

A Study of the Acts of the Apostles
Week Thirty
Acts 24:5-25:8

Day One

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 6 and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him. 7 [We wanted to judge him according to our own Law. 7 "But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands, 8 ordering his accusers to come before you.] 8 By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him." 9 The Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.

v. 5 – Tertullus’ charges were vague. One can almost hear him and the Jews whining today, even though this took place 2,000 years ago! It is true that the Jews did riot in some places, but that was their choice, not by Paul’s instigation. Paul had shown great respect for his people and customs, although he was working with the Gentiles. The translation here isn’t that strong, for Tertullus didn’t call Paul a troublemaker, but rather a pestilence. And he portrayed Paul as a ringleader, which in this case was a military term.

v. 6 – Tertullus lied at the proceedings, for Paul did no such thing. Don’t expect your enemies to “play fair,” for the rules of kingdom of darkness are lying, cheating and stealing:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10).

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44-45).

v. 7 – This verse isn’t in the NIV and is in brackets in the NAS translation, for most believe that the verse was added to later manuscripts. This should cause you no concern. The same Spirit who wrote the Bible has preserved the Bible. For a book that is thousands of years old, written by many different men, and translated many times over, it is remarkably intact and consistent.

This verse would be consistent with the other lies that Tertullus told, for Luke did not portray the military commander as a man of violence. It was the Jews who were violent; Lysias did his job and did it well. Once again we see that evil people will lie and not give it a second thought.

vs. 8&9 – How in the world did they think these flimsy charges would hold up in a court of law? Because they said it was true didn’t make it true! And they had absolutely no

evidence or corroboration from any third parties. You can see why the commander was confounded, for he could not figure out what Paul did wrong. But God was working in this situation to get Paul to Rome, which was part of his purpose. **Are you fretting over some situation over which you have no control and which perhaps doesn't make any sense? Then put your trust in God that He is working in ways you cannot see to get you where you need to be.**

Day Two

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. 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.

v. 10 – Paul spoke in his own defense, but began without the flattery that the Jews had employed. He spoke simply: Felix had governed for years and now Paul had a chance to make his defense but also preach the gospel to that lost Roman official. **Do you take every chance you get to preach the gospel? I don't always and I should. I think I will commit to do so more regularly. Will you join me in this commitment?**

v. 11 – This had been an eventful 12 days for Paul! But remember that he had been prophetically warned that he would be bound and delivered to the Gentiles. That is exactly what had happened. In the meantime, the Lord appeared to him and told him not to worry or be fearful. **Are you worrying or anxious? This isn't just a bad habit; it's sin, for we were commanded not to do either.**

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7).

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?" (Matthew 6:25-26).

Are you worrying? Anxious? Are you a worrier? Then you need to determine why and how it is that you can't trust God more in the situation that you are in.

vs. 12&13 – I'm glad Paul was on our side. He was a formidable opponent to Christians as Saul, but a formidable ally as Paul. Paul didn't speak long, easily refuting the charges and putting the ball back in the Jews' court, so to speak. I'm sure Paul was aware of Jesus' words:

"But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all

on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But **make up your mind not to worry beforehand** how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By **standing firm** you will gain life (Luke 21:12-19).

Notice Jesus said that you can decide not to worry, and that you can decide to stand firm. Will you do those two things today: not worry and stand firm? No matter what you are facing, you can determine to act in a way that is consistent with your faith.

Day Three

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, 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. 16 So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man. 17 "After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings.

v. 14 – Notice Paul didn't say he was a Christian. That was a term that non-believers used. Paul referred to the Way. In modern terms, that would be unacceptable to refer to *the* Way for the common thinking is that there are *many* ways to God. But Paul spoke to the Jews who thought *they* had *the* Way, but he was telling them that they too needed Jesus. The spirit of our age is one of tolerance except for anyone who claims that there is only one way to God. Then those who are tolerant become intolerant. **Do you see an inconsistency here? How can someone want to be known as tolerant but then be intolerant with those who hold a certain position?** The truth is, those who are tolerant are really trying to undermine and diminish the importance of the work of the cross.

Paul tied his Christian faith with the faith and message of the Old Testament. We are not New Testament people; we are Bible people. I don't just preach and teach the New Testament but the Old as well, because, like Paul, I believe everything that agrees with the Law and the Prophets. **Do you?**

v. 15 – So the doctrine of the resurrection wasn't initiated with Jesus; it was a belief among the Jews prior to Jesus coming. Yet they were committed to the doctrine, but offended by the person of Jesus. This proves you can hold the correct doctrine but still miss the Way, for the Way isn't a doctrine but a person.

It doesn't really matter much what you believe. It is what you do with what you believe that makes all the difference. These Jews believed correctly that there would be a resurrection, but ending up opposing God. Be careful that you don't do the same.

v. 16 – The Jews accused Paul of trying to start another sect, like the Pharisees and Saducees. In their thinking, this would undermine their society, making Paul a threat just like Jesus had been. For the Jews had accused Jesus of being seditious before Pilate, and now they were trying the same strategy with Paul. The problem was that they had no evidence. But later Rome would reach its own conclusion that the Christians were undermining the Empire and treat them as traitors. But Paul made one simple statement: his conscience was clear. He had done nothing to dishonor God or to manipulate or mistreat men. Therefore he stood before the tribunal with nothing to hide or fear, for his conscience was clear.

Many believe that conscience is the remnant of the image of God that is in every person. There are some who aren't serving God, yet when they do something wrong, they say that their conscience bothers them. They are in touch with some standard of righteousness within themselves. At that time, their conscience will either accuse or defend them.

Now people can ignore their conscience and it eventually seems to stop "talking" to such individuals. And our conscience isn't infallible, for we may do something wrong and have no pangs of conscience. But when we educate our conscience, then we can "feel bad" doing something today that our conscience would not have reacted to in the past. Since our conscience isn't infallible, we should do remember what Paul wrote:

My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me (1 Corinthians 4:4).

I like the concept that our conscience is a remnant of the image of God that is in each person. Paul described this in another way, still referring to the context of conscience:

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them (Romans 2:14-16).

Are you educating your conscience? Do you pay attention to what your conscience is trying to tell you? Be aware of what is going on inside you, for it may be God trying to get your attention!

v. 17 – Paul then continued with his presentation, describing his reasons for coming to Jerusalem. Notice that he still referred to the Jews as "my people." He loved them and would have done anything to reach them for Jesus. But his purpose was to go the Gentiles and he never had effective ministry among "his people."

I speak the truth in Christ — I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit— I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the

covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen (Romans 9:1-5).

You cannot choose your purpose. It is assigned to you, along with the places where you will be most effective. Are you trying to function in a place of your choosing or have you released your purpose so that God can direct you to places of His choosing?

Day Four

18 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. 19 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. 20 Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin— 21 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.'" 22 Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. "When Lysias the commander comes," he said, "I will decide your case." 23 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.

vs. 18-21 – Paul quickly reiterated his actions that led to the tumult. Paul was direct and to the point, not using a lot of words that could be used against him. The Jewish leaders did not witness any of the disturbance caused by the Asian Jews, so they were bringing second-hand charges. And Paul then challenged those leaders to bring charges against him with evidence.

But Paul was correct: the issues were doctrinal and not behavioral. Paul understood that the Jews believed in the resurrection, but then denied the possibility that Jesus had been raised. Paul had seen the risen Lord on the Damascus, so he knew that the doctrine was true and that Jesus was the first fruits of that resurrection doctrine. The Jews held to the possibility of the doctrine, but denied it in actuality.

v. 22 – Felix was well acquainted with Christian doctrine and he put off the accusers, deferring a decision to some future date. I would imagine that he wanted to hear what the commander had to say. Yet he already had Lysias' letter, so I'm not sure what more the commander could say that would shed light on the case. Perhaps Felix was indecisive and wanted to find some way to placate the Jews and still do his job.

v. 23 – Felix gave Paul some freedoms, realizing that he wasn't a violent threat, but rather a religious prisoner. Paul was more under protective custody than he was under arrest. But Paul had to wait, knowing full well that he was innocent. It must have been hard for that active apostle to sit still. I wonder how he used the time?

How do you use your time when your schedule is interrupted and you have no power to change it? I always carry a day's work with me just in case I get delayed as I travel. But I am also learning that God will bring us into seasons where the activity ceases and things quiet down. When that happens, it's important that we use that time to rest, reflect and refocus. Don't be in too much of a hurry to emerge from those periods where your circumstances beyond your control cause you to stop or diminish your activity.

Day Five

24 Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. 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." 26 At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him. 27 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.

v. 24 – Drusilla was Herod the Great's daughter (Herod was king when Jesus was born). She ended up marrying Romans since her father had been a Roman politician, but seemed to have maintained her loyalty to her Jewish heritage (Herod was half Jewish). It is unclear why Felix would summon Paul if he was already aware of the Christian faith as mentioned in verse 22 above. Some translators believe that he wasn't aware and that verse 22 should be translated that he was about to research it and become aware. Here we see Paul preaching the gospel in a situation that only his chains could have produced. God was fulfilling Paul's purpose, which was to bear witness to the Gentiles and their leaders. Yet the Lord had to take Paul to prison so that he could have those opportunities.

God is in control. Do you believe that in your own life? Can you see the truth of the famous verse?

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

If you can't see that verse, can you have faith that it's true?

v. 25 – Felix heard the Word and trembled, overcome with fear. Instead of responding to the message, however, he put Paul off so he could re-compose himself and not have to respond to the call that God was issuing him. We must not delay in doing God's will, for we have no promise that tomorrow we will be here. I am watching the scenes from New Orleans and the flood there. Today an Indonesian airline crashed into a residential area. I just received news that a 54-year-old colleague has suffered a stroke. If your heart is moving you to do something today, do it!

Felix said that he would send for Paul when it was convenient. That is the slogan for many people: "I will serve God when it is convenient." God doesn't exist for our convenience, we exist to do His will as He commands.

v. 26 – When Felix re-composed himself, he sent for Paul frequently, hoping to obtain a bribe. This man hoped to turn his encounter with God and God's man into a money-making occasion. What a rascal! What a scoundrel! And of course, we see that Paul gave him nothing but the truth of the gospel. Paul was a man of principle; Felix a man without the same. One man went on to impact the world; the other disappeared into history, his only mention as a man who missed his opportunity to get right with God. If it wasn't for Paul, we wouldn't even know who Felix was.

The memory of the righteous will be a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot (Proverbs 10:7).

v. 27 – This went on for two years. Poor Paul! He must have been struggling under arrest for all that time. In the end, Felix wanted to do the Jews a favor, so he left Paul in prison. Why? Not for the reasons he thought, for God now wanted Paul to preach to the new governor, Festus. There were times when God had Paul speak to the masses; then at other times, to only one or two. Either way, Paul was a faithful and obedient servant.

Can you be as content with doing the little things as well as the big? The insignificant as well as the significant? Working with the individual as well as the large crowd?

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much" (Luke 16:10).

Can you be trusted to be faithful with little?

Day Six

25:1 Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, 2 where the chief priests and Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul. 3 They urgently requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way. 4 Festus answered, "Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. 5 Let some of your leaders come with me and press charges against the man there, if he has done anything wrong."

v. 1 – Notice that Festus went "up" to Jerusalem. Even though Caesarea is northwest of Jerusalem, you still went "up" to Jerusalem no matter from what direction you approached. Feel free to disagree, but this represents a bit of arrogance that any one city could be that important. But in the minds of the Jews and many of the believers, Jerusalem was still the "holy city." But today, the holy city is the people of God, for that is where God dwells. I am not a big believer in a holy place, whether it be a piece of ground, a building or a city. Are you?

v. 2 – Paul now had to go through the whole process again of charges and defense. But of course, it would have been even harder to prove these so-called charges after two years had passed. But that didn't prevent the Jews in their hatred for Paul and the Way from pursuing their case in the courts. Don't ever underestimate the staying power of stupidity and wickedness. These men were willing to wait and resort to any means to kill Paul. And these men were the rulers in the "holy city." Do you see what I mean? There is no such thing as a holy city; only holy men and women who live in a city.

v. 3 – These holy men and leaders lied to Festus, pretending to want Paul back in Jerusalem. What they really wanted was to ambush Paul and kill him. I presume that the men who had taken a vow not to eat until Paul was killed were dead by this time, for they had not accomplished their task and would have died of starvation. Of course I'm being facetious, for I'm sure they ate, so they could live to kill Paul on another day. It boggles my mind that these so-called spiritual leaders could resort to murder and feel that God and their Law justified their actions. There is no limits to the deception of a religious mind.

vs. 4&5 – Festus wasn't familiar with this case, so he urged the Jews to come to Caesarea where Paul was staying to press charges. Of course, the governor wanted and needed peaceful relations with the Jews, so he was open to the suggestion of returning Paul to Jerusalem once he heard the charges and the presentation of both sides. Of course, we know that God was using all this to get Paul to Rome so he could witness to Caesar. God used the Jews when they killed Jesus and God was using the Jews to get Paul where He wanted him to be. God is in control of the meanest landlord, most ornery boss and unreasonable supervisor. **Can you trust that God is working in the midst of your circumstances?**

Day Seven

6 After spending eight or ten days with them, he went down to Caesarea, and the next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him. 7 When Paul appeared, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many serious charges against him, which they could not prove. 8 Then Paul made his defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar."

v. 6 – Festus spent some time in Jerusalem getting to know the Jews, I would imagine. Notice again that he went "down" from Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the pinnacle and everything else was below it. This developed a superiority complex among those who lived there, especially the leaders, who felt they were exempt from right behavior. Jeremiah confronted this same attitude:

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!" If

you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever. But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless (Jeremiah 7:3-8).

The people believed in Jeremiah's day that the Temple of the Lord would protect them no matter what they did. They believed in the sanctity of a place and a building, when God wanted the holiness of His people.

v. 7 – Festus wasted no time convening a hearing and the Jews brought many serious charges against Paul. It is safe to assume that since the charges from their first hearing two years prior didn't get results, they intensified their case with new, more serious charges. I'm sure they had attorneys and had gathered some testimony from other parts of the world. But still they could not prove their accusations and charges.

v. 8 – Paul stood alone, as far as we can tell. He had no legal representation, choosing rather to represent himself. He was confident that his God would stand with him and help him make his case. But at the same time, Paul had lived in the truth of what God had spoken to him for the last two years:

The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome" (Acts 23:11).

Do you have any promises or directives that God has given you? If so, are you living in them? Have you put your faith in them? The Bible teaches:

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Jesus Himself quoted this verse when He was tempted by the devil in the wilderness. Are you living according to the word that comes from God's mouth for you? God is a great communicator. He speaks every language, He speaks through circumstances, He speaks through His word, He speaks through other people, both believers and non-believers. He can even speak through a donkey as we saw in the story of Balaam in Numbers 22. God is actively communicating with His people and with you. What is He saying? What has He said? I urge you to listen more carefully, in faith write down what you think God is saying, and build your life around that, just like Paul did.

The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning. The voice of the LORD shakes

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the desert; the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, "Glory!" (Psalm 29:3-9).