

On Trial

Acts 23:33-24:23, Sunday AM, January 15, 2023

Prelude – Scripture: Acts 23:23-24:23 And he called to him two of the centurions and said, “Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen.”²⁴ They were also to provide mounts to put Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor.²⁵ And he wrote a letter having this form:²⁶ “Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings.²⁷ “When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came up to them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman.²⁸ “And wanting to ascertain the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Council; and I found him to be accused over questions about their Law, but under no accusation deserving death or imprisonment.²⁹ “When I was informed that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, also instructing his accusers to bring charges against him before you.”³⁰ “When I was informed that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, also instructing his accusers to bring charges against him before you.”³¹ So the soldiers, in accordance with their orders, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris.³² But the next day, leaving the horsemen to go on with him, they returned to the barracks.³³ When these had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him.³⁴ When he had read it, he asked from what province he was, and when he learned that he was from Cilicia,³⁵ he said, “I will give you a hearing after your accusers arrive also,” giving orders for him to be kept in Herod’s Praetorium.³⁶ After five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with an attorney named Tertullus, and they brought charges to the governor against Paul.³⁷ After Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying to the governor, “Since we have through you attained much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation,³⁸ we acknowledge *this* in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness.³⁹ “But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing.⁴⁰ “For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.⁴¹ “And he even tried to desecrate the temple; and then we arrested him. We wanted to judge him according to our own Law.⁴² “But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands,⁴³ ordering his accusers to come before you. By examining him yourself concerning all these matters you will be able to ascertain the things of which we accuse him.”⁴⁴ The Jews also joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so.⁴⁵ When the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul responded: “Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense,⁴⁶ since you can take note of the fact that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship.⁴⁷ “Neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city *itself* did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot.⁴⁸ “Nor can they prove to you *the charges* of which they now accuse me.⁴⁹ “But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets;⁵⁰ having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.⁵¹ “In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience *both* before God and before men.⁵² “Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings;⁵³ in which they found me *occupied* in the temple, having been purified, without *any* crowd or uproar. But *there were* some Jews from Asia—⁵⁴ who ought to have been present before you and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me.⁵⁵ “Or else let these men themselves tell what misdeed they found when I stood before the Council,⁵⁶ other than for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, ‘For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today.’”⁵⁷ “But Felix, having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off, saying, “When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case.”⁵⁸ Then he gave orders to the centurion for him to be kept in custody and *yet* have *some* freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from ministering to him.

Step back from the passage. It’s been just two chapters since Paul came to Jerusalem where he received such a warm welcome from the believers in spite of many warnings about suffering and persecution that would come if he went to Jerusalem. And that’s exactly what we’ve experienced leaving that warm welcome firmly in the past. Zeal, but sloppy theology led some to run with a rumor about Paul’s taking a Greek into the temple! Convinced of their righteous cause defending God’s name, they rushed to spill Paul’s blood stopped providentially by Roman soldiers. Paul’s heart for these misguided and dangerous Jews causes him to plead with the commander to give a defense, which he does without incident until he relates God’s command to take the gospel to Gentiles. Once again, they seek to destroy him, rescued by the commander who then decides to have Paul beaten to get to the truth. Avoided only by Paul’s reminder of his citizenship, Paul then faced a religious council consisting of perhaps some of Paul’s former colleagues—I am on trial for my hope in the resurrection of the dead! Uproar as council was divided. Rescued by Romans—encouraged by Lord to continue testifying—then last week, plot to kill Paul by zealous Jews—sister, her son, tons of soldiers all protect the servant of the One the Romans had allowed to be nailed to a cross! God protected Paul from death so his ministry could continue. Long night of travel, continue the next day . . . when does it end? When overwhelmed, what do you see when you look to God and ask for help? I’ve been reading John Onwuchekwa’s book on prayer again. He noted, “In the forty days following Jesus’s resurrection and ascension, the disciples began to pray differently. They stopped praying for self-preservation and more for gospel faithfulness and boldness (cf. Mk. 8:31-34, Acts 4:23-31, 5:40-41).” P. 24 And THIS is what you see Paul living! Praise God for strength that comes from Him not merely to endure, but to fulfill our mission among God’s people and before a hostile world. Sing these two hymns across the page from one another as you pray to live not merely for comfort and existence, but for gospel faithfulness and boldness.

***Hymn #448: A Charge to Keep I Have**

***Hymn #450: Lord, Speak to Me**

How does God speak? Through inner promptings? Visions? Circumstances? Through fellow believers past and present? Perhaps some of these more than others, but God’s Spirit bears witness with our Spirit through fellowship with Him in prayer and ALWAYS in line with His Word. Words are powerful—today, another trial—before governor Felix with Ananias the religious leader once again standing against him—this time, armed with an eloquent lawyer with a carefully prepared defense. You Felix are to be thanked for your work of keeping the peace and bringing reform, so it is with deep regret that we trouble you with this troubler . . . Who decides who is the troubler? Trust God’s powerful words to clear the air—to encourage, and to direct. You NEED these words. Sing the heart of the psalmist concerning God’s Word.

***Hymn (Powerpoint): Your Words are Wonderful *Pastoral Prayer: Pastor Jahn Choir: Come, Holy Spirit Scripture: Psalm 115**

Not to us, O LORD, not to us, But to Your name give glory Because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth.² Why should the nations say, “Where, now, is their God?”³ But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.⁴ Their idols are silver and gold, The work of man’s hands.⁵ They have mouths, but they cannot speak; They have eyes, but they cannot see;⁶ They have ears, but they cannot hear; They have noses, but they cannot smell;⁷ They have hands, but they cannot feel; They have feet, but they cannot walk; They cannot make a sound with their throat.⁸ Those who make them will become like them, Everyone who trusts in them.⁹ O Israel, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield.¹⁰ O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield.¹¹ You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield.¹² The LORD has been mindful of us; He will bless us; He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron.¹³ He will bless those who fear the LORD, The small together with the great.¹⁴ May the LORD give you increase, You and your children.¹⁵ May you be blessed of the LORD, Maker of heaven and earth.¹⁶ The heavens are the heavens of the LORD, But the earth He has given to the sons of men.¹⁷ The dead do not praise the LORD, Nor do any who go down into silence;¹⁸ But as for us, we will bless the LORD From this time forth and forever. Praise the LORD!

Offering: *Doxology: Give facts, defend yourself, but give the gospel.¹² “Neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city *itself* did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot.¹³ “Nor can they prove to you *the charges* of which they now accuse me.¹⁴ “But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets;¹⁵ having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.¹⁶ “In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience *both* before God and before men. Big stuff—therefore, abide w a greater God—Our Father who art in heaven (you sent Jesus not merely to make us able to stand before God as Judge, but to bring us to Himself as beloved children—You care!) AND you are powerful to protect—but holy is your name (Your name more important than mine), so Your kingdom come, Your will be done. So, like the Psalmist, while we are thankful that the Lord is mindful of us and will bless those who seek Him, Not to us O Lord, not to us, But to Your name give glory because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth!

***Hymn (Powerpoint): Receive the Glory**

In THIS context of living for HIS glory, HIS name honored and proclaimed, crave closeness and protection as beloved children. This is NOT just for super-saints. No, those who trust Him for reconciliation and regeneration **have received a faith of the same kind as ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.** As Pastor Jahn preaches, join Jacob in this next song worshipping the nearness of God. Pray with the choir, Come, Holy Spirit, I need Thee to, like Paul, live gospel faithfulness and boldness.

***Hymn #393: Nearer My God to Thee**

Message: On Trial Acts 23:33-24:23

***Hymn #378: Only One Life**

Prayer