Summary

What do you do when life puts you in an impossible situation through no fault of your own? Acts 24 walks us through one of the most dramatic courtroom scenes in Scripture, where Paul stands falsely accused before the Roman governor Felix, surrounded by enemies who want him dead. The central spiritual lesson here is both simple and profound: the best thing we can do in a bad situation is testify about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul does not waste his moment in court arguing purely for his own freedom. Instead, he turns every accusation into an opportunity to declare the hope of resurrection and the reality of a living Messiah. We see how truth spoken with courage has a power that outlasts any verdict a human court can render. The accusations brought against Paul by the hired orator Tertullus were built on flattery and lies, yet Paul responded with calm, measured truth. There is something deeply encouraging about watching a man who has every reason to panic instead speak with clarity and peace. That kind of composure does not come from self-confidence. It comes from a settled conviction that God is sovereign over every circumstance, even unjust imprisonment. For us, the lesson is that our most difficult seasons are not interruptions to our purpose. They are often the very stage on which our faith becomes most visible and most compelling to those around us.

Points

Title: Making the Best of a Bad Situation: Paul's Example of Testifying Through Trials

Sermon Summary: This sermon follows the apostle Paul through a series of deeply unjust legal proceedings in Acts 24, drawing out a central and recurring theme: the best response to any difficult, unfair, or tragic situation is to testify about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul, a man of constant action and movement, finds himself confined and falsely accused, yet he consistently turns every courtroom appearance into an opportunity to declare the gospel. Through the contrast between the flattering lies of the prosecutor Tertullus and the bold, truthful defense of Paul, the sermon illustrates how Paul's unwavering focus on Christ's resurrection exposes the true motive behind his persecution — that belief in Jesus as the risen Messiah threatened established religious authority. The sermon also examines Paul's private conversations with Felix and Drusilla, where Paul speaks directly about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, demonstrating that genuine gospel witness transforms even the most dire circumstances into spiritually profitable ones. The closing application issues a direct challenge to anyone delaying a decision for Christ, warning that there is no guarantee of a more convenient time.

Key Points:

- Paul's physical recognizability made him a target among Jews who had opposed him in cities like Ephesus, Iconium, Lystra, Corinth, Thessalonica, and Berea, and Jerusalem was the most dangerous place he could be
- Paul's status as a natural-born Roman citizen was the legal obstacle that prevented the Romans from simply executing him to appease the Jewish leaders
- The prosecutor Tertullus employed gross and obvious flattery toward Felix followed by false accusations against Paul, including calling him a plague, a creator of dissension, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes
- Paul's defense was grounded in truth: he had only been in Jerusalem twelve days, he was there to worship and deliver offerings, and there were no eyewitnesses present to substantiate the charges against him
- The central and recurring strategy Paul employed in every hearing was to bring the conversation back to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which was the actual reason for his persecution
- Jesus had personally encouraged Paul in his prison cell, telling him that just as he had testified in Jerusalem, he must also bear witness in Rome, revealing that God's sovereign plan was actively directing every circumstance

- Felix, despite being described by historians as cruel, abusive, and self-serving, was moved enough by Paul's words to call for him repeatedly and hear him speak about faith in Christ
- Paul spoke to Felix and Drusilla about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, which caused Felix to become afraid, yet he deferred with the reply that he would call for Paul at a more convenient time
- Delaying a response to the gospel is effectively a rejection of it, and the sermon emphasizes there is no promise of a more convenient time
- Paul remained imprisoned for two years under Felix, who was eventually recalled to Rome for violence against the Jews, and Drusilla later died in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, illustrating the fatal consequence of postponing a response to the gospel

Scripture Reference:

- Acts 24 serves as the primary passage, covering Paul's trial before Felix, the accusations of Tertullus, Paul's defense, and his subsequent conversations with Felix and Drusilla
- Acts 14:19-20 recounts the stoning of Paul at Lystra, where he was left for dead
- 2 Corinthians 12:2-6 contains Paul's account of being caught up to the third heaven, which the sermon connects to the Lystra stoning as the likely occasion
- Acts 21:23-25 records the Jerusalem church's counsel for Paul to participate in a Nazarite vow completion to demonstrate his faithfulness to the law
- Acts 23:11 records Jesus appearing to Paul in his cell and commissioning him to bear witness in Rome
- Acts 23:6 records Paul's declaration before the Sanhedrin that he was being judged concerning the resurrection of the dead
- Acts 5:33-42 contains Gamaliel's counsel to the Sanhedrin to leave the apostles alone, reasoning that if their work is of God it cannot be overthrown
- Numbers 6 is referenced as the source of the Nazarite vow Paul was assisting others in completing
- Romans 3 and Psalms are referenced in connection with the declaration that there is none righteous, no not one
- John 3:16 is cited in the closing appeal regarding God's love for the world

Stories:

- The stoning of Paul at Lystra by Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who dragged him out of the city supposing him to be dead, only for Paul to rise and continue his journey, is recounted as background to the deep hatred certain Jews carried toward Paul
- The physical description of Paul written by a man named Onesiphorus, portraying him as short, bald, bow-legged, well-built, with a monobrow and a hooked nose, is used to explain why Paul was so easily recognized and targeted in Jerusalem

- The account of Gamaliel addressing the Sanhedrin in Acts 5 is retold to illustrate the principle that authoritarianism is always threatened by its own denial of truth, and that what is of God cannot be overthrown
- The historical background of Felix is recounted, including the Roman historian Tacitus describing him as ruling with the spirit of a slave and with cruelty and lust, and Josephus describing him as trigger-happy and abusive
- The account of Felix using his position to lure the Jewish princess Drusilla away from her husband, King Azizus of Amisa, to become his third wife is included to provide moral context for Paul's conversation with them about righteousness and self-control
- The death of Drusilla and her son in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius while visiting Pompeii is cited as a sobering historical postscript to her deferral of the gospel
- The January 2025 midair collision near Washington D.C. involving a jet departing from Austin is referenced as a contemporary illustration of the unpredictability of death and the urgency of responding to the gospel without delay

Scripture

Here is a list of all scripture references mentioned or alluded to in the sermon:

Directly Cited References

- Acts 24:1 — opening passage for the sermon
- Acts 14:19 — stoning of Paul at Lystra
- 2 Corinthians 12:2-6 — Paul's account of being caught up to the third heaven
- Acts 21:23-25 — counsel from James and elders regarding the Nazarite vow
- Numbers 6 — the Nazarite vow (referenced in context of Acts 21)
- Acts 23:6 — Paul declares his belief in the resurrection before the Sanhedrin
- Acts 23:11 — Jesus encourages Paul in prison, promising witness at Rome
- Acts 23:28 — Paul declares his Roman citizenship
- Acts 23:33-35 — Paul delivered to Felix at Caesarea
- Acts 24:2-25 — the trial before Felix, Tertullus' accusation, and Paul's defense
- Acts 5:33-42 — Gamaliel's counsel to the Sanhedrin regarding the apostles
- Acts 15 — the Jerusalem Council and the letter to Gentile believers
- John 7 — Jewish leaders questioning whether anything good can come from Nazareth
- Romans 3:10 — no one is righteous, not one
- Psalms 14:1-3 / Psalms 53:1-3 — none righteous, not one (Old Testament source Paul draws from)
- Romans 3:23 — all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
- John 3:16 — God so loved the world
- John 3:3 — Jesus declares one must be born again to enter the kingdom of heaven

Alluded to Without Direct Citation

- Acts 19 — the riot at Ephesus (referenced when discussing Paul's protection among Gentile populations)
- Acts 22:28 — Paul's declaration of natural-born Roman citizenship
- Acts 15:20, 29 — restrictions given to Gentile believers (things offered to idols, blood, sexual immorality)
- Hebrews 9:22 / Leviticus 17:11 — the necessity of a blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin (implied in the closing gospel presentation)
- Isaiah 53 — the substitutionary atonement of Christ (implied in closing gospel appeal)
- Jeremiah 31:31-34 — the new covenant and God's promise to forgive and forget sin (referenced thematically)

Quotes

- The common theme we discover here is making the best you can of a bad, terrible, unfair, tragic, awful, unfortunate, unacceptable, unsavory, farcical, inopportune situation always involves, always involves testifying for Jesus about his resurrection.
- Authoritarianism is always threatened by its own denial of truth, especially when that truth is perceived by large numbers of people, yet denied by those in authority.
- If you've even committed one sin, and of course, by now, looking at the crowd that I'm looking at, including myself, we're talking about millions of sins, and that Jesus would take all of that upon himself. That's why he came. That's why he died.
- Every time you hear the gospel, it gets a little farther. You harden your heart a little bit more, a little bit more, a little bit more. You get more able to reject the gospel that's being delivered to you, the gospel of salvation paid for by the Lord Jesus Christ.
- He took it all upon himself. Past, present, and future. It's the basis for the new covenant that God will forget your sin. He will forgive your sin. And he will forget your sin.
- They may put you to death for it, but they cannot put the word to death.
- There is no promise of tomorrow. And even with the faithfulness of Paul to speak to him about salvation and about the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, and everything that Jesus did for the whole world because he loved the whole world.
- It may seem strange, but the best thing that we can ever do in a bad situation is testify of our faith in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing. But if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it, lest you even be found to fight against God.
- There is no more convenient time than right now.

Discussion Questions

Paul consistently responded to unjust circumstances by testifying about the resurrection of Christ rather than focusing on his own defense -- in what ways might shifting our focus from our own grievances to proclaiming truth transform how we handle unfair situations in our own lives?

Tertullus opened his accusation with extravagant flattery that everyone in the room recognized as false, yet he continued -- what does this reveal about the way those in power can be manipulated through pride, and how should believers guard themselves against both giving and receiving empty flattery?

Paul declared in Acts 24:15 that he had hope in the resurrection of both the just and the unjust, grounding his entire defense in that hope -- how does a genuine belief in the resurrection change the way a person endures suffering and injustice?

Felix heard Paul reason about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come and became afraid, yet he sent Paul away saying he would find a more convenient time -- what does this response reveal about the human tendency to acknowledge spiritual truth while still resisting full surrender to it?

The sermon draws a parallel between the threat that belief in Jesus as Messiah posed to Jewish authority in Paul's day and the way truth still threatens entrenched authority today -- where do you see similar dynamics playing out in contemporary culture, and how should believers respond?

Paul spent two years in custody without a formal charge, knowing he was innocent, and yet continued to use that time to share his faith with Felix -- what does this teach us about the difference between waiting passively and waiting redemptively in seasons of prolonged injustice or hardship?

Gamaliel warned the Sanhedrin in Acts 5 that if the movement of the apostles was of God, they could not overthrow it without fighting against God himself -- how does this principle shape the way we should think about opposition to the gospel, both historically and in our present moment?

The sermon describes Paul as a man who could not sit still, someone defined by constant movement and action, and yet God placed him in a situation of forced stillness for years -- what might God be teaching us when he uses circumstances to slow down those who are most driven and active in ministry?

Paul's physical description, his recognizable appearance, made him an easy target for those who wanted him dead, and yet that same visibility made his testimony undeniable -- in what ways does being known and recognizable as a follower of Christ carry both risk and unique opportunity for witness?

Drusilla, a Jewish woman who had abandoned her husband to marry Felix, sat beside him as Paul reasoned about righteousness and self-control -- what does it mean to hear the gospel in the midst of a life that openly contradicts its demands, and what responsibility do believers carry when sharing truth with those whose lives seem most resistant to it?

Small Group Guide

Making the Best of a Bad Situation

Based on Acts 24

Overview

This week's sermon walked us through Paul's second trial before Felix in Acts 24, exploring how Paul consistently responded to unjust circumstances not by demanding his own vindication, but by testifying about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The central theme is this: making the best of a bad situation always involves testifying for Jesus about his resurrection, because it turns every life situation, no matter how dire, into something profitable and useful to everyone who hears.

Key Takeaways

- Paul faced a deeply unjust situation -- falsely accused, held without charge, and surrounded by people who wanted him dead -- yet he consistently redirected every hearing toward the resurrection of Christ.
- Tertullus employed flattery and lies to prosecute Paul, but Paul responded with calm, factual truth and a clear declaration of his faith.
- Felix, despite being a corrupt and morally compromised ruler, was moved enough by Paul's testimony to send for him repeatedly and hear him speak about faith in Christ, righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come.
- Felix's response -- "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time, I will call for you" -- is a sobering picture of delayed response to the gospel, one that for Felix apparently never became convenient.
- Paul's example demonstrates that our most powerful response to suffering and injustice is not self-defense or self-promotion, but faithful witness to the risen Christ.

Discussion Questions

Opening Question

Think of a time when you faced an unfair or difficult situation -- at work, in a relationship, or in your personal life. What was your first instinct in how to respond?

Digging Into the Text

1. In Acts 24:1-9, Tertullus opens his accusation against Paul with excessive flattery toward Felix, which the sermon describes as something that would have made every hypocrisy meter in the room go off the charts. Why do you think people in positions of need or desperation resort to flattery rather than truth? Have you ever been tempted to do the same?
2. Paul's defense in Acts 24:10-21 is notably calm and measured. He denies the false charges but does not dwell on them. Instead, he steers the conversation toward his belief in the resurrection of the dead. Why do you think Paul consistently made the resurrection the centerpiece of his defense rather than focusing primarily on proving his innocence?
3. In verse 15, Paul declares his hope in the resurrection of both the just and the unjust. What does it mean for your own faith to hold both of those realities -- eternal life for believers and accountability for all -- at the same time? How does that shape the urgency with which you share the gospel?
4. The sermon points out that Gamaliel's wisdom in Acts 5:38-39 is relevant here: if something is of God, it cannot be overthrown. How does that truth encourage you when you feel like the forces working against your faith or your witness seem overwhelming?
5. Felix was described by Roman historians as cruel, self-serving, and morally compromised, and yet he sent for Paul repeatedly to hear him speak about faith in Christ. What does that tell us about the power of a consistent, faithful witness, even in the most unlikely circumstances?
6. When Paul reasoned with Felix about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid. Why do you think those three topics in particular produced fear in him? Which of those three topics do you think people today are most resistant to hearing?
7. Felix responded by saying he would hear more at a more convenient time -- a time that, by all accounts, never came. What are the dangers of treating a response to the gospel as

something that can always be postponed? Have you ever found yourself in a similar posture about something God was calling you to do or surrender?

Personal Reflection Questions

8. Paul made the best of an extraordinarily bad situation by keeping his focus on testifying about Christ rather than on his own circumstances. What situation in your life right now might God be using as an opportunity for witness that you have not yet recognized as such?
9. The sermon draws a contrast between what Paul could have done -- demanding his release, arguing his innocence at every turn -- and what he actually did, which was use every appearance and every conversation to point to Jesus. What does that kind of intentionality look like in your daily life?
10. Paul's transformed life was itself a form of testimony. Felix could see something in Paul that was different. Who in your life can see that kind of difference in you? What would it look like to be more intentional about letting that difference open conversations about faith?

Practical Applications

This Week, Choose One:

- Identify one difficult or unfair situation you are currently facing. Write down one specific way you could use that situation as an opportunity to testify about your faith in Christ, whether through a conversation, a letter, a prayer with someone, or simply the way you carry yourself through it.
- Think of one person in your life who, like Felix, has shown some curiosity about faith but has not yet made a decision. Commit to praying for that person every day this week and ask God to give you one natural opportunity to continue the conversation.
- Reflect on whether there is an area of your own life where you have been waiting for a more convenient time to respond to something God has been asking of you. Take one concrete step this week rather than deferring.

- Read Philippians 1:12-18, where Paul reflects on how his imprisonment actually advanced the gospel. Journal about what it would look like for you to have that same perspective toward a hardship in your own life.

Closing Thought for the Group

Paul did not know when he was arrested that he would spend two more years in Caesarea, followed by a dangerous sea voyage and years more of uncertainty. He only knew what Jesus had told him: that he must bear witness at Rome. He trusted the destination even when he could not see the path. The same sovereign God who arranged Paul's circumstances is arranging yours. The question is not whether your situation is bad. The question is whether you will make the best of it by keeping the resurrection of Jesus Christ at the center of your response.

Suggested Closing Prayer

Close your time together by praying specifically for anyone in the group facing a difficult or unjust situation. Ask God to give each person the clarity, courage, and peace that Paul demonstrated -- not to minimize the hardship, but to use it. Pray also for anyone in the group who may still be weighing a response to the gospel, that today would be the day rather than a more convenient time that may never come.

Devotional

5-Day Bible Reading Plan and Devotional Guide

Bearing Witness: Making the Best of Every Situation

Day 1: The Resurrection Changes Everything Reading: Acts 24:14-21 Devotional: Paul stood before a hostile court and could have argued his innocence in a dozen different ways. Instead, he directed every word toward the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He understood that the resurrection was not merely a doctrine to defend but a living reality that transformed every circumstance around him. When life feels unjust, when accusations fly and circumstances close in, the resurrection remains the anchor that holds. Ask yourself today: when difficulty surrounds you, does your conversation point others toward Christ, or does it point only toward yourself and your own troubles?

Day 2: Faithful in the Waiting Reading: Philippians 4:11-13 Devotional: Paul spent two years in Caesarea without a formal charge, without resolution, and without freedom to do the work he loved. A man of relentless action was forced to sit still. Yet Paul did not waste that waiting. He received visitors, shared his testimony, and reasoned with Felix about righteousness and the judgment to come. God's purposes are not undone by delay. The waiting seasons of your life are not empty seasons. They are often the very seasons in which God does his deepest work, both in you and through you, for the benefit of those placed in your path.

Day 3: The Danger of a More Convenient Time Reading: 2 Corinthians 6:1-2 Devotional: Felix heard the gospel from the lips of a man whose transformed life made the message undeniable. He felt the fear that comes when the Holy Spirit presses truth against a hardened heart. And then he said the most dangerous words a person can say: go away for now, when I have a convenient time, I will call for you. History records that the convenient time never came for Felix. The gospel does not grow more appealing with delay. The heart does not grow more tender with postponement. If the Spirit is speaking to you today, today is the day to respond.

Day 4: Suffering as a Platform for Witness Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:2-10 Devotional: Paul recounted an experience, likely connected to the stoning at Lystra, in which he may have died and been caught up into the very presence of God. Rather than boasting in that extraordinary

encounter, he boasted in his weakness. He understood that suffering was not a contradiction of God's faithfulness but a platform for it. The hardships Paul endured across more than ten thousand miles of missionary travel, and then through years of unjust imprisonment, became the very circumstances through which the gospel reached governors, soldiers, and kings. God does not waste your pain. He redeems it for purposes far greater than you can see.

Day 5: The Sovereignty of God Over Every Obstacle Reading: Acts 23:11 Devotional: On the night Paul sat alone in a Roman prison cell, uncertain of his future and surrounded by men who wanted him dead, Jesus came and stood beside him. The Lord did not promise Paul comfort or immediate release. He promised him purpose: as you have testified in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome. Every conspiracy, every trial, every delay, and every injustice that followed was being sovereignly arranged to deliver Paul exactly where God intended him to go. Whatever obstacle stands between you and what God has called you to, take courage. God's purposes are not stopped by the plans of men.