



10/06/2019
Acts 23:12-24

BIG IDEA

The providence and faithfulness of God will comfort you in your suffering.

LOOKING BACK

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Invite members to share any questions or points that came up in their family discussions regarding last week's study. Invite them to share ways God continued to speak to them as they sought to apply those truths throughout the week.

- What is your initial reaction when someone treats you unjustly?

Paul was unjustly arrested and beaten by the chief priests in Jerusalem in Acts 22–23. This situation caused Paul great distress. In the midst of such circumstances, God spoke to Paul, reminding him that He is always at work and would empower Paul to preach the gospel in Rome. God's Word and God's work in our lives give us the strength we need to continue living for Him, even in the face of unjust suffering.

LOOKING IN

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Ask a volunteer to read Acts 23:12-35.

- Why did people want Paul dead?
- Paul was living faithfully for the Lord and seeking to lead the lost to salvation in Jesus Christ. Considering this, do you struggle to understand why God would allow Paul to experience so many trials? Why do you think God allowed Paul to face so much unjust suffering?
- Where do you see God's providence in this situation?

Forty of the Jews plotted to kill Paul because of his teaching and ministry. Paul was spared after his nephew told Paul and the Roman authorities the plot to take Paul's life. The tribune, Claudius Lysias, protected Paul with 470 men and sent him to Caesarea Philippi to go before the governor, Felix. Paul had the right to such a trial because he was a Roman citizen. Through the Roman law, God made a way for Paul to be protected and ultimately to continue his ministry.

- Where have you seen God's providence in the trials you have faced in life? In what situation are you needing to see His hand at work right now?

After a flattering introduction that praised the governor far beyond his merit, Tertullus brought three charges (24:5-8). First, he accused Paul of being a troublemaker who stirred up riots in Jewish

communities everywhere. Second, Paul was charged with being a “ringleader of the Nazarene sect.” Finally, Tertullus charged Paul with desecrating the temple. Let's read how Paul responded.

| *Ask a volunteer to read Acts 24:10-23.*

- Does Luke's account of Paul's response here seem like he was nervous? Confident? Unsettled? Considering the circumstances, why do you think Paul was able to respond in such a way?
- What is the relationship between a person's belief in God's providence and faithfulness and the way he or she responds to unjust personal suffering?

Whereas Tertullus spoke in general condemnatory statements, Paul invited Felix to check out the facts. In so doing, Paul gave testimony to many facets of the gospel. He confessed that he worshiped the God of the Hebrews, was a follower of the Way, believed everything in the Law and the Prophets, had hope in God, believed in the resurrection, and worked hard to keep his conscience clear before God and man. In short, Paul made both a personal defense and a gospel presentation when given the opportunity to speak.

- How does Paul's sharing of the gospel in this situation encourage or challenge you in your own difficult circumstances?

Paul pointed out that the trial was legally questionable, because his main accusers—the Asian Jews—were not present (24:19). Thus, Felix adjourned the proceedings and ordered Paul to be put back in prison. He was aware of Paul's innocence, but he did not want to antagonize the powerful and influential Jewish leaders by setting him free. So, he acted cowardly with a selfish political motive—he delayed his decision about the case. Paul languished in prison as a result.

| *Ask a volunteer to read Acts 24:24-27.*

Felix and his Jewish wife Drusilla later visited the place where Paul was imprisoned. Felix summoned Paul and listened to him speak on the subject of faith in Jesus.

- Considering there are no salvation stories in Acts 24, would you say that God's providence and faithfulness were still at work? Explain.

Even though Felix was responsible for unjustly keeping Paul in prison, Paul did not speak bitterly to Felix, but rather, preached the gospel to him so passionately that Felix was alarmed and sent Paul away. Still, we must talk to others about righteousness and judgement because these topics are essential to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- Read Philippians 1:18-21. What was Paul's eager expectation and hope (v. 20)? How did this focus enable him able to say, “For me to live is Christ, to die is gain.”

Paul wrote Philippians while in prison. Paul was convinced that whether he lived or died, he would have the privilege of continuing to honor Christ (v. 20). While Paul knew that the accusations against him were unfounded, he also knew that at any moment, Felix could give in to the Jew's demands and sign off on his execution. In the midst of such uncertain circumstances, Paul focused on living for Christ and proclaiming the gospel. He could face a very uncertain and potentially terrifying future (execution) because he knew that neither death nor life could keep him from living for the honor and glory of Jesus Christ.

LOOKING FORWARD

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

- Where are you needing to be faithful and sustained in your period of waiting?
- What are some practical ways you can remind yourself this week of the character of God that inspires faith?

FAMILIES

Use the following questions and truths to disciple your children throughout the week.

- Paul was a great preacher and leader in the church. But he still knew that He was not in charge. Name some situations where you know that you are not in charge. Name some situations where you have trouble remembering you're not in charge. What is one step you could take this week to trust Christ more, because He is always in charge?

PRAY

Thank Jesus for willingly facing slander and false accusations on your behalf. Ask Him to help you devote yourself to living for His glory, so you might be content to trust in His providence and faithfulness.

COMMENTARY

| Acts 23:12-35

23:12-15 The radical Jews took an oath not to eat or drink until Paul was dead. This kind of oath in Jewish custom carried wording such as: "May God do to us the same and more" or perhaps: "May we be cursed if" Paul was no stranger to such plots (9:24; 20:19). They went to the chief priests and elders. Avoiding the minority Pharisees who had spoken in Paul's behalf, they approached Ananias and his cohorts to involve them in this "pretext." Though Luke does not specifically say so, the passage intimates strongly that the Sanhedrin hierarchy agreed and, thereby, entered into a murder conspiracy with anarchists.

23:16-22 Any plot so well known in the city had little chance of success. We get the impression from Paul's letters that family ties had been broken (Phil. 3:8), but such connections do not die easily. Furthermore (the forty henchmen notwithstanding), preservation of life was the greatest value in Judaism. So God used a hitherto unknown nephew as an agent of deliverance. The mention of this nephew is all we know of Paul's family.

23:23-24 At 9:00 p.m. under cover of darkness, 470 Roman soldiers escort Paul to the provincial capital at Caesarea, headquarters of Governor Felix. The Romans were nothing if not efficient. Lysias called up two centurions with their two hundred infantry, seventy cavalry troops and two hundred dexiolaboi, a fascinating word which appears only here in the New Testament. Obviously it means "spearman," but it comes from a root meaning "right-handed" because in the Roman army spears were commonly thrown with the right hand. Some scholars scoff at this account because of the overkill escort, but Lysias would take no more chances with these Jewish anarchists.

23:25-30 How could Luke possibly have known the content of private and official correspondence between a Roman commander and the procurator of Judea? Of course, he could not; that is why verse 25 says, He wrote a letter as follows. Luke's summary obviously came from Paul who also only learned it from whatever Felix revealed in the questioning of chapter 24.

23:31-33 This is the third time Paul sneaked out of a city at night. The foot soldiers stopped at Antipatris, doubtless resting there for awhile before returning to the barracks. On his horse, Paul accompanied the cavalry all the way to Caesarea, about sixty miles from Jerusalem and thirty miles northwest of Antipatris.

| Acts 24:1-27

24:1-3. Luke's reporting of the case against Paul reflects standard Roman legal procedure, including the prosecution brought by a spokesman (lawyer). Tertullus was a common Roman name, but he may have been a Jew (v. 6), although he refers to the Jews objectively in verse 5. Tertullus began with a captatio benevolentiae, the standard opening of a Greco-Roman speech designed to curry the favor of the listener, Felix.

24:5-7 Paul was accused by Tertullus of far more than just bringing a Gentile into the temple. Although the charge of desecrating the temple would perhaps make Felix suspicious of Paul, the charges of being an agitator and ringleader would have genuinely alarmed him since it implied Paul was a threat to Roman rule. Tertullus also said the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem would have been able to handle the situation if Lysias had not interfered. Clearly the Jews felt they should be left to do with Paul whatever they wished.

24:8-10 Tertullus finished with another compliment toward Felix, this time expressing confidence in his abilities to rightly judge the case against Paul. When Felix asked Paul to speak, Paul offered a less flattering *captatio benevolentiae*. Instead of offering hyperbole, he recognized that Felix was an experienced governor of many years before whom he would gladly offer his defense.

24:11-13 The 12 days that Paul referred to did not include the time he had spent in Caesarea, but only time spent in Jerusalem. This was a sufficient amount of time for Paul's enemies to gather evidence that he was a troublemaker, and yet they were unable to provide any.

24:14 The phrase the Way is used throughout Acts as a self-designation by Christians (v. 22; 9:2; 19:9,23). At this early date, Christianity was considered a sect of Judaism. It became independent over time as it spread to Gentiles, and as Jews continued to reject it in large numbers. Paul saw Christianity as continuous with, and the fulfillment of, ancient Judaism. Thus Paul and other believers worshiped their fathers' God.

24:17 Paul came to Jerusalem to bring charitable gifts and offerings he had collected to aid the church there. This collection is mentioned in Paul's letters (Rm 15:25-26; 1Co 16:3; 2Co 8:1-9:15), but is not emphasized in Acts.

24:18-21 Paul emphasized his state (ritually purified) and the state of the crowd (without any uproar) when Jews from Asia came across him and stirred up trouble. Paul justly demanded that the Sanhedrin representatives charge him with things they had personally witnessed or heard from him (including talk about resurrection of the dead).

24:22-23 Felix was familiar with the Way. Some have speculated that he learned of Christianity through his wife, Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa (v. 24). As procurator for more than five years, he would have had numerous chances to learn this new movement. Felix seemed to acknowledge that Tertullus had not been a faithful conveyor of the facts surrounding Paul's arrest when he stated that he would wait for the arrival of Claudius Lysias before deciding the case. The circumstances of Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea allowed visits by friends and colleagues. This privilege was likely made possible by his Roman citizenship.

24:24-26 Felix was interested enough in Christianity that he brought his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish, to hear Paul. Paul may have tailored his comments specifically for Felix, whose morals were publicly questioned. For instance, he took Drusilla from her first husband Azizus. Feeling the threat of divine judgment, Felix became afraid and sent Paul away. Whatever hope Paul may have held for Felix's conversion, Felix's hidden motive for their ongoing discussions was base, illegal, and indicative of spiritual destitution.

24:27 Felix's immorality is on further display in the fact that he kept Paul imprisoned for two years even though he did not find that Paul had committed any punishable offense, and then left him in this state when Festus became the new proconsul (AD 59).