

Title: No Guilt, No Shame, No Fear, No Game
Text: Acts 24
Theme: the freedom of slavery to Christ
Series: Acts
Prop Stmtnt: Life in Christ is a meaningful and diligent rest, no matter what.

Read Text:

Let's ask some questions about this chapter. What is obvious about this? Well, it feels like it is quite a big let-down from what we anticipated was going to happen. The previous two and half chapters had a lot of intensity and drama that kept building and building to what we thought was this point. Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he went to the Temple where he was spotted, a riot breaks out, he is almost killed, Roman soldiers rescued him, he gets a chance to speak to the crowd, they listen for a bit then demand his death, he is taken before the Jewish council, which breaks out into a brawl, there is a serious plot against his life and he is rushed out of Jerusalem in protective custody to Caesarea where the trial is to occur that will determine Paul's fate. What is going to happen to Paul? What is going to happen to one of the most influential leaders of the early church? What is going to happen to the gospel church movement?

But then, this. After five days, the trial happens and the governor decides, not to decide. He adjourns the case in order to get more information from the Tribune (in spite of already receiving the letter from him). Paul is left in custody, the high priest and his entourage return to Jerusalem dissatisfied with the non-verdict and then before anything is decided, Felix, in an administrative shuffle, is sent packing and replaced by Festus. Meanwhile, two years passes; two years! And Paul is still in prison.

I. **Even when the bad guys “win”, they lose.**

What are their favorite tools?

A. **Image** (1-2) – the attempt to persuade based on appearance or reputation (not reality)

By the way, there are over 250 papyri documents that date back to the early days of the Roman Empire that detail for us how legal proceedings of the Empire were to be conducted. This account in Acts 24 unsurprisingly reflects those proceedings. So, here is the scene. The prosecution has an army and they look official and are official. The defense is one guy. It's not looking good and we haven't even started.

A friend of mine works in the legal world. One day Sam Bernstein called his place of employment in order to talk to his boss, so he put Sam on hold in order to get his boss. That evening when asked how his day went he said, “I put Sam Bernstein on hold.” After 5 days, the high priest Ananias, along with some elders and an attorney, Tertullus came into town. It's like watching the opposing softball team get off the bus only to see Miguel Cabrera is playing for them. “Oh no!” And that is what Paul may have been tempted to think when Tertullus came into the room. This is like seeing Sam Bernstein representing the other side. 1-800-Call-Tertullus,

doesn't have the same ring to it. But, this does show that the high priest and the Sanhedrin are doing everything they can to take Paul down.

B. Falsehoods (5-6)

The proceedings begin with what sounds to us like a bunch of flattery, but there is some truth to what Tertullus says about Felix. Even though many of the Jews did not like him, Felix had done some commendable things for the Jews and Tertullus is acknowledging that. At the same time, it was no secret that Felix's reign was marked by a great deal of conflict because he was so ruthless, there certainly appears to me that there is a level of flattery here as well. But then he charges Paul with being a public enemy and in v.5 accuses him of being Covid-19 (or something akin to that). "He stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world." This was a clever move on the part of Tertullus. The letter from Claudius Lysias (the Tribune) said that the charges against Paul had to do with their (Jewish) law. Now, it is the Jews who are charging Paul with breaking Roman law. Not only that, but he is the ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. That was a shrewd move too, because Jesus was crucified under Roman law as an enemy of the empire, so linking Paul with an enemy of the empire would have carried some weight.

Paul is then charged with attempting to profane the Temple. He is not charged with actually profaning the temple, but with attempting to profane the Temple. This is a subjective charge, difficult to prove, but also difficult to defend against. The evidence that would suggest it to be true is Tertullus's claim that they (the Jews) seized him before he could do it. This makes it sound as if they were not only rescuing their Temple from being compromised but in so doing helped keep peace in Jerusalem. Then...

C. Public Pressure (9)

"The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so." All these leaders are in agreement that Paul is an enemy of their country and the empire. And over here is Paul, all by himself. This looks like its curtains for Paul, right? But, what makes things even worse is that in this case, the judge is a political office. The judge is actually the governor and even though the governor is not an elected official (that is elected by the Jews), but rather appointed by the Roman Empire, the Jews know that they can make life so miserable for the governor that Rome will recall governors and replace them. It would be very bad for Felix' career for this to go sideways. So, Felix has power and the Jews have power and their relationship has been marked by trying to use the other to get what they want. To make things worse, Felix is not an honorable guy. Truth and Justice are not paramount to him, but image and career.

D. Political Posturing

Felix was all about political survival. As we see, he really did not care about Paul, he certainly did not care about Ananias, Tertullus and the rest. Felix cared about Felix and his position of power enabled him to play the game of making much about himself. If you expect to get a favorable judgment from Felix then you had better demonstrate how a favorable judgment to you was in the best interest of Felix. But, like the Tribune who sent the case up the line, Felix is in a

tough spot. Paul is a Roman citizen and he has rights and at least publicly and formally, Felix is bound to honor those rights. At the same time, he does not want to needlessly anger these Jews because he knows that they know that they can make life terrible for him and jeopardize his career, which, by the way does happen. So, Felix hides behind an excuse of waiting for Claudius to come so that Felix can gather more information.

E. Deflection and Avoidance (22)

That is deflection and avoidance. I've decided not to decide. And at the end of the trial, the Jews do not get what they want, and Paul has certainly not been treated fairly. What happens next only confirms what we suspected. Felix is hoping for a bribe.

F. Bribery (26)

With Paul in prison in Caesarea, and with the Jewish legal team back in Jerusalem Felix thinks that he has an opportunity to make this work. If Paul will give him money, after all Paul has connections to a lot of loyal people, then Felix could figure out a way to have him released.

At the end of the chapter, Felix has ongoing conversations with Paul, figuring that Paul, like everyone else, has a price, after all, Felix obviously does. But, while he is willing to release Paul for a price, he ends up keeping him in jail in order to do the Jews a favor. What is that? That's maddening, right? But wait. Even bad guys are still under the sovereignty of God. And even when the bad guys appear to win, they still lose.

Let me ask you a few questions. Have you ever been falsely accused? Have you ever been under the authority of a dishonorable person who could care less if they destroyed your life as long as they got what they wanted? It is so hard, isn't it? Why don't we scream? Why don't we lose it? Why don't we go on a rampage? But, isn't this exactly what Jesus went through? Jesus was falsely accused. He was accused of committing sins that were worth being executed for. But even the wrath of man is leveraged by God to carry out good things (Romans 8:28). While Jesus was not guilty of committing those sins, I am guilty of them and when Jesus went to the cross, he bore my sins upon himself. He was credited with every single one of my sins, every single one. The wrath of man against Jesus put him on the cross. But the wrath of man was leveraged by God, because the death of Jesus became the sacrifice that paid in full for my sins and for the sins of every single person who believes on him. And those who believe on Christ and therefore follow him can expect to be treated like him, after all, Christ is our Captain.

Paul had no one to lean on but God. Paul had nowhere to turn but God. But God is a good One to lean on and turn to, no matter what. When you lean on God and turn to him, you win. As believers, we don't win the way the world defines winning. We win, the way God defines winning and that is the only kind of winning that really wins. You see...

II. Even when the good guys "lose", they win

At the end of the chapter, Paul is still in prison. He has not been cleared of the false charges, is not free to travel and is still a pawn in the unethical hands above him. Of every person mentioned

in this chapter, he clearly appears to be the loser. But, even when the good guys lose, they really don't lose. I want you to appreciate how God defines winning and losing. Winning does not mean you get your way now and that everything turns out how you want. Winning means to reflect Christ and accurately put him on display, no matter what. Even if you are unjustly charged like Christ and like Paul, you know that there is a greater courtroom, a greater verdict that is coming and if you are justified by God through Christ, there is no charge against you that will stick. Christ gives you Teflon righteousness. No charge sticks. Christ rose again from the dead. When Christ defeated sin and death, he defeated injustice. Therefore, since we have already won, even though we do not yet experience all of those benefits, we don't use image, intimidation, flattery, falsehoods, peer pressure, bribes, or political posturing. Our tools are much less complicated, but way more effective.

A. Humility (10)

Paul's opening statement is humble, succinct and completely void of flattery. Paul acknowledges that Felix is the judge and Paul is happy to make his own defense. This humility marks Paul's rather long-term relationship with Felix. Later on, after the trial is over and Paul is still in custody, Felix sends for Paul and has regular conversations with him. Felix has not been honorable and Paul has not received justice, but nevertheless (v.25), Paul reasons with him and (v.25) converses with him. While Paul, as a Roman citizen is deserving of justice, as a Christian he does not act like it. Paul even admits there actually may be one thing that he could be considered guilty of in a technical sense. When he was before the Sanhedrin, he did state that "It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today." Paul is saving the court the trouble of having to sift through all of the details, because it all comes down to this one issue and Paul admits it. I speak to that more in a minute.

B. Truth and just the Facts (11-21)

Paul was accused of being a plague. That's a character smear. He was accused of stirring up riots among the Jews throughout the world. That's a lie. He didn't stir them up. He wasn't a ringleader as that term is generally understood. He did not try to profane the Temple (baseless accusation both in terms of action and intent). In response however, Paul did not attempt to smear his opponents, but actually spoke rather respectfully and clearly factually. He did not attack their character or assume motive. He stated the facts. I was in the Temple area and I was ceremonially purified. I was not stirring things up. I was not making a scene. I was bringing my alms and presenting offerings. The people who stirred things up were some Jews from Asia who are the ones who should be here because the men making these accusations did not witness anything.

Paul also spoke of the common ground that he stood on with his opponents. What they call a sect is the true worship of the God of our fathers and a complete and faithful belief in the Law and Prophets, and like these men I believe in the resurrection of the just and the unjust and I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.

We know that prosecutors tend to overreach with their charges so that they have bargaining chips for leverage and so that even if a judge or jury doesn't convict on all charges, the prosecutor can still count the verdict as a win. On the other hand, defense attorneys tend to overreach their

claims of innocence so that even if a judge or jury doesn't accept the entire story, the defendant is still better off than he or she would have been and the defense attorney can count it as a win. In the legal world there is a ton of strategy that is employed that is based on, how will this look to this judge or to this jury. Here, at what is arguably the Supreme Court of Israel, Paul has no panic or overreach. He simply states the facts. And at the end of the day he can put his head on the pillow of God's Word with no regret and as he said, with a clear conscience, and that is a win.

If you have to lie in order to win, you lose. If you have to lie in order to get your way, you lose. If you have to lie in order to get people to agree with you, you lose. When you keep lying, you keep layering guilt upon yourself and you cannot handle that. Guilt will crush you. You will turn to some kind of addictive behavior in an effort to deal with your guilt. For the sake of your soul, if you are involved in addictive behavior, have the courage to examine your heart. Are you attempting to cover something up? When I say addictive behavior, it's easy to think of drinking, or medication, or porn, but what about sleeping all the time, binge watching, video games, hours on social media platforms, eating, buying things on Amazon, etc.? Get under the skin of your behaviors and ask some heart questions such as: What do I want that I don't have? Am I using this as a way of avoiding something I need to do or need to face. As a follower of Christ, I am free to face the truth, in fact, I have to and I really want to. Jesus is the truth.

C. Christ and the gospel (24-25)

Felix respects Paul. It is obvious from the way that he treats him that Felix is intrigued by him. Later on, in a more private setting, he and his wife talk with Paul, who does what? He does exactly as we would come to expect. He tells them about the gospel. Paul warns Felix and Drusilla about their need for the gospel because Paul spoke of righteousness, self-control and the coming judgment. That scene right there, summarizes this entire story for us. Do you see it now? Paul is not on trial, Felix is. Paul is not in bondage, Felix is. Paul has no fear of judgment, Felix does. Paul can sleep in a jail cell, but Felix cannot rest in a palace. Paul is at peace though he is clearly not in control. Felix is in turmoil, though he is supposed to be in charge. At the end of the day, who wins? Being in Christ, is priceless, no matter what. No guilt, no shame, no fear, no game.