

12-26-21

Acts 24:1-21

What are we to do when there appears to be a jockeying for position, where people appear to have an agenda, where flattery words are used to gain an advantage?

It is hard to “**be of good cheer**” when it appears like everyone is out for themselves and will do whatever it takes to put themselves in best position.

It is hard to “**be of good cheer**” when things appear to be unfair, or in fact are unfair.

- When you know that Jesus is present.
- When you know God has a plan.
- Even when you can see his protective hands around you.

How are we to raise our children, grandchildren in a world where more and more people appear to only be doing what’s right in their own lives?

How do we continue to teach, preach, and encourage people to serve others, to prefer others, and to love the unlovable while being smacked in the teeth?

It is so easy to read the bible, to quote it, to teach it, but man is it SO hard to live it. When it appears everywhere around us there is craziness. It seems like everyone is so busy talking and not enough listening.

The teaching today is that if you don’t agree with a certain narrative than you are wrong. Disagreement is ok. Debate is ok. Questions are ok. Too often if you don’t agree, then you are ridiculed, your character is assassinated, you are lied about, bullied, beat down and even if you give in, you are not forgiven. Your whole existence is no longer welcomed. Cancel culture.

Where do we go? How do we navigate these waters? God’s Word is the only answer. We are in Acts 24 and Paul was living in a cancel culture/woke society before there was a woke thing.

How should we respond when people reject us? When we are lied about. When it appears, someone is trying to hurt or destroy us. When the deck seems to be stacked against you. (Physical, social, emotional, spiritual)

I. **PREPARE, BECAUSE IT’S AH COMMUN.**

- **Read verses 1-9.**
- In these verses Paul is caught in an illusion. The religious Jews want him dead for preaching and teaching about Jesus, but they’re selling it different. The Roman government is trying to manage a Jewish nation that hates them occupying their land and ruling over them. The religious Jews don’t want to lose control of their people. If the truth of Jesus were to continue to be taught it would be the end of their way of life. The Romans don’t want to upset the delicate love/hate relationship they have with the Jews either. Paul is a thorn in the side of both.
- Look at the disgusting kissing of the gluteus maximus, **verses 2-4.**
- To quote the great Christmas movie Elf, “You sit on a throne of lies.”

- To think for a minute that any Jews sitting in that room thought that way would be crazy. ***“though you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.”*** I bet he wanted to wash his mouth out with soap after this opening statement. Can you imagine the eye rolls, and people falling out of their chairs? If I were Paul, there is no way I would have kept a straight face. (Offer this man some chap stick to keep his lips from getting chapped)
- Reading this encourages me. I often hear, watch, and read politicians, scientists, administrators, people much smarter than me say some of the dumbest, most ridiculous, factually wrong things with a straight face and don't back down from it. And then, to witness as people eat it up like its truth, I catch myself scratching my bald head and looking around to see if I am being pranked.
- Look it gets worse, **verses 4-9.**
- The prosecutor says that Paul is a plague, a troublemaker, pestilence, “loimos lo-E-mos”, a disease on humanity, a bird of prey. I think it is safe to say this was a personal attack.
- The prosecutor keeps going, ***“a creator of dissension among all the Jews, throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.”*** This was a political attack, trying to get Felix and the Roman government to see Paul as a threat to them as well.
- **Verse 6, “He even tried to profane the temple.”** This was a religious attack.
- To end his opening argument Tertullus accuses Felix's commander did wrong by helping Paul and he even did it violently. (The religious Jews are the real victim here?!) Does any of this sound familiar?
- **Verses 8-9.** This is where all the religious elite Jews would shout, “here, here!”
- This will happen to you. Maybe not on such a big stage, but it will happen. So, get prepared for it. How, you ask?
- First, to even begin to tread water you must have a tight relationship with Jesus. I mean a life changing experience. Without God and His people walking with you, you are in trouble.
- In some way or somehow each one of us will face character assassination. If it hasn't happened yet, there is coming a time when you are mistreated, rejected, on the outside, and how will you handle it?
- Knowing it is coming you are going to need an anchor to keep you grounded, and the unmovable anchor is Jesus Christ. When the storms of life start coming at you, knowing Him personally prevents you from getting lost in the storm.
- Men who oppose truth will stop at nothing to distort the truth or promote a lie.

II. KEEP LIVING WITH THE GREAT HOPE!

- **Read verse 10. “I do the more cheerfully answer for myself,”**
- When you live with the great hope, only found in Jesus you can find hope even in the most hopeless of times and in stressful of times.
- There maybe darker days ahead, more uncertain, but because of Jesus the best of days is ahead of us. One day Jesus will set this world straight. One day He is coming back, and every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that He is Lord.
- Every time we lose power, I am reminded that the darker it is the more light stands out. One candle in my living room gives off so much light in the dark.

- The darker this world gets the more people will be searching for a light. They will need a light, one that helps them see, illuminates their hearts, and brings peace.
- Most of you know that my mother passed away Monday morning. We didn't get much sleep that night. Many times, this week my mind has kept wandering into the what if's, what could have been, or should have been. And that's not necessarily a bad thing, its good to reflect and be opened to learn and admit to yourself your weaknesses.
- But God kept bringing back to the center, to Him, to His word, His promises, and used His people to pray and encourage me. I had to keep my eyes on Jesus, and His hope. I kept thinking, "I will never leave you or forsake you."
- Look at what Paul says in **verses 11-14**.
- In the middle of things that made no sense, that were out of his control, that he didn't deserve or of his fault, he **"went up to Jerusalem to worship."**
- Paul says they didn't find me causing trouble or arguing with anyone. But I will confess this movement called, **"the Way"** I am part of it. I am a follower of Jesus Christ. It stokes the fire of his desire to serve and tell others about Jesus.
- Paul says he worships the God found in the written word of God. **(v.14)**
- Keep your eyes on Jesus. Live for the great hope found only in Jesus.

III. CONTINUE TO REACH BEYOND THIS WORLD.

- **Read verse 15.**
- Fellow believers we have hope in God.
- We will and can reach others by being different, by being like Christ.
- As believers we can't take ourselves out of the fight, we need to refocus, and get back in there.
- We must shine, stand for God's truth and His ways. Our relationship with Jesus is bigger than just us, its world changing.

IV. STRIVE FOR THE HIGHEST STANDARDS.

- **Read verses 16-21.**
- Paul strived to be at peace with God and man. To have a good conscience with both wherever possible.
- **Romans 12:9-13.**
- Time after time, God calls us to the highest standards of behavior. And Paul consistently strived to live by these high standards. Paul wasn't perfect, and he would be the first to admit that. But he constantly strived to live by the highest standards, and God wants us to do the same.

V. PROTECT YOUR HEART.

- **Read verse 17.**
- Paul brought back the offerings from all the Gentile churches to the Jerusalem church. Knowing that he wouldn't be welcomed and was warned that he would be persecuted upon returning.
- We all need a generous heart like Paul's. How hard he had worked to be a blessing to the believers in Jerusalem!

- **Philippians 4:10-19.**
- God wants all His people to be generous givers, and He will make sure that we are also receivers. God wants to make all of us a blessing to each other.
- None of us would blame Paul if he were to grow a little sinical, angry, or even lashed out. He was abused, misrepresented, and lied about. Yet he could write, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content."
- Brothers and sisters, we must guard and protect our hearts from growing weary from ministering to others. Even if you have been hurt, God desires that you continue to put yourself out there for that one person that you can reach. Now, I am not saying you are to be a door mat. But you also can't take yourself out of the game.

Conclusion

The kind of life God wants us to live: Leaving blessings behind wherever we go. And they will be able to tell that we are Christians. The evidence will be overwhelming.

Believers, we have hope in God, real hope like Paul had. And we know that all our hope comes through the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus took all the guilt for our sins when He died on the cross for us. And when we trust in the Lord, our Risen Savior, then we have this sure hope that we will live forever in Heaven. Everybody in the world needs the hope that we have today, and everybody can have it.

Terry Stout told a great story of Christian hope. His story happened in Atlanta. Terry was the business manager for the Psychiatry Department at Emory University Hospital in Atlanta.

One fall morning Terry was running a little late, but even though he was late, Terry passed by his regular slot in the parking deck. He decided to drive to the top floor of the parking garage, so he could look at the sky and enjoy the day for a moment or two.

I am sure that the Lord was leading Terry that day, because when he got out of his car, he saw a woman. She was standing on a narrow beam that jettied out from the roof of the parking deck. There were only 2 inches of steel between her and the pavement 9 floors below.

Terry quietly set down his bag and walked over to her. He asked her if he could help. She told him she wanted to be with Jesus. She said she was confused and had committed sins and never did anything right. Terry listened to her, and he talked to her about God's forgiveness, and the possibility of enjoying peace and happiness, if she put her faith in God.

As they talked, a crowd began to gather, and among the newcomers was a psychiatrist, who joined Terry in speaking quietly with the girl. But the doctor's approach was psychiatric, and the girl wanted to talk about God, so Terry did most of the talking.

He offered her a pin he was wearing. It was a gift from him to her, and it had two words on it: "There's Hope." Terry told her that Jesus would help fix her troubles, and that they would pray together, if she returned to the roof. -- And she did!

Church: That is the power of hope! And living with this hope in the Lord is great evidence to prove we are Christians.