

Lesson 20: Paul's Imprisonment in Caesarea

Acts 23:12-24:27

If anyone has had cause for bitterness, for skepticism, for indifference toward men, surely Paul did. Persecuted, imprisoned, plotted against, the man was a continual target for unjust treatment. And yet we see time and time again that Paul's desire was for the very men who were mistreating him to come into a saving relationship with his Lord. It's easy to begin to see him as super-human, but he wasn't. He wept. He wondered. He got hungry and tired and probably irritable. But he sought to live at peace – to neither offend nor to be offended. If he wasn't super-human, there is only one way he could have lived in such a way – the very power of God dwelling in him through the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote in Romans 5:5: “the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” That same Spirit dwells in us as believers. *Lord, fill us with Your love, through Your Spirit, that it might overflow to those around us regardless of our circumstance.*

“In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.”

Acts 24:16

The Plot Against Paul

Read Acts 23:12-22.

1. What had some of the Jews in Jerusalem plotted against Paul?
2. Who intervened to save Paul?

We don't know much about Paul's family. In fact, this is the only place where a member of his family is specifically mentioned as part of the action. In a way, this mention asks more questions than it answers. Paul had a sister. Where had she been? Was she still alive? What about this nephew? Was he also a believer – or just loyal to his uncle? Had he been in touch with Paul throughout his missionary journeys? Something caused him to risk his reputation and possibly his life to intervene at this point in the story.

3. As the plot came to Paul's attention, how do you think he might have been comforted by the Lord's words in Acts 23:11?

4. Forty men may not be plotting your demise, but we do have an enemy. How is he described in 1 Peter 5:8?

5. Read Jesus' words in John 10:1-11.
 - ❖ What is the enemy's desire according to verse 10?

 - ❖ What was Christ's purpose in coming and laying down His life for us?

 - ❖ Who recognizes the Shepherd's voice? (See John 10:4.)

The Lord is our Shepherd and we are His sheep. Like Paul, we can hear and recognize His voice. We can find comfort and reassurance, guidance and fellowship, hope and healing.

6. What are some ways that you hear the Lord speak in your own life? Spend some time discussing this with your small group.

Paul's Move to Caesarea

Continue reading Acts 23:23-24:1.

7. Paul's journey to Rome began in the dark of night. What precautions did the Roman commander take as he transported Paul to Caesarea?

8. From Acts 23:30, what had the commander ordered the accusers of Paul to do?

9. What did Felix decide to do with Paul in Acts 23:34-35?

10. For five days, Paul waited in prison for his accusers to arrive and for his trial to commence. Given what we've seen of Paul in the past, how do you imagine he might have spent his time?

Paul's Trial before Felix

Read Acts 24:2-27. Paul's accusers arrived – the high priest Ananias, some elders from Jerusalem and a lawyer named Tertullus.

11. From Acts 24:2-8, what were the basic charges brought against Paul?

In Acts 24:9, we see the Jews affirming the charges against Paul. I wonder if they knew – or had once known – that the charges were false. Gossip, slander, even our own speculation can convince us of another's guilt, even if we at one point knew or suspected their innocence. We've all done it. We've all joined in the mob mentality, deciding another's fate without or in spite of the facts.

12. What are some ways that we affirm the guilt or shame of another and lead others to do the same?

Then Felix looked at Paul to present his defense.

13. From Acts 24:10-13, what charges did Paul deny?
14. According to Paul in Acts 24:14-15, what were some things that both the Jews and members of "the Way" (believers in Christ) agreed upon?
15. In Acts 24:14-21, Paul confessed to some of the things of which he was "guilty." What truth about Christ did he focus on in Acts 24:15 and 21?

16. We have seen that Paul was willing to risk his life for the sake of the gospel. How does the gospel hinge on the fact of the resurrection? Consider Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:16-20.
17. Who will be resurrected according to Paul in Acts 24:15?
18. Read the following verses and record what you learn about resurrection and eternity:
- ❖ Daniel 12:2
 - ❖ Matthew 25:46
 - ❖ Revelation 20:11-15
19. How do you think Paul's understanding of the resurrection lent urgency to his message?
20. Returning to Paul's defense, what was one reason he gave for being in Jerusalem in Acts 24:17? See 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and Romans 15:27-29. What was the significance of this work?

Roman law required that the accusers be present at the trial.³⁴ In Acts 24:18-20, Paul pointed out that it was the Asian Jews who had originally accused him, and they were nowhere to be seen.

21. What was Felix's decision regarding Paul in Acts 24:22-23?
22. During Paul's two-year imprisonment, he spoke to Felix and Felix's Jewish wife Drusilla. What did he speak to them about according to Acts 24:24-25? How did Felix respond?

³⁴ Polhill, John B. "Acts". Holman Concise Bible Commentary. Ed. David S. Dockery. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998. Page 534.

23. What was Felix's motive for listening to Paul according to verse 26? What are some of your own self-serving motives for listening to people at times?

When Festus replaced Felix as governor, Paul remained imprisoned in Caesarea (Acts 24:27), where he would face another trial – but that's next week's story.

Prepare for Life

At his trial, Paul testified that he did his best “to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men” (Acts 24:16).

24. What do you think it means to live “blameless” before God and men?
25. Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart. Is there any action you need to take either with God or with another in order for your conscience to be blameless?

“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”
Romans 12:18

Lecture Notes: Lesson 20