

Be Consistent Acts 24:1-16

This morning I would like to jump right into our passage and invite you to turn in your Bibles with me to **Acts 24:1-16**.

To this point Paul has just completed his third missionary journey and now has traveled to Jerusalem 1) to give a report to the church leaders in Jerusalem of all God was doing among the Gentiles, 2) to observe Pentecost and 3) to deliver a monetary contribution collected by the Gentile churches for the relief of believers in Jerusalem who were experiencing an extensive famine. Paul's desire through this gift was to help galvanize both the Jewish and Gentile believers.

At the prompting of the Jerusalem church leadership he took a vow with several other Jewish Christians to show the Jewish Christians his respect and adherence to the law. He was responsible to visit the Temple, pay for the sacrifices and inform the Temple officials about the duration of the vow. But it was in this holy place of worship that he was wrongly accused of desecrating the Temple by bringing a Gentile past the outer court. A mob gathered and attacked Paul who was immediately rescued by Roman soldiers. During the night the Lord stood by Paul and told him to take courage because he would go to Rome where he would be a witness.

On the following day the Roman commander called a meeting between Paul and the Sanhedrin to ascertain the allegations against Paul in order to determine if the charges warranted further punishment or if he should be set free. Realizing this was a kangaroo court out for revenge not for justice Paul changed tactics and noted he was on trial because of his hope in the resurrection. The Sanhedrin was divided on this point and another riot broke out that again required the assistance of Roman soldiers to protect Paul who was a Roman

citizen. A band of men made a vow to assassinate Paul, but the plot was thwarted when Paul's nephew reported it to the commander. By night Paul was sent to Caesarea along with 472 soldiers who were to protect him. Caesarea you will recall was the Roman capital of Palestine. There he was to stand trial before Felix the governor.

Over these past couple of Sundays that we have been considering these passages, my prayer has been that in viewing your life circumstances, no matter how difficult they may be, that we might take lessons from Paul who shows us that we must be courageous. As He did with Paul, the Lord also tells us to take courage when events seem to spiral out of control, when events are not what we want. We are to take courage from the Word. We are to take courage in our walk. We are to take courage in our witness.

Last week on vacation we were nearing the end of a wonderful afternoon canoeing when we passed a man fishing from a kayak. With pole bent we could see that he was bringing in something. We couldn't tell if it was a fish, an old shoe, or some seaweed. As we drew closer he pulled in a small fish, not bigger than my hand. David hollered over to the man "hey, since you caught a fish, you should try fishing for men." He has courage.

Three weeks ago we saw the need to *be courageous*. Two weeks ago we saw the need to *be confident*. *Be confident because God's plans are sovereign.* *Be confident because God's protection is secure.* God's plans and protection will never fail because God is in control. From the life of Paul, in today's passage we will learn that we need to *be consistent*.

Follow with me as we read this passage together.

At the end of chapter 23 Felix was willing to hear Paul's case. That trial would take place after his accusers arrived. Verse 1 of chapter 24 indicates

that it took five days for them to show up before Felix. That they hired an attorney, got their case together and met before Felix in five days is nothing short of fast action. Remember that it took Paul two days to travel there by horse. The Sanhedrin may have been afraid that if they delayed too long Felix might dismiss the case and release Paul. They not only wanted Paul out of Jerusalem, they wanted him dead. So they acted quickly.

If we were to go back and reread chapter 21 we would note that Paul's original accusers in fact Jews from Asia. But who showed up in Caesarea before Felix? Not the Asian Jews, but the Sanhedrin. Notice also that the High Priest Ananias was among this contingency of accusers.

Remember from our previous discussion regarding Ananias that he was the most corrupt High Priest to hold this office in Israel's history. **John MacArthur** comments "that the religious and political leaders of Israel came in person to accuse Paul shows how serious a threat he posed to them." Some scholars even suggest that they feared Paul would himself become High Priest. So Ananias was going to do all he could to ensure that didn't happen. It was not beneath him to use force to get his way or to use his position to become more powerful. He is the man you will remember who ignored the law and had someone standing nearby hit Paul for calling the High Priest a hypocrite, but Paul didn't know it was the High Priest. That was the man who stood before Paul as an accuser.

Now, let me back up a moment and help you understand something about Governor Felix. He was as cruel a governor as they come. He was a slave who paid for his freedom and then through political ties through his brother's influence with the Emperor eventually became governor. **Tacitus**, an early historian wrote of Felix that "He thought he could do any evil act with impunity...he exercised the power of a king in the spirit of a slave." To coin a phrase, he thought he could get away with murder.

He thought he was above the law and could do what he wanted without punishment. That was the man before whom Paul stood. Ruthless. Brutal. Heartless. In this company it seems as though Paul's position had become more grave. From a human perspective it looked like an open and shut case not leaning in his favor. He appeared to have no hope of getting out of this, yet I'm convinced Paul's hope was not in the wisdom of man but in the promise and power of God who had told him to take courage because he would be a witness in Rome.

When all seems hopeless and foreboding, don't look at the power of man, remember the promises of God. Be sustained by His Word. Go back to the promises he made and pray them back to God. Be assured that His promises will not fail.

Accompanying this group of religious and political leaders from the Sanhedrin was a lawyer named Tertullus. The term used in the KJV refers to him as an orator. The word literally means a public speaker, someone who is accomplished in presentation, a professional speaker. This guy was not only gifted at gab but was also gifted at persuasive speech. He was a paid spokesman. Interestingly his name means liar or imposter. How fitting a name for one who would be speak for the Sanhedrin. It's like one snake using another.

About Tertullus, Herbert Lockyer writes "with his power of glib eloquence as well as knowledge of Roman laws, the orator Tertullus sought to impress the mind of the judge. With trick of his class, he began with flattery."

In spite of the governors sordid reputation, this gifted orator attempted to butter up the governor. He wanted to win him over with flattery. In reality, the Jews hated Felix, so what Tertullus said was a bit tongue in cheek. He may have even had to swallow hard before the words came out his silver tongued mouth to appear smooth as glass.

Following this oratory introduction we read the accusations he was bringing on behalf of the Sanhedrin against Paul. There were three.

1. Paul was a worldwide trouble maker.
2. Paul was a ringleader of the Nazarene sect.
3. Paul attempted to desecrate the Temple.

The Jews who were present all agreed with these accusations.

Paul sought to disrupt Roman peace in the Empire. Paul sought to establish a religion not sanctioned by Roman government.

Paul sought to undermine the Jewish Law by desecrating the temple and subvert the jurisdiction given to Jews by the government to execute justice against any who violated the law regarding the Temple. They were nothing more than trumped up charges.

Beginning in v. 10 Paul was then given an opportunity to speak in defense of the accusations. He used no flowery language to flatter the governor, but merely acknowledged that Felix had resided over Israel long enough to know its religious laws. He also acknowledged that the governor was familiar with the beliefs of the Way.

Regarding the first accusation which had political implications, because Rome was all about maintaining peace, Paul stressed that it had only been 12 days since arriving in Jerusalem, hardly enough time to gather support to incite a riot. Five of those days had been spent in Caesarea in prison. Two days had been spent in the barracks of fortress Antonia under arrest and two days were spent visiting with the Jerusalem church and its leadership leaving three days unaccounted for. Furthermore, he hadn't been seen in the synagogue or in the streets engaging in any discussion about matters of faith. He cited that he had come to Jerusalem to worship not stir up trouble of any kind. As a matter of fact Paul was never an instigator of any riot but always the victim.

Today's technology allows for mass groups to form in a single place in a matter of a short time. They call them flash mobs. They meet at a designated place, at a designated time and perform some unusual act and then disperse. It's usually harmless and fun. However, recently we have seen where technology was used to create mass hysteria and rioting. Take for example several months ago when the city of Cairo, Egypt erupted in rioting or more recently, the riots of London, England. Tweeting and other types of instant messaging were used to intensify the unrest.

Paul wasn't there to riot, he came to worship.

Regarding the accusation that Paul was the leader of a sect, Paul advocates that he wasn't part of a sect but was in fact worshipping the God of his fathers, the same God his accusers also claimed to worship. Remember that Rome allowed religious freedom as long as it was sanctioned by the government. They accused Paul of starting a cultic religion not approved by the government. Paul stated that everything he believed was clearly taught in the faith he had practiced all his life. What he believed was consistent with what the law and the prophets taught. He then challenged them to provide evidence that he had incited a riot and gave evidence that he practiced true Judaism because he believed what it taught about who the Messiah was. This gave him hope in the resurrection, the same hope his accusers also believed in.

It was because of this hope in the resurrection that Paul rested this portion of his defense with this statement: **“So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.”** Because of his hope in the resurrection, his daily motivation was to live a life free from offending either God or man.

What are some practical lessons that we can observe from this verse and throughout Paul's writings that will benefit us? The question is do you want a clear conscience? Does having a clear conscience matter

to us as it did to Paul? Paul provides some clues on how to have a clear conscience. With that our time is gone for the day and there is a lot more I would like to share with you from the life of Paul about how we can have a clear conscience. We'll look at those areas next week. We'll look at four

His walk was with effort.

His walk was encompassing.

His walk was with equality.

His walk was eternal.