

Scripture Reading:

Acts 23:31 “Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. **32** The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks. **33** When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. **34** And when the governor had read it, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that he was from Cilicia, **35** he said, "I will hear you when your accusers also have come." And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.”

Acts 24:1 “Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator named Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul. **2** And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: "Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, **3** we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. **4** Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us. **5** For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. **6** He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law. **7** But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took him out of our hands, **8** commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him.”

9 And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so. **10** Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: "Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself, **11** because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. **12** And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. **13** Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me. **14** But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law & in the Prophets. **15** I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. **16** This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. **17** Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, **18** in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. **19** They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me. **20** Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, **21** unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, 'Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.' " **22** But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of the Way, he adjourned the proceedings and said, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case." **23** So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him.

"Paul on Trial for the Resurrection"

I want to begin with a little survey this morning and I need you all to raise those hands nice and high so we can see any contrasts around the room: First, how many of you greeted someone or were greeted this morning with the proclamation: “He is Risen?” And of course we all know that we are speaking of the resurrection of Jesus.

Now, have any of you this morning, or at any time heard the proclamation, “Lazarus is risen?”

Could we even say that?

- Would it not be more proper to say, “Lazarus was risen?”

Lazarus was indeed raised by Jesus, but he went on to die once more at his appointed time.

On the other hand it would be strange to say of Jesus, “He was risen!” That is certainly a historical fact, but since Jesus is alive for evermore it is more proper to say “He is Risen!”

- **While the other resurrections in the Old and New Testaments are dramatic, it is the resurrection of Jesus that demonstrates God’s complete victory over sin & death.**

Jesus is the first fruit of all those who will one day be raised in like manner! This is why Paul makes the resurrection of Jesus the central point of the Gospel in I Corinthians chapter 15 and why it is at the center of his testimony before both the Jews and Gentiles here in Caesarea.

Someone made the observation last week that the testimony which Paul gives before this court seems to be a bit weaker than some of his others. We saw Paul give a powerful testimony of his conversion before the crowds at the Temple in Jerusalem and we will see him do this again before King Agrippa in a few weeks. However, here in Caesarea Paul is brought before a formal trial where he manages to present both his own defense against false charges...

- **AND a strong challenge to those present with the power of the Gospel and the reality of the resurrection.**

In fact, we will see that Paul manages to combine the messages that he has used for Jewish audiences on the one hand with the common message he carried to the Gentiles. We know that Paul’s challenge to the Jews was always for them to see that Jesus was the promised Messiah: To believe ALL that the Law and Prophets teach just as he said before this Roman Governor while Ananias and the other Jews had to listen.

We know from studying Paul’s address on Mars Hill that his challenge to the Gentiles was to see how God demonstrated that He was the Creator and Judge of all the world through the resurrection of Jesus. We will see all of this in Paul’s defense today.

So let us take a few minutes to review what happened at this trial before we consider what the power of the resurrection means in our lives today. After discovering a Jewish plot to murder Paul, the Roman commander Claudius Lysias sent Paul to safety in Caesarea and ordered the Jewish council to make their charges against him before Governor Felix. The high priest Ananias makes the trip in person, and he brings the orator Tertullus with them. An orator is one who speaks well: What we would think of today as a slick lawyer or lobbyist or a public relations specialist.

- **He was brought along to make sure that a solid case was made before Governor Felix.**

This Felix was no friend of the Jews and his rule had not gone smoothly in many ways with secular historians reporting that he ruled as a king with the mind of a slave. You would get no hint of this from the glowing introduction that this orator made to ‘butter-up’ the governor:

“Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, 3 we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.”

With that introduction to warm up the governor Tertullus then makes three quick charges against Paul:

The first two are intended to put Paul in a very negative light in the mind of this Roman governor and the third is an attempt to move Paul’s case back under the Jewish counsel in Jerusalem.

“5 For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. 6 He even tried to profane the temple, & we seized him, & wanted to judge him according to our law.”

- **Tertullus tells Felix that Paul is a trouble-maker knowing this governor had no use for Jewish trouble-makers.**
- **Tertullus also tells the governor that Paul is part of this new sect that follows the man from Nazareth, whom the Romans had put to death.**

He hoped that both of these counts would convince the governor that he really did not want to have to mess with this man Paul or his case. Then Tertullus gives Governor Felix the opportunity to send Paul back to Jerusalem so that the Jews can judge this case:

- The Romans had given the Jews the authority to control the Temple and they could put someone who violated the Temple to death, even if they were a Roman citizen.

According to them, Paul profaned the Temple and they would have handled the case if the commander had not intervened, and now they would be pleased to take Paul back to Jerusalem to deal with the matter in their own council.

Ananias and the other Jews confirm what Tertullus has said and then the governor gives Paul an opportunity to state his answer to these charges: First we see that while Paul is respectful of Governor Felix, he does not go out of his way to butter him up as Tertullus did in his introduction.

“Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself, 11 because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. 12 And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. 13 Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.”

Paul shows that he was not and is not a trouble-maker and did not even have enough time in Jerusalem to have done all that he was accused of doing. *[mention the 12 days and coming from and to Caesarea]*

- With the second charge, Paul says in a sense... Guilty as charged!

But he quickly reminds the governor that many who follow the Way are in reality faithful Jews and that up until this time it was legal to be a Jew or a Christian in the Roman Empire.

14 “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law & in the Prophets. 15 I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.”

- We can see that Paul here takes the opportunity of answering this charge to finish the final witness that he tried to make before the Jewish counsel when Ananias had him stuck before he could finish saying hello.

These Jews had no such power here in the Governor’s court and Paul is able to defend the faith by telling them that he in fact BELIEVES all that the Law and the Prophets have proclaimed...

- Thus he does follow the Way seeing Jesus as the promised Messiah, JUST as they should have as well being leaders in Israel!

He returns to his comments about being charged and hated because he believes in the resurrection...

- Here Paul is referring not just to the resurrection of Jesus as the first fruits, but to the general resurrection where all the righteous and unrighteous will be judged.
- This is a powerful challenge to both the Jews and the Gentiles who are present and we will return to discuss this more in a moment.

Finally, Paul turns to the most serious charge which if left unchallenged could have resulted in his return to Jerusalem to face the evil band that had taken an oath to murder him.

16 “This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. 17 Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, 18 in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. 19 They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me.”

- Paul lays out his defense very carefully:

He had a good reason for being in Jerusalem and was causing no trouble. It was the Jews from Asia who caused the trouble by making false charges and if they were serious about those charges they should have been testifying in person there in Caesarea.

- **With such a solid defense made before the governor, Paul should have been released as an innocent Roman citizen!**
- **BUT, as we shall see next week he is kept in prison here in Caesarea for over two years simply for political and financial reasons.**

In closing Paul again challenges the Jews who are present and returns to power of the resurrection which is very appropriate as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on this glorious Easter morning.

20 “Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, 21 unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, 'Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.' ”

Paul’s accusers fall silent at this point and we do not see them return again to bring any further charges against Paul. They are content to leave Paul in Roman hands and return to their various battles in Jerusalem with the Romans and within their own ranks.

- **Battles and strive that would consummate in the total destruction of Jerusalem & the Temple in a very few years just as Jesus had foretold.**

We will see in the coming weeks, several Roman officials who are also content to leave Paul’s case alone.

- **However, what is important to remember on this Resurrection Sunday is that every one of them, as well as everyone today, must render a verdict when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus!**

Jesus rose from the grave in history & He will call all those who have lived from the grave to face judgment as Paul declared before Felix & Ananias: “there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.”

- **It is also important to remember that this decision is made based on the same set of facts!**

When the Roman soldiers witnessed what happened at the tomb of Jesus on that first Easter morning and reported what they saw to the Pharisees, BOTH groups hardened their hearts against the truth and rejected Jesus in order to advance their own short-term religious or financial well-being.

When the Roman Centurion and other witnesses of the power of Christ’s death or when the women and the disciples saw the risen Jesus...

- **They overcame their doubts and were later filled with the power of the Holy Spirit who came at Pentecost to be their promised comforter.**
- **To the former, the resurrection of Jesus was the stench of death and to the later seeing the risen Jesus was the aroma of life.**
- **Things have not changed down to our day and thus we must continue to witness about the resurrection.**

As we grow in our understanding we must strive and desire to faithfully use the situations that God places us in to be His witnesses. We must be very familiar with all the events in the Gospels and all that Paul and the other New Testament writers tell us that these events mean.

We have also talked often about the need to know the Old Testament well and to be able to do what Jesus, and the disciples and now the Apostle Paul were able to do:

- **Preach the Gospel from the Old Testament Scriptures!**

Not only does it give us insights into how Jesus had to come as the suffering Messiah, to die on a cross and lie dead and buried in the tomb before being raised on the third day...

- It also gives us insights into the power and meaning of that resurrection and the general resurrection of which Jesus was the first fruits.

We know that Job looked forward to standing before God in his body long after worms had destroyed it after his death. In Daniel twelve we are told how the resurrection would involve the saved and the lost, and we know from Hebrews how Abraham believed that God would raise his only son from the dead after he was sacrificed.

But it is Jesus Himself who gives us one of the most exciting insights, which we might miss in our English language. During His ministry, the Sadducees confronted Jesus with a “tough” trick question about the wife of seven brothers and He basically told them that they did not understand the impact of the future glory on those who would be resurrected. Jesus then directly addressed these skeptics regarding the question of whether there will be a resurrection using the Old Testament!

Listen carefully to what Jesus said about the resurrection:

Matthew 22:31 “But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 32 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” 33 And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His teaching.”

Now I have to be honest in telling you that I often read this and thought it was not such a powerful argument when it comes to the resurrection because Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had not at that time been resurrected.

- This is why I started this morning out with our little survey.

It should help us to better understand the powerful point Jesus is making!

Remember the distinction we made with Lazarus, saying that we could not properly say ‘he is risen,’ but should rather say ‘he was risen.’

What Jesus says regarding the resurrection is astonishing to these people because they DID understand the point that He was making.

God did not say to Moses at the burning bush, ‘I was the God of Abraham’

- Rather Jehovah declares to Moses, “I AM the God of Abraham.”

IF there was no resurrection of the dead then God would have said, “I was the God of Abraham,” because Abraham’s body would be no more.

- This is the resurrection power that the Sadducees rejected and that the Pharisees did not understand!

It is the resurrection power that brings great comfort to those of us today who have put their trust in Jesus! God promised that He would exchange our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh and that we would call upon the name of the Lord and that He would be our God and we would be His people!

Having put my faith in Jesus I now hear the voice of the Great Shepherd and know that I am His. After my death He would still affirm the statement to any who might ask, “I AM the God of John Stoops” even though my body for a time will rot in the earth or sea. At the resurrection of the dead I will be raised with a glorious new body and God will be my God for all eternity!

- SO, when we come to Resurrection Sunday, we do not remember and celebrate “A” resurrection but “THE” resurrection!

When we remember the death of Jesus on Good Friday, or each week as we come to this Table: We do not remember “A” death, but “THE” death.

The death of Jesus which propitiated the wrath of God against sin and defeats ALL of God's enemies, including death on the last day. This is why Paul could present the Gospel as clearly as he did to those troubled Saints at Corinth:

“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you-- unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. 11 Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

- **Please keep all of this in mind the next time someone says “He is Risen” so you can truly give the hearty response: “He IS Risen, indeed!”**

Communion Meditation:

Hebrews 12: “1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. ”