

The Offense & Motivation of Resurrection Hope

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Introduction:

How important is the truth of the resurrection to your life? What role does it play in your witness to Christ? Does it influence the way you live? Paul was bound in Jerusalem but thrice protected by the tribune due to his Roman Citizenship and because Jesus would stand with him until he bore witness in Rome. In our passage, he is in Caesarea, almost fifteen hundred miles from Rome, waiting for the governor Felix to hear his case, whom the Roman historian Tacitus described as, “a master of cruelty and lust who exercised the powers of a king with the spirit of a slave” (*Historiae* 5.9). Of his governorship, Josephus shares how his brutality and repeated crucifixion of the leaders of various uprisings leading to increased alienation of the Jewish population and dramatically increased anarchy (cf. *Jos. War* II, 253–70 [xiii.2–7]; *Antiq.* XX, 160–81 [viii.5–8]). Yet, as Paul stands before Felix, we’ll see him bear witness to Christ again with a particular focus on the resurrection and its implications for everyone, including Felix, challenging us to consider how the truth of the resurrection shapes our lives and witness. Consider two things Luke draws our attention to in this story. First,

Paul Proves His Only Charge was Resurrection Hope

Consider how Luke sets the stage. Look at verses 1-3, “And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul. And 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.’” Pause there and think about this for a moment. With what we know of Felix’s governorship, it should have shocked and offended the Jews to hear Tertullus proclaim gratitude for reforms and peace on behalf of the high priest and council. Notice the charges brought against Paul in verses 4-9, “‘But, to detain you no further, I beg you 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.” Tertullus moves from charges of sedition against Rome, to a crime deserving death under Jewish law. Labeling him as “a ringleader of the sect of Nazarenes” who stirs up riots throughout the world paints him as a serious threat to the empire. Remember the harsh treatment by Felix of any hint of an insurrection. If they could paint Paul as a threat to the empire, Felix was sure to allow the council to proceed with the death penalty, even though Paul was a Roman citizen. Note how the Jews join in affirming these charges as Felix is invited to examine Paul. The irony is thick, as they align themselves with a greedy and brutal Roman governor over Paul because he proclaimed God’s salvation to Gentiles. Continue in verses 10-13, “And 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, and 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 up against me.’” When given the opportunity to speak, Paul shares his purpose of worship in Jerusalem and how no one found him disputing with anyone or stirring up any crowd, which Felix can verify because it was only twelve days prior that he arrived in Jerusalem. Yet, note what Paul confesses in verses 14-16, “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. So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.” Once again, Paul seized the opportunity to witness to Jesus.

He confesses to worshipping the God of Israel in accordance with “the Way,” but proves it is no sect by tying his beliefs to everything written in the Law and the Prophets. Then, he claims to have the same hope in God as the Jews. And pay attention to that hope, “that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust,” a truth that leads Paul to strive to live properly before God and man. This puts the focus on the resurrection, primarily as it relates to God’s judgement of all people. Essentially, Paul stresses continuity with the Jewish faith, claiming his beliefs are the way of the Lord and hope of the resurrection. Notice how he continues in verses 17-21, “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 and to 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.’” In his closing argument, Paul highlights his acts of worship and piety again to show he couldn’t have been profaning the temple, nor the cause of any riot. Then points out how his accusers weren’t there to back their charge, which Roman law frowned upon, before insisting his only crime was proclaiming the resurrection was the reason for his trial before the Sanhedrin. Dr. Kenneth Gangel summarizes Paul’s defense before Felix into three clear points: “My religious record is clear—no lawbreaking... My civil behavior is blameless—no riots... My personal message is the issue—Jesus is alive” (Kenneth Gangel, Acts, p. 411). Twice, Paul emphasizes the resurrection to prove it was the only charge against him. Look at verses 22-23, “But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, ‘When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case.’ Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.” Paul’s defense is effective because Felix has some knowledge of “the Way.” Yet, Felix keeps him in custody with some liberties, including the care of friends. The next thing Luke draws our attention to is how,

Paul Stresses the Implications of Resurrection Hope

While anticipating Lysias’ return, the narrative takes an interesting turn. Look at verses 24-26, “After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, ‘Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.’ At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him.” “After some days,” is a common connective phrase for Luke, used to ensure we connect this to what just took place. Felix’s wife, Drusilla, was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I. Raised as a Jew, she married the king of Emesa, Azizus, who agreed to convert to Judaism for her. Then, Felix wooed her to adultery and marriage to him. Richard Longenecker comments, “Drusilla was unhappy with Azizus; and, as captivated by Felix’s ruthlessness and power as he was with her beauty, she accepted his offer of marriage. Neither his birth as a slave, his Roman paganism, nor her Jewish scruples deterred her from what she considered a higher station in life. The relationship between Felix and his young wife seems to have been based upon greed, lust, and expectations of grandeur.” (Richard N Longenecker, The Expositors’s Bible Commentary, Volume 9: John and Acts, p. 539). Yet, something piqued her interest in Paul’s message. Perhaps Felix went home, sharing about the trial and how Paul kept speaking of the resurrection which led Drusilla to want to hear his message because of her Jewish upbringing. Paul doesn’t hesitate to share the gospel. The phrase “Christ Jesus” focuses on Jesus as the Messiah and eschatological king. And him reasoning about, “righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment,” shows he was focusing on what the resurrection meant for them specifically. Note the connection to Paul’s trial. On trial, he spoke of “the resurrection of the just and the unjust” and now he speaks of “the coming judgement.” These Again, his focus is on the resurrection as it relates to God’s judgment of all people. Now, we need to understand Paul is not primarily focusing on a need for morality, but the necessity of faith in Christ for mercy. Paul uses the implications of

the resurrection to expose their need for Christ. Church, in our witness, we don't seek to conform people to a moral standard. We declare hope in Christ for forgiveness of sin, salvation and transformation. Sometimes, I fear we are so focused on addressing immorality that offends us that we forget to show how people's only hope is Christ. Paul connected to their sin to call for faith. This, we see terrified Felix but caused him to send Paul away. Though his heart was pricked, his greed, lust, and pride kept him from belief. We don't know what happened to Drusilla, but Luke tells us Felix kept having conversations with Paul, hoping for a bribe, likely because of the almsgiving Paul mentioned. We'll consider the ending of the story in a moment. For now, I want to consider two truths this story highlights. First,

1) Hope in the Resurrection is Offensive

Hope in the resurrection is the focus of this story, and the reason for offense with the Jews and Felix. Consider the emphasis of verses 15 and 25. In verse 15, Paul says he has, "a hope in God...that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust." Then, we are told in verse 25, "he reasoned [with Felix] about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment." The resurrection is only a good thing for the just. For the unjust, it is condemnation. What makes the resurrection offensive? Because Paul proclaimed there was only one who is just, the Righteous One, Jesus. And therefore, "the Way" of Jesus was the only hope for all people, Jew and Gentile alike. This offended Jews because it put them in equal standing with the Gentiles. It offended Felix because it exposed his greed and lust, calling him to bow the knee to another. Ultimately, it is offensive to all people because it pricks the pride of every heart. Think about it. The death and resurrection of Jesus declare we are too sinful to save ourselves. It shows that nothing within us can make us just and righteous before God. It proves that the Son of God had to suffer and die to pay the penalty of our sins. It means no adherence to the law, no personal status, and no power gained in this life can remove the gruesome reality of God's coming judgment. We are all the unjust. Hebrews 12:29 says, "our God is a consuming fire." And Hebrews 10:31 says, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." And Christ is our only hope. Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him" (John 14:6). Yet, "Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame," and "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:11-13). Family, we must realize hope in the resurrection has been and will always be offensive, because it claims to be the only way to God. Yet, we also must proclaim it because it is humanity's only hope. Second,

2) Hope in the Resurrection is Motivation for Transformation

Pay attention to Paul's flow of thought in his defense. Right after he confesses his hope in the resurrection, he shares how that influences his life. Look again at verse 16, "So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man." Paul strives to have a clear conscience before God and man because of hope in the resurrection. The reason he didn't instigate riots, or profane the temple was because of his hope in the resurrection. This hope dominates Paul's writing. In Philippians 3:8-9, he says, "For [Christ's] sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection." In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, after talking about sacrificing his rights to win Jews and Gentiles to the faith, Paul says, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. 25 Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." Paul lived for the glory of Jesus because his eyes were set on the resurrection. If you are struggling to overcome sin and live for Christ, hope in the resurrection. If you are struggling to love your spouse and kids, work hard as unto the Lord, and be gracious to others, hope in the resurrection.

Conclusion:

As the worship team comes for our time of response, I want to consider how this story ends. Look at verse 27, “When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.” Paul sat in prison for two years, likely conversing with Felix throughout his time. What keep him going? He trusted Christ’s promise and purpose in his custody. He knew Christ was standing with him through all of this, providing more opportunities to bear witness to Him. And he know what that meant for his future. Paul later says to Timothy, 2 Timothy 4:16–18, “At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me... But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” Family, set resurrection hope in your heart so you to can live boldly in the way of Jesus, though its offense may put you in harm’s way. Christ is with you to the end of the age, and He will bring you safely into his heavenly kingdom. As Jim Elliot once said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” Would you pray with me as we prepare to respond?