

PAUL'S HOPE IN THE RESURRECTION

Acts 24:1-27

Key Verse: 24:15

"...and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked."

In chapter 23, the Risen Christ stood beside Paul in the Roman barracks and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." The Risen Christ did not apologize to St. Paul because he suffered for the gospel. The Risen Christ planted courageous faith in his heart. It was the power of God. The Risen Christ also gave him clear direction, and a promise that he would testify about him in Rome. We may not be in a Roman barracks, but each of us faces times of discouragement. Each of us loses a sense of direction. We must listen to the words of the Risen Christ. He plants courage in our hearts. He give us clear direction and the peace of God.

Today, in chapter 24, Paul stands on trial before Governor Felix. Paul did not try to save himself. Instead, he sought to please God. He also shepherded Governor Felix with the gospel truth. We can learn Paul's hope in the resurrection of the dead and his shepherd heart for one lost person. May God bless our study today.

First, Paul was imprisoned without a charge (1-13).

As we studied, Paul was taken to Caesarea by 470 Roman soldiers. It was a spectacular rescue, demonstrating that God was with Paul. Paul was kept under guard in Herod's palace. Then, five days after Paul's arrival, his accusers—the high priest Ananias, together with some elders and a lawyer named Tertullus—came to Caesarea and brought their charges against Paul. Tertullus must have been a famous trial lawyer, like Perry Mason or Johnnie Cochrane. His opening remarks flatter to the point of nausea. He said, "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. But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly" (2-4). Tertullus spoke eloquently without any contents. There was no basis to charge Paul.

Look at verses 5-8, including the footnote. "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 and wanted to judge him according to our law. But the commander, Lysias, came and with the use of much force snatched him from our hands and ordered his accusers to come before you. By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him." When we look at this statement carefully, we notice that there are no facts mentioned. There is no date, place or specific action, but only groundless accusations, laced with loaded words, such as "ringleader." What is more, Tertullus implies that if Lysias had not acted ruthlessly, the whole matter could have been settled peacefully in Jerusalem. In fact, they would have killed Paul. As Tertullus spoke, the Jews joined in the accusations (9). They lied boldly and eloquently, like their father, the devil (Jn 8:44).

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. 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” (10-13). Paul spoke based on facts. He had done nothing more in Jerusalem than go to the temple to worship God. Now he was branded as a dangerous criminal. As Jesus had been slandered and falsely accused, Paul was also. It should not surprise God’s servants to be hated by the world. These days some JBF leaders are being rejected in their high schools. It is not because they did something wrong, but because the devil opposes God’s work. Anyone who stands on God’s side will be hated and persecuted. Jesus described this, saying: “They hated me without reason” (Jn 15:25).

Second, Paul’s faith in Jesus and in the word of God (14).

If Paul was only thinking about getting out of the situation, he could have stopped speaking after verse 13. But he did not. In verses 14-16, Paul continues with a personal testimony. In doing so, he reveals his faith in Jesus and in the word of God. Then he speaks of his hope in the resurrection of the dead.

Look at verse 14. “However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets...” Paul worshiped God, the God of Israel. He worshiped God as a follower of the Way. Here, “the Way” refers to Jesus. Jesus said in John 14:6, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Jesus is the way to God. Without Jesus no one can come to God. When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Mk 15:38). This curtain represented the wall of separation between God and men because of sin. Jesus died for our sins. Now we can come to God and have a personal relationship with the living God through the blood of Jesus. Hebrews 10:20-22 says, “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith...”

When Paul said that he was a follower of the Way, he added, “which they call a sect.” This was a derogatory expression of the Jewish leaders to discredit Christianity. They wanted to shame Christians and make them powerless and useless. It was the devil’s temptation. Jesus had warned his disciples, “If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels” (Mk 8:38). Peter said, “However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name” (1Pe 4:16). Paul was not intimidated by the devil’s pressure. Paul clearly identified himself as a follower of the Way, that is, Jesus Christ, though corrupted said it was a sect. Paul said in Romans 1:16, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...” We must not be ashamed of Jesus before corrupted people. We must identify ourselves boldly as Jesus’ disciples. We must continue to sing “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name,” at the airport as we pray for world mission journeys. We must boldly go fishing on the campuses of our universities. We must boldly pray in Jesus’ name whenever we eat in the school cafeteria.

Paul also confessed his absolute faith in the Law and the Prophets, that is, in the Bible. Paul had discovered that the Law and the Prophets pointed to Christ and found fulfillment in Christ. Paul’s faith in Christ was not based on his personal experience alone, or even on the life and ministry of Jesus alone. It was rooted in the Scriptures. Paul had mastered the faith that Jesus really wanted his disciples to have. Jesus had said in Luke 24:44, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” Jesus really wants

us to believe, "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1Co 15:3,4).

We can understand this faith better when we think about Father Abraham. One time he fought a costly war to rescue his nephew Lot. Abraham paid a high price to shepherd one person to the end. But it seemed to be a losing venture after ten years of investment. Abraham felt a sense of loss and he became somewhat fatalistic. Then God took Abraham outside and showed him the stars. God said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be." Genesis 15:6 says, "Abram believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness." When we believe God's promise instead of focusing on the present situation or the visible reality alone, we can receive righteousness from God; we can have the faith that pleases God. How we feel is not really important. What kind of situation we are in is not really important. What pleases God is that we believe the word of God simply because it is the word of God. May God help us believe the word of God like Paul did.

We only thank God for our missionaries in the Middle East. Because of strict government controls, they cannot go fishing on the campuses. They cannot even go onto the campuses. If they try to share the gospel openly, they will be deported. For them, it is a very real possibility that they may invest their whole lives in the mission without seeing any visible result. One woman missionary in a Muslim country cannot go out of the house without her husband. She must stay in her house all day long every day. Only her dear son is with her. It seems she can do nothing. But she has faith in God's word. She believes that one day God will bring the gospel light to those living in darkness. She realizes that she may not see it with her eyes. But she believes it. So she struggles every day to overcome discouragement. She studies Arabic and trains her son to be a missionary after her. She said, "If not my generation, then my son's generation, or my grandson's generation."

We pray that God may make North America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Sometimes this seems irrational or unbelievable. But our faith is rooted in the promise of God (Ex 19:6; 1 Pet 2:9). God is pleased by our faith. We must have a personal promise of God as well. God told Abraham, "I will make you into a great nation...I will make your name great" (Gen 12:2). We must believe God's victory for us in this world and final victory in heaven. One young man is old enough to have finished a master's degree, but is only halfway to a bachelor's degree. He speaks well. But he lives under the power of sin. May God help him believe one promise of God from his heart and experience God's victory. We have ups and downs in life. Our world is ever changing. But our faith in Jesus based on the Scriptures must be constant. We can have this faith when we study the word of God deeply and diligently.

Third, Paul's hope in the resurrection (15-21).

Look at verse 15. "...and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked." When we believe the word of God, we can have hope in the resurrection. This hope began to be realized when God raised Jesus from the dead. God proved that he is the almighty, living God and that Jesus is the living Son of God (Ro 1:4). Jesus said in John 5:28,29, "...a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned." Everyone will be raised from the dead, both the righteous and the wicked. The Apostles Creed clearly says that Christians believe in "the resurrection of the body."

However, the devil deceives people to think that death is the end of everything. Hebrews 2:15 says, "...and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." The fear of death makes people fatalistic. The fear of death makes people despair. The fear of death makes people powerless. Hedonism and moral corruption are rooted in the fear of death. Selfishness is rooted in the fear of death. But Jesus taught that death is like sleeping (Jn 11:11). When life on earth ends, our souls go to the Lord and our bodies go to the dust. In God's right time, our bodies will be raised. But they will not be like they were before. They will be spiritual bodies worthy of the kingdom of God. They will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual (1Co 15:42-43). There will be no hair loss, wrinkles, deformities, or pot bellies. We will bear the glorious image of Christ within and without. When we have this hope, we can live the way God wants us to live.

Paul concluded in verse 16, "So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man." Our deeds will be remembered. All pains borne for the work of God will be recognized. God will crown us with glory and give us eternal life in the kingdom of God. When Paul had this hope, he did his best to live before God with a clear conscience. He lived to please God and to be a blessing to others every day. Resurrection hope is not just a theory. Resurrection hope leads us to struggle hard to keep our consciences clear before God and man. Resurrection hope helps us resist the hedonism of the culture of death. Instead of despairing, we can study hard to get all A's. We can joyfully teach the Bible one-to-one to our friends and classmates. We can live a pure moral life, trusting in God's future blessing. We can teach our children the word of God and pray for them like Monica, Augustine's mother. We can forsake worldly treasures to go as missionaries to a foreign country. May God help each of us to have resurrection hope and strive to keep our consciences clear, living before God each day.

Fourth, Paul's one-to-one Bible study with Felix (22-27).

After hearing Paul, Governor Felix adjourned the proceedings, saying he would wait for Lysias before making his decision. Most likely he was stalling. It was clear that Paul was innocent, but Felix had no strength to do what was right. A lifetime of moral compromise had rendered him powerless to make tough decisions. He remained indecisive, caught in a human dilemma. Several days later he brought his wife and they listened to Paul speak about faith in Christ Jesus. It was a one-to-one Bible study between St. Paul and Governor Felix. Felix seemed to like Bible study. He found the truth of God refreshing to his soul. At the same time, he must have liked Paul, sensing his shepherd's heart. When Paul had hope in the resurrection, he was free indeed. He was free to have a shepherd heart for Felix. Paul taught Felix joyfully.

Look at verse 25. "As Paul discoursed on 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.'" Felix was convicted of his sin. He should have repented. But he postponed until a more convenient time. He is like some who study the Bible until it touches their sin problem. Then they say, "Don't call me. I will call you when I am ready." The gospel requires a personal decision to repent and believe in Jesus. Parents cannot do this for their children. Shepherds cannot do this for their sheep. Sooner or later, each person must decide to repent and accept Jesus. Those who postpone this decision run a great risk. We don't know if we will live through tomorrow. Our hearts may harden beyond control. Felix lived in indecision for two years. Then his indecision became a rejection of Christ. Without Christ he could not escape the fires of hell.

In this passage we learn that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. Let's believe this Bible truth and live before God with a clear conscience as shepherds for our people.