PAUL’S HOPE IN RESURRECTION

Acts 24:1-27

Key Verse:24:15 “and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.”

A year ago my wife and I had a chance to visit Korea, my home country. We had a wonderful time with my family there and had a special moment with one of my cousins, who was struggling with her barrenness. Even though she had been married for 5 years, she didn’t have a baby. Because she was a Christian, Mary and I prayed for her. She prayed with us in tears. Since my family came back to St. Louis, I have forgotten about her for a year. Last week I heard that she had been pregnant for 9 months and that she is waiting for her first child next month. I was so thankful to God who answered our prayer. God never ignores the prayers of his people. Last Tuesday I called my cousin and congratulated her with a blessing. Then I asked her to invite her parents to church because they don’t believe in God. I asked her to use this opportunity to bring them to Christ. She asked for our prayer support.

What I want to say here is that we must use our every opportunity to preach the gospel. We must make every effort to share the good news with unbelievers around us. In today’s passage Paul defends himself before Felix the Roman governor. While defending himself, he preached the gospel and taught righteousness, self-control, and the judgment of God. Paul did not waste any opportunity. Because of the coronavirus, our social life is restricted and limited. Nevertheless, we must make every effort to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those who are perishing without hearing it. I thank God for those who continue to study the Bible on line. Let’s study how God used Paul to preach the gospel even in his trial and how Paul defended himself before Felix and the Jews.

First, because of the Resurrection of the dead (1-21) Paul was sent to Felix the governor in Caesarea by the commander Lysias, who asked Felix for a fine judgment of Paul, a Roman citizen. This was because Paul was in danger of being killed by the Jews before being found guilty. Five days after Paul arrived at Caesarea, the high priest Anania went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. (1) When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix. Tertullus said, “**We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude**.” (2-3) Tertullus, as a professional lawyer, started with customary flattery to appeal to Felix’s vanity. In fact, Felix was not such an excellent governor himself. According to Josephus the historian, Governor Felix was cruel, immoral, and greedy. He was originally born as a slave, but became a freeman because of his brother who became a friend of the emperor Cladius. After he became acquainted with the emperor, his social position was elevated until he became a governor of Judea. He married the granddaughter of Cleopatra, but he remarried two more women. Drusilla in verse 24 was his third wife. He divorced his second wife to marry Drusilla, a daughter of King Agrippa 1, who had a husband before she met Felix. Even though Felix did not deserve to be praised at all, Tertullus flattered him to a maximum degree to win over Felix’s heart for his favorable decision.

What charge against Paul did Tertullus bring to Felix? Look at verses 4-8. “***But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly. “We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him. By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him.***” According to Tertullus there were three charges against Paul. First, Paul stirred up riots. Second, he was a guru of Christians. Third, he desecrated the temple. The first two charges seemed to be political and the last one, religious. At that time Rome ruled the world. Under the catchphrase ‘*Pax Romana’*, which means, ‘Peace through Rome’, the Roman Empire set strict orders and laws in order to keep peace among her colonies. Anyone who rebelled against the emperor and stirred up a riot was put to death. Tertullus claimed that Paul started a riot which broke peace among the Jews and stood against the emperor as the leader of a rebellious group. The other Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true. (9)

How did Paul defend himself? He denied their first charge in verses 10-13. Look at verses 10-13. “When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: “***I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation, so I gladly make my defense. You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me.***” Paul said that he came to Jerusalem to worship, not to collect rebels. He didn’t argue with anyone at the temple or in the synagogue and didn’t perform any suspicious act or behavior that would incite a riot. Paul also said that the Jews didn’t bring any evidence for their first charge.

But Paul admitted their second charge. Look at verses 14-16. “***However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.***” Paul meant that he believes the same God whom the Jews believed and he follows the same law which they keep and shares the same hope which they desire. The difference is that he follows Jesus Christ, who is the way and the truth and the life. (Jn 14:6) In the view of Jewish law Paul was innocent because he followed the Jewish law and believed their prophecies with clear conscience before God and men. Paul claimed that there was not even a hint of rebellion or riot which violated the Roman law. Paul emphasized that he was charged because of the Jewish religion, not of insurrection. At that time the Roman government allowed her colonies religious freedom as long as they paid taxes and kept *Pax Romana*.

Paul’s defense continues. He denied their third charge. Look at verses 17-21. “***After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. I was ceremonial clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me. Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin—unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: ‘It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today***.” Their third charge was that Paul desecrated the temple. (6) But Paul said that he was ceremonially clean and faultless when he came to the temple to worship. At the temple he did not perform any suspicious act or behavior which would incite riot or defile the temple. Paul continued that his primary accusers, the Jews from the province of Asia, didn’t appear at court. According to the Roman law if the accusers do not appear in court, the case would be dismissed. Before Paul was sent to Felix, Paul was tried before the Sanhedrin. Even the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, didn’t find any crime which deserved imprisonment. In his defense against the third charge Paul mentioned the resurrection of the dead again. He repeated that he was arrested and charged because of his faith and hope of the resurrection of the dead. What’s wrong with Paul who believed in the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked?

As a member of the Pharisees, Paul used to have the hope of the resurrection of the dead. But he did not know what would happen to him after he died and how he would be resurrected. He thought that he would become righteous before God by persecuting Christians. But on the way to Damascus he met the Risen Christ. The Risen Jesus Christ who appeared to Paul did not bring a sword to slay Saul, but a grace to forgive Paul. Jesus did not appear as an agent of punishment, but as the Lord of salvation. Paul’s physical eyes became blind because of the brilliance of the Risen Jesus, but his spiritual eyes were opened to see the light of life. Paul was converted from a man of hatred into a man of love. Paul had hope of his own resurrection after he met the Risen Jesus. After he rose, he would be as holy as Jesus. He would be as lovely as Jesus. He would be as glorious as Jesus. Paul wrote his first letter to the believers in Corinth Church, while he was in Ephesus during his second missionary journey. At that time Paul suffered much because of persecutions from his enemies. Still, Paul stood firm and continued to preach the word because of his hope of resurrection. The faith and hope of resurrection became the source of his strength which enabled him to carry out his mission, wherever he was, whomever he met, and whatever he confronted.

Do you have the hope of resurrection? Do you have the hope that you’ll be changed with a glorious resurrection body? Do you have the hope that you will stand before the judgement seat of Christ? Do you have the hope that you will walk on the golden street in the Holy City, New Jerusalem?

What was the response of Felix after hearing Paul’s defense? Look at verses 22-23. “***Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. “When Lysias the commander comes,” he said, “I will decide your case.” He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs***.” The conclusion is that Felix did not find any crimes from Paul that deserved his imprisonment or death. So he postponed his decision and put Paul in a palace and gave some freedom to Paul. Paul enjoyed freedom in Herod’s palace until his case was resumed almost two years later. (27)

Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. Drusilla was Felix’s third wife and a beautiful daughter of King Agrippa I. (24) Felix summoned Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. (24) Felix might have called Paul to please his young wife or to find any clues or evidence about the charges against him. What was Paul’s message to Felix and Drusilla? Verse 25 says, “***As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, “That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you***.” Felix might have expected from Paul good-hearing words because he allowed Paul some freedom and treated him better than any other place. But Paul delivered a message of righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come because Felix lived an opposite life from all of these. Paul delivered the message of repentance to Felix and Drusilla with spiritual love. Paul reminds us of John the Baptist who rebuked King Herod saying, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” (Mk 6:18) John delivered the message of repentance to Herod even though he was king. Paul also delivered the message of repentance to Felix until Felix stopped Paul’s preaching because he was convicted by Paul’s message.

Here we learn from Paul that we must use every opportunity to deliver the gospel. Paul delivered the message of the resurrection of the dead while he was tried before the Sanhedrin. He also shared it before Felix, and later to King Agrippa.(26:6) Paul delivered the message of righteousness, self-control, and upcoming judgment to Felix and Drusilla. Paul didn’t spare a chance for sharing the gospel. He did not waste even a minute. He made all efforts to preach the word and share the gospel. Around 20 years ago, I had a chance to visit Russia for a mission trip. At that time one of my journey members was eager to share the gospel with Russians. He got off from a coach bus during break time and shared the gospel with passer-by’s in Russia. A few years later, God sent him to Russia as a missionary. God blessed his shepherd heart for Russians and anointed him as a missionary in Russia. I pray that we all may make every effort to preach the word and share the gospel like Paul and like this missionary.

Last summer David Lee, the second son of Msn James and Esther Lee, went to Pakistan & Turkey for a mission trip. In Turkey he met a Muslim boy named Muhammad one day before David came back to USA. David did not lose a chance to share the gospel with Muhammad. He taught the good news of Jesus Christ to the Muslim boy because it might be the only chance for Muhammad to hear the gospel in his lifetime. Muhammad was impressed by David’s love and the story about Jesus. Then, just before they departed, Muhammad took off his watch and gave it to David as an expression of his gratitude. Who knows Muhammad may remember the story of Jesus, David, and his watch so that he may be saved through faith in Jesus Christ? Amen!

Do not lose a chance for the gospel when opportunity comes. As Paul did, whether we are in trial or in duty, may we use every chance and opportunity to share our hope and gospel with others. Amen!

Paul did his best to defend himself because he had a remaining task in Rome. His mission was not over yet. He had to go to Rome. God gave him words and wisdom from above so that he could defeat all false accusations from his enemies. Around 20 years before Paul stood before Felix, our Lord Jesus stood before Pilate. Paul defended himself, but Jesus didn’t. This was because Jesus knew that the hour had come and that his mission was over. Jesus knew that he had to die on the cross as the Lamb of God for the sins of the world. Jesus knew that he had to obey the will of the Father and that the hour had come. So Jesus didn’t open his mouth for his defense even though he was sinless. The Prophet Isaiah prophesied this Jesus in Isaiah 53:7, “*He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.*” Finally, the Lamb of God Jesus was crucified on the cross for our sins. Isaiah said in 53:5, “*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed*.” Paul knew very well that Jesus had died for his sins. He knew that he was healed by Jesus’ wounds. He believed that he would be raised like Jesus with a new glorious resurrection body. Because of the faith and hope of resurrection, Paul defended himself to the end. Because of his hope he wanted to complete his mission in Rome. The hope of resurrection and faith in Jesus Christ made Paul great. May God richly bless us with the gospel faith and resurrection hope like Paul! May God richly bless us when we make every effort to preach the word and share the gospel as Paul did! Amen.