like set the stage. We're going to read the passage. And it's pretty self-explanatory. So, we'll take some time to explain a few details, a few key moments, and then we'll consider what it might mean for us.

And actually, that is going to be the thing where we see this very simple, very straightforward passage sort of multiply its implications for our lives. And I think that will be, overall, the main idea here is that God's word is endlessly deep and rich and has impacts on our lives that ripple outward over and over and over again.

[1 : 47] And so, without diving deeply into any specific one of those implications, what we're going to do is see how there's a cascade of implications for our lives. And even this, a very simple, a very plain passage of Scripture.

And excite our hearts, I hope, towards the whole of Scripture. Seeing that God's word is so rich and so good for his people. So, Paul has arrived in Jerusalem.

And he has almost immediately fallen into the hands of violence. Some pilgrims from Asia Minor, where he previously was, they recognize him in the temple courts.

They recognize that they don't like him because, well, they didn't like him in Ephesus either. And so, they grab him. They cause a riot. Claudius Lysias, the Roman prefect, the tribune there, who was responsible to keep the Roman peace in Jerusalem, took Paul into custody.

And then he sets him before the Jewish ruling council because he doesn't understand what the outcry against Paul is from the Jewish people. And this is sort of where the high priests, their Jewish ruling council, takes sort of center stage.

[3 : 02] They weren't part of the initial riot against him. But then, they're the ones who try him. And in fact, they are, Lysias has to remove Paul from them by force because they are starting to attack Paul, literally in their council chambers.

They then conspire with assassins to assassinate Paul. They then, as well, we're going to see them today, they're going to chase him 75 miles because Lysias has ordered that Paul be moved in the night once he discovers the plot of the assassins.

They follow to keep pressing charges against him. And that is what we're going to see today as we enter into Acts chapter 24. And so we read.

And after five days, the high priest, Ananias, came down, and we are now in Caesarea Maritima. We'll get there in a second. Came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus.

They laid before the governor their case against Paul. When he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude.

[4 : 26] But to detain you no further, I beg in your kindness to hear us briefly. For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a

ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. By examining him yourself, you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him.

The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so. When the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied, Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense.

You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem. They did not find me disputing with anyone, or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple, or in the synagogues, or in the city.

Neither can they prove to you what they now bring against me. But this I confess to you, that according to the way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the law and written in the prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

[5 : 51] So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. Now, after several years, I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings.

While I was doing this, they found me, purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia, they ought to be here before you, make an accusation, should they have anything against me.

Or else, let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them.

It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day. This is God's word for his people.

Let us be thankful to him for it. I suspect that that was pretty straightforward to you. If there were a couple details that might help us get our heads a little bit more around what's going on, here they are.

[7 : 02] First off, where exactly are we? Jerusalem was the capital of Israel, of the Jewish people. However, Rome, who was occupying the known world at this time, including Israel, they ruled over Israel from the port city of Caesarea Maritima.

It's on the Mediterranean coast. It's north of modern-day Tel Aviv. And so Lysias, the Roman tribune in Jerusalem, was not only sending Paul to Caesarea to get him away from the threat of assassins in Jerusalem, he was also kind of going up the chain of command.

This Felix, before whom they are having this trial today, he is the highest-ranking Roman official in all of Israel. And so this is going up the chain of command.

And who is this Felix? Well, like Lysias, who we saw in Jerusalem, the prefect there, Felix was a Roman official, whose main job, again, just like all the Roman officials, was to keep the peace, so that Rome could stay in charge, right?

Rome kept the peace so that they could keep control. And where Lysias was responsible for Jerusalem and its environment, Felix, his superior officer, so to speak, now oversees the entire region.

[8 : 27] Now, Felix is an interesting character. We know from ancient historians something of what his rule was like. He wasn't doing a particularly great job of keeping the peace.

There were numerous uprisings among the Jewish people, and he resorted frequently to violent suppression of dissent.

And the Jewish people disliked him more than other Roman officials, whom they disliked all of them. They were the occupying force. So when Tertullus begins with these really flattering words, first off, they're not even true.

Like, they were not enjoying peace, as he said. Like, this is false flattery. It's not even like a positive spin on something neutral. It's just flat-out lies. One writer put it this way.

Tertullus begins with some careful flattery, designed to make a favorable impression upon the governor. Felix is praised for the peace that extends to the province and for the reforms which he had introduced.

[9 : 37] But that was simply propaganda. In fact, Felix's administration had been characterized by unrest. And the relations between Rome and the Jews had continued to deteriorate.

So Felix is charged with keeping the Roman peace in all Judea. And he's not doing a very good job of it. And so, more than most Roman officials, he's paranoid about uprisings, on the lookout for

anything that smells like a disturbance.

And he's been known to violently suppress dissent. And so, now we see Tertullus' strategy here. Right?

He's lacking any actual evidence. That's what Paul points out at the end. They don't have evidence. They don't even have witnesses who were there. Right? That's Paul's defense. Tertullus is building on the hope of exploiting Felix's paranoia.

That's what's happening in this passage. That's the strategy. And Tertullus is a Greek name. Likely, the high priest hired a Roman lawyer to work in this Roman court.

[10:52] One writer put it this way. Tertullus' endeavor was to put Paul on the same level as previous revolutionaries with the hope that in his insensitivity to the issues, Felix would act in his usual manner simply on the basis of their testimony.

And his usual manner was to violently suppress threats of dissent. And so, that's why Tertullus lays out the charges the way that he does here. And it's interesting what the charges are.

Look at verses 5 and 6. We have found this man a plague. One who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world. That's number one.

Number two is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. And number three, he even tried to profane the temple. And so, what Tertullus is trying to do here, because their qualm against Paul, right, he hasn't done anything against Rome.

Nothing that the Romans will care about. The high priests hate him because he's preaching Christ, which Rome doesn't care about. If they want Rome to kill him because they can't execute Paul on their own, being occupied by the Roman army, they need to show somehow to Felix that he's a threat to Rome.

[12:20] Because Felix doesn't care about the temple. Felix doesn't care about the Jewish religion. And so, what he's doing here, he says, oh, well, he's the one who stirs up riots. Oh, well, that matters to Rome.

He doesn't care about his theology. He cares about riots. However, he's not guilty of that crime. And they bring no evidence of it.

They're simply playing on the hope of exploiting Felix's suspicions, his paranoia. And it's that that Paul replies against and says, sort of in a four-part response, says, there's no evidence of any of these things.

You don't need to suspect me. The structure of his reply looks something like, verses 11 to 13, I didn't make a disturbance. Verses 14 through 16, I'm not even violating the Jewish law because the way that I follow the way of Christ, that's the fulfillment of the Jewish law.

I'm being more Jewish than these people. Verses 17 to 19, right, there was no temple desecration. I was there purified.

[13:37] And then finally, verses 20 and 21, there's not even proof here, just accusation. They don't even have witnesses who are there to begin with.

And so Paul hadn't even begun, right? Like, when he gets to the temple, he's doing a purification ritual. He's helping some men fulfill their Nazarite vow so that he can ingratiate himself to the Jewish people and get a hearing for his preaching.

He hasn't even begun preaching. How could he then have been riling up people? It was someone else. It was Jews from Asia who began the tumult. And so Paul is pointing out not only that they are the only people who could be the witnesses, but they are in fact the people who should be on trial themselves.

So that's basically the explanation of a pretty straightforward passage. There's some historical context understanding who Felix is and what he's like helps us understand a little bit more of the strategy behind the accusation.

What does this have to do with you and with me, with our lives? As I said, even in so simple a passage, and this is really the thing that I want us to recognize today, is that the application to our lives and the influence the Lord's word has over us multiplies and expands.

[15:13] The more we attend to his word, the more we will see. And in a passage like this one, we see less taught explicitly to us, directly, but we also see here an example of so many of the wonderful principles of scripture brought forth for us to see.

It's a living example as the Lord leads Paul in his defense before a hostile world. And so this sets for us an example.

We'll start at the shallow end of the pool and move our way towards the deeper end. How's that sound? First, we see an example, really a contrasting example.

The way Tertullus and the way Paul address Felix is really interesting and very, it's a huge contrast, right? Verses two through four, that's where we see Tertullus address Felix with, we've already said it, this incredible false flattery.

Since through you we enjoy much peace, which is not true. And since by your foresight, which he had none, most excellent Felix, which he wasn't, Caesar's going to remove him in just a couple years.

[16:36] And in fact, that's actually part of the next passage is how Felix is removed for being incompetent. Reforms are being made in this nation. No reforms. In every way and everywhere except in no way and nowhere, we accept this with all gratitude.

The Jews hated him. But to detain you no further, I beg you, you in your kindness, hear us briefly. And again, he follows that up with zero evidence.

His argument stands entirely on flattery and accusation. No substance. Compare that with Paul's introduction.

Verse 10. He simply says, knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense. He begins with some respectful words and immediately provides substance.

Right? And we see here the distinction, like these complete foils of one another. Huge contrast. Between the flatterer and the simple, plain-spoken truth.

[17:48] It reminds me of Proverbs chapter 26, verse 28, where we see a flattering mouth works ruin. Friends, let's not be those who would rest on flattery or manipulation of any kind.

Christians are a people of the truth and so let us rest on truth. That we indeed have great truth to proclaim.

Like I said, we started at the shallow end of the pool. Walk a little deeper. Look at verse 14. Paul says, this I confess to you that according to the way which they call a sect.

Friends, this is, this teaches us how to read the Bible. I worship the God of our fathers believing everything laid down by the law and written in the prophets.

What is he saying there? He's saying that as he follows Jesus, he is not doing something new.

[19:05] As he follows Jesus, he is faithfully following the entirety of the Hebrew scriptures.

Which changes the way we open up the Old Testament and read it. Because the Old Testament, the Hebrew scriptures, Genesis through Malachi, is Christian scripture.

Because it points to Christ. And in fact, Jesus Christ himself said that in John chapter 5. He said, if you believed Moses, you would believe me for he wrote of me.

Now, Jesus and Paul both know that the name Jesus of Nazareth, it does not appear anywhere between Genesis and Malachi.

How then can we say that it's about him? How can we say that it's about him? from the very first pages of scripture, the word is anticipating someone.

[20:19] Someone to crush the head of the serpent. Someone to be the seed of the woman.

Someone to be the prophet after Moses. Someone to be the king who sits on David's throne.

Someone to initiate a new covenant. The whole of the Old Testament is there anticipating just as we enter in this season of Advent.

He's anticipating someone is coming. Someone is coming to do all these things. He is going to make, forge for his people a great salvation.

And Paul is saying, he's come. He's come. And not only is it forward looking, the whole scripture, the whole of the Old Testament is looking forward to this one.

But everywhere we look, everywhere we read in the Old Testament, what do we see? We see a God of glory and holiness and grace acting on his people's behalf.

[21:32] And that is precisely who appears in Bethlehem on Christmas Day. and so when we open up the scriptures from beginning to end, it is a book about not me and what I need to do and who I am first.

But chiefly, it is a book about him. And so this teaches us how to read our Bibles. Let's wait a little further into the pool.

There is an example here of Paul under duress. Last week we said Paul's having a bad week. He is under a lot of stress.

This is not the fruitful, in his eyes, season of his ministry. So the Swiss reformer, Rudolf Gualther, observed this about this passage.

So Christ prophesied about these things, that these things will take place, that his apostle will suffer. So that we would be less troubled if at any time something similar happens to us too.

[22 : 59] As the apostles suffered all kinds of persecution and adversities, so they teach by their example what is fitting for us to do when we are tested by persecutions and temptations.

This is the chief use and purpose of all this present matter and of the entire story that follows. And we know, friends, that Christ promised, Matthew chapter 10, a disciple is not above his teacher nor a servant above his master.

It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher and the servant like his master. they have called the master of the house Beelzebul. How much more will they malign those of his household?

Christ has promised if you follow him there will be some suffering in your life on account of that. But he has also promised that it is worth it.

Because even before he said that in Matthew 10, he said in Matthew chapter 5, Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

[24 : 09] Isn't that precisely what's happening to Paul here? He says rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets and today we see the apostle who were before you.

Gualther's point here is saying that Christ has prepared us not only by this prophecy but also by showing us examples like Paul of faithful suffering for the cause of Christ.

Now he says it's the chief use and purpose of this episode in Acts and I don't disagree with Gualther it's a valuable implication of this passage as we mount up more and more as we see as we look as we dive into it and more and see friends scripture is rich layer upon layer of meaning and implication for our lives.

Even the great apostle Paul suffered didn't win all his battles so to speak and suffered for the cause of Christ and here's an encouraging thought the church was not undone because here we are and here's what's even more encouraging Paul was not undone he stands in glory today and that's huge great is his reward in heaven and so will too be his people's reward in heaven because our inheritance!

inheritance isn't streets of gold it's Christ himself so we see that Christ preserves his people and prospers his own purposes for their good and for his glory and so we can suffer for Christ if necessary after the example of Paul the Lutheran theologian this is a good name Wolfhard Pannenberg that's a good theologian's name asks the question because I think we all ask the question why does God allow this to happen here's a partial answer he says he keeps watch until the time of judgment first he waits so that by his long suffering and patience he might call the sinful to repentance keep that in the back of your head we're going to revisit it soon second he might sift and purify the devout showing them that a very different blessedness follows after this life than is found here on earth it's a partial answer to the question of suffering but another thing we see modeled in this passage as we continue to explore its implications for our lives is don't suffer needlessly

[27 : 09] Christ does not desire that we suffer needlessly we don't seek it out and we don't submit unjustly to it if we do not have to we see here by Paul's example that Christians may mount for them a solid themselves a solid defense and that's exactly what he does now I'm no historian of Roman legal procedure but those who are say that Paul gives a good defense here he demonstrates that they had no actual evidence just accusations and actually by Roman parliamentary rule apparently Felix should have immediately dismissed it on the basis that the actual witnesses were not there not only that he's pointing out who in fact were the culprits it's a good defense strategy as well so absolutely Christ promises blessings to those who suffer for his name's sake but he doesn't desire that we suffer needlessly but in another wrinkle as Paul is eager to declare not guilty not guilty he does say guilty on one charge because another point of application in our lives we see the example here of being bold to declare

Christ right the charges are verses 5 and 6 we have found this man a plague one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world too is a ringleader!
of the sect of the Nazarene in 3 verse 6 he even tried to profane the temple Paul defends against the accusations he says not guilty they did not find me verse 12 disputing with anyone or stirring up

a crowd either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city verse 13 not guilty neither can they prove to you what they now bring against me but then he does plead guilty verse 14 but this I confess I confess that according to the way which they call a sect I worship the God of our fathers and so while he is not guilty of the things they have accused him of he actually is guilty of one of them and he's eager to put that out in front are you eager am

I eager to let people know about Jesus we see not only boldness wrapped up in that we see something else the fact that he's not guilty of anything else points us to this Paul is himself obedient to God's word and God's ways I'm thinking in particular of 1st Peter chapter 2 this is not just found in 1st Peter chapter 2 because 1st Peter wasn't written yet obviously but this it's a summary statement that we see of a principle we see throughout scripture in 1st Peter chapter 2 verse 12 Peter says keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers they may see your good deeds and glorify

God on the day of visitation is that not exactly what Paul is doing is that not exactly the kind of life that he is living out and that they are falsely accusing him when they speak against Paul as evildoers all that's here to see are Paul's good deeds because he's living for and he's living towards his God who is good I want to mention one last implication potential application of this as we again dig deeper and think more thoroughly friends

[32 : 11] I just I so want for you to see how scripture is endlessly rich and deep how even in a passage like this a very simple and straightforward one how we see even if it's not explicitly taught right because Paul's not talking to us he's talking to Felix but we see modeled for us so much of the Christian life and so many principles of scripture and so much truth being lived out spend some time with your Bible and meditate over it you will see things God that you don't see on a first glance as we've been I don't like my analogy anymore shallow into deep end of the pool but like as we've been going through this list and seeing application and implication multiplied to our lives friends

God's word is good and rich indeed let's meet him there we could probably go on and on and on because my eyes are not clear enough to see everything I want to leave us with one more and again this is not directly explicitly taught from this passage but we see it happening so let us consider it for our own lives this passage gives us by way of model by way of example a way that we might honor our Lord as we become peacemakers let me explain what I'm talking about we've already said that the legal strategy that Tertullus is using here he's trying to he doesn't care about Rome Tertullus hates Rome or at least the people who hired Tertullus we're not exactly sure who he is I said he's probably a Roman lawyer that's everybody's guess we don't know Ananias does not care about Rome Ananias doesn't like Rome Ananias would love if revolutionaries freed Israel right because then well the high priest would have even more power Israel would be free his people wouldn't be under the thumb of Rome they wouldn't be paying tribute all these things right they are not interested in Rome keeping control but in this moment they use Rome and say oh yes yes we want to keep the Roman peace because it's advantageous to them to attack Paul they don't care if Paul has anything to do with Rome what they care about is that he is chipping away at their influence their power among the people of God but they attack him on this other thing because it's well it's what they have available to them now that might not seem like a thing that has very much to do with you and with me but it does how often not my marriage of course but maybe yours has one spouse been upset at another spouse it's like why are you so upset this is not a big deal and you realize it's spill over from somewhere else mad about this thing making you pay for it with this thing that's exactly what's happening here because this is where they can hurt him they're mad about Christ but they can hurt him with Rome so that's where they'll go and how often do I do that and how often do you we should beware of this tendency in ourselves with our family members you know spouses or whatever but also people at work people at school who you know do you find yourself nitpicking at someone finding fault with everything because you don't like this one thing about them does it spill over into everything else that you do everything else that you think about that person if you have the eyes to see that right that we're kind of tertullus in this moment that we can be mad about one thing hurt about one thing and so hit somewhere else if we have the eyes to see that about ourselves we can be peacemakers in a unique way and Jesus said blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God not that we earn adoption into the family of God by making peace with other people that's not how that phrase works in the ancient near east what it means is that you are someone who follows after the example of that person that's why Jesus said to the pharisees you know you're of your father the devil not that they were literally his offspring but

that they were walking in his ways and when Jesus says blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God that means that he's saying of us when we make peace we are walking after the God who makes peace and here's one tool in the peacemaking toolkit as we follow after the God who makes peace and ultimately the God who makes peace is the exact opposite of Tertullus and that inclination like Tertullus in our own hearts the God who makes peace does not see something that upsets him and God is more righteously indignant over our sins than Tertullus was indignant!

over Paul or more righteously indignant over our sins than I am about somebody who bothers me and instead of striking us for the blow himself that!

[39 : 18] is the peace making God we follow and so friends we follow after a God who loves to the uttermost who makes peace and who gives us a rich word that in paying attention to it we might see layer upon layer depth upon depth testimony to his goodness and so friends let us be thankful to him let's pray our great God and Father will you shape in us a desire for your word and might by your spirit in us open our eyes to treasure your word that we might see you better and walk after you more faithfully for our good because that's how you've made us to be and for your glory that all the world might see that you are good and you do good through your people we pray this in the name of Christ Amen