

## PAUL'S DEFENSE WITH A CLEAR CONSCIENCE Acts 24

### Acts 24

Because of the trial and death of Jesus, we all know the name Pontius Pilate. Even those who have little interest in Jesus or things related to the Bible likely know that name.

Pontius Pilate was the GOVERNOR over Judea.

Like Presidents, Prime Ministers and even Kings, these governors, in time, get replaced. So here we are, still in the land of Judea, and now the governor is Felix.

These governors were, of course, under the authority of Rome. Sometimes they were native citizens of the land over which they ruled. But generally they were outsiders who were placed where they came to be by the Roman government. And that is exactly the case in regards to both Pontius Pilate and now in the case of Felix.

Having been sent to Felix, who was at that time residing at the Roman seaside city of Caesarea (named after Caesar), Paul has now been afforded his opportunity to give his defense. But, as is always the case, the accuser goes first. And so after buttering Felix up a bit with their words of flattery (which everyone knows is **phony**, for the Jewish leaders all despised Rome and its ever present and domineering hand over Israel), the Jews, with the aid of Tertullus (likely a well-spoken attorney), make their accusations against Paul. In short they accuse him of being

- a plague
- a man who stirs up riots wherever he goes
- a ringleader of the Nazarenes, and
- a man who attempted to profane the temple

Well, the profaning of the temple was a misunderstanding on their part. And as for Paul being a plague that is just name calling for what constitutes a man who is a plague? That would be hard to say.

**But as for stirring up riots or being a ringleader of the Nazarenes, one would have to acknowledge there was SOME TRUTH in those charges.** Being a ringleader of the Nazarenes (who followed Jesus of Nazareth) was not a crime. So the only thing that could in any

way STICK would have been the issue about Paul stirring up riots or trouble.

But those were the charges.

And now Paul was given the opportunity to defend himself and speak to those charges.

Now we should remember that Paul was a **skilled orator**. Tertullus may have been an attorney, but Paul was a **skilled orator**.

When Paul and Barnabas were in Lystra and were there used by God to heal a crippled man, you may recall how the people came to think of Paul and Barnabas as "gods" who had come down to them. In Acts 14:12 it says that the people called Barnabas Zeus, but Paul "they called Hermes "because **he was the chief speaker.**"

Speaking was Paul's gift.

When Paul, in Acts 17, arrived in Athens, he didn't wait for Silas and Timothy to arrive but, on his own, addressed the philosophers of the city.

Some people are very skilled at speaking. Some are skilled at speaking (as we say) "on their feet." They are quick thinkers, even able to dominate those who go against them. In marriages, this skill **can become a form of abuse** by which the better speaker can come to dominate the other person. In marriages it tends to be men that DOMINATE their wives because of their physical size, but in more than a few cases a woman has DOMINATED a husband because of her abilities with her mind and quick tongue.

In the case of Paul, appearing before a Roman-placed governor over Judea – and realizing that truly his life was potentially on the line, it is good that he was as good and quick and able with this tongue as he was.

So he gave his defense. And, in the end, he was **persuasive enough** that Felix made no final judgment of the case and sent Paul's accusers packing, while keeping Paul under custody while offering him a fair amount of liberty.

Now, let's make a few points from this 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Acts...

**1. One cannot help but wonder what ever happened to Felix and his wife, Drusilla, in regards to coming to faith in Jesus.** The fact that Felix, even before talking to Paul, was already somewhat familiar with "the Way" – that term used back then for Christians and their belief system – is significant. For two whole years, the text tells us, Paul was in a place to give a witness to Felix, teaching him about "righteousness, self-control and the coming judgement" (v. 25) with the effect that it says that Felix was "alarmed." So it makes one wonder what may have become of Felix. Did he later turn to Christ? We'll have to wait until we enter glory to find out.

**2. While Paul did not flatter or "butter up" Felix the way that Tertullus and the Jews did, nevertheless he was very polite towards Felix.** And that is as he should have been. Sometimes when people – even Christian people – feel that an injustice has been committed against them, they become pretty cantankerous.

I know a man like that (indeed he is in my mind as I speak). And while that man may have **good reason** to feel miffed or "bent out of shape" because of something that has befallen him, he tends to take it out on everyone around him when that happens. He's the kind of fellow that proverbially "kicks the dog" – not because the dog has done anything wrong but simply because he's mad.

But here we have Paul who has been unjustly attacked, arrested, and now he is in custody by the Romans. But instead of striking out, he is polite as he makes his case.

**3. Thirdly...and this is the main point of today's sermon...I would have you note what Paul says regarding his own defense...**

verses 14-16

Here Paul not only suggests that all that has happened to him is because of his belief in the resurrection from the dead, but that his belief in the resurrection from the dead is the basis for his living and, by extension one might suggest, his **giving an honest defense** – one given with a "clear conscience."

To me that makes a lot of sense.

Think about it:

If there is **no resurrection** from the dead...if this life is all there is... then where is the **motivation to be truthful**? That is, why not lie if that helps you, saves you, or, in this case, gets you out of trouble? Why not lie?

On the other hand, if there **is a resurrection** from the dead with an accompanying JUDGMENT BEFORE GOD, and that based upon that judgment from God one's eternal future can either be bright...or...TERRIBLE, then there comes to be **a very high motivation to speak truthfully**.

Recent Barna and Pew studies have shown that an increasing number of Christians doubt the existence of hell. As the Bible hasn't changed, why there should be a shift in the convictions of Christians is hard to understand. For Jesus could hardly have been any more clear as to the existence of hell than he was. Just think of his statement in Matthew 5 when he said,

*"If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell." (5:29-30)*

Whatever hell is, or is like, Jesus clearly wanted his followers and listeners to understand the gravity of it and be warned that they **definitely don't want to go there**.

So this whole issue of a resurrection and judgment is a GREAT MOTIVATOR towards all of us living holy lives.

A couple years ago I was talking to Brian Acebo and he referenced a book he had read: Abandon Ship! The Saga of the U.S.S. Indianapolis, the Navy's Greatest Sea Disaster by Richard Newcomb. Brian's endorsement of the book piqued my interest so I purchased the book and read it for myself.

It is a sad story of how out of some 1500 sailors aboard that ship – the very ship that was just returning after having

secretly delivered the two nuclear bombs that were dropped by plane on Hiroshima and Nagasaki – only 315 survived after their ship (the U.S.S. Indianapolis) was struck by torpedoes sent by a Japanese submarine. Most of those that died, died in the water, being eaten by sharks.

There was huge political fallout regarding the sinking of the U.S.S. Indianapolis and, in the end, a case was made against the ship's captain, Charles McVay. It was argued, in court, that McVay should have taken greater effort to make his ship's passageway through the sea more difficult to track, preferably **travelling in a zigzag manner** through the open sea. Such actions, it was argued, would have made it far more difficult for a submarine to track and then torpedo the ship.

What is **most interesting** is that to bolster their case against McVay, of all the witnesses that might have been produced, none was as surprising as their having brought before the court, Lieutenant Commander Mochitsura Hashimoto, the Japanese commander of the I-58 submarine, the very submarine had torpedoed and sunk the U.S.S. Indianapolis.

But the defense immediately suggested that Hashimoto's statements could not be accepted since "his nation is not of Christian belief, thus affecting (his) ability to take the oath as a witness to tell the truth." (p.223).

After some wrangling back and forth between the attorneys (acting against and in defense of Captain McVay) it was finally agreed that Hashimoto should be questioned regarding **his religious convictions**. For, it was argued, if he does not believe in **some sort of God with some sort of judgment, where is the motivation for him to tell the truth?**

Here is a transcript of the court case at this point...

(pp. 225-226)

Up until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many states (including Pennsylvania) held that one had to affirm their conviction in God and an afterlife in order to be accepted either as a juror or as a witness. The whole concept of swearing with one's hand on a Bible and saying, "so help me God" is rooted in the belief that if one does not believe in God, and in a

judgment in regards to an afterlife, then there can be **no motivation to tell the truth.**

This, of course, has been dropped from our legal system. One need no longer place one's hand on a Bible, nor swear "so help me God" to be accepted as either a juror or a witness. But the reasoning of those who lived in an earlier age is right: If there is no God,  
                                   if there is no judgment,  
                                   if there is no potential future life,  
                                   then **what is the motivation to speak truthfully or to act righteously?**

Because of the shift in our legal process, this question may not be being asked any longer, but the question is still outstanding. Where is the motivation to act righteously if there is no ultimate accountability?

So Paul argued that he had a clear conscience before God in regards to what he was saying for he believed in the resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

**4. (Final point this morning). There is a resurrection of all people.**

The notion of a resurrection of both the just **AND THE UNJUST** is what I have called a **HORRIBLE DOCTRINE**. By that I do not mean it is a **poor** doctrine, or a doctrine that we **should not adhere to**, or one that **I do not believe in**. Rather, what I mean by the adjective "horrible" is that what this doctrine implies **has horrible consequences**.

Daniel 12:1-2

John 5:29

Acts 24:15

These three passages support the notion that the resurrection is not only of the righteous. Paul's statement in Philippians in Philippians 3 seems to imply only a resurrection of the godly...

Philippians 3:10-11

But I think we need to understand Philippians 3:11 in the context of a resurrection of **all people**. So in Philippians 3:11 Paul is inferring his hope of being resurrected on to ETERNAL LIFE.

In Adam we **all sinned**, but in Christ we are **all made alive**, both the just and the unjust. But that does not mean that the unjust are resurrected to a life of blessing or good or paradise or heaven...nor are they resurrected only to then be annihilated. Rather, theirs is a resurrection unto **eternal punishment** – what the Bible and Jesus called "hell."

What that hell is like, is hard to say.

If one is a strict literalist, then hell would appear to be a place of eternal fire and torment.

Is it possible that Jesus, who affirmed that kind of place, used such language only to underscore in a graphic manner how terrible it is? Yes, I believe that is possible. But who is to say?

But this much we know: we don't want to go there.

## 2 Thessalonians 1:5-9

What is hell like?

"Eternal destruction"

"Away from the presence of the Lord" and

"Away from the glory of his might."

Whatever hell is, you don't want to go there.

For there is a resurrection from the dead, and **all will be raised**, both the just and the unjust. All will receive resurrected, immortal bodies...bodies that, unlike our own bodies, cannot be destroyed.

Knowing that that is the case, no wonder the Bible challenges people to **COME TO CHRIST NOW**. No wonder the revivalists through the centuries challenged people to **FLEE TO CHRIST NOW**. then come to Christ now. Yes, be freed **NOW** of the judgment due you for your sins, so that you then may, like Paul, live life and speak the truth "with a clear conscience."