

Unit 35

Facing Adversity

Acts; Epistles

Memory Verses

“Now to him who is able to protect you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory, without blemish and with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time, now and forever. Amen.”

—JUDE 24-25

Preaching in All Circumstances

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God guides His people where He desires to carry out the mission He gives them.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: Acts 24–26

I had just finished an interview when the lady asked me, “May I ask you a personal question, off the record? I just want to know if you consider yourself a man of faith?” I promptly responded, “Yes ma’am, I embraced Jesus as my Savior when I was about sixteen years old and have been following Him ever since.”

She then asked one more question: “Do you think it’s appropriate for me to say God saved me and has a plan for my life because He didn’t let me die in a car accident a few years ago?” Seeing her sincerity, I could tell she wasn’t trying to have a theological debate or asking a question to trap me. Rather, she was inquiring about her relationship with God.



How would you have answered this question?

Group Time

Point 1: God guides His servant to preach to others (Acts 24:1-10).

¹ Five days later Ananias the high priest came down with some elders and a lawyer named Tertullus. These men presented their case against Paul to the governor. ² When Paul was called in, Tertullus began to accuse him and said, “We enjoy great peace because of you, and reforms are taking place for the benefit of this nation because of your foresight. ³ We acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with utmost gratitude. ⁴ But, so that I will not burden you any further, I request that you would be kind enough to give us a brief hearing. ⁵ For we have found this man to be a plague, an agitator among all the Jews throughout the Roman world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. ⁶ He even tried to desecrate the temple, and so we apprehended him. By examining him yourself you will be able to discern the truth about these charges we are bringing against him.”

⁹ The Jews also joined in the attack, alleging that these things were true.

¹⁰ When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied, “Because I know you have been a judge of this nation for many years, I am glad to offer my defense in what concerns me.

Paul had a unique calling upon his life, at least in the details. Paul knew that in Jerusalem he would be handed over in chains to the Gentiles (21:10-11). But he also knew he would have opportunities to preach the gospel to Jews, Gentiles, and even rulers in those respective worlds (9:15-16). Still he would have to suffer for the name of Jesus. Here Paul patiently endured false accusations against his character and his Lord.



How can we prepare for suffering and persecution we might experience for preaching the gospel in certain places or to certain people?

Paul was able to give his defense and express how his accusers objected to his belief in the resurrection (24:10-21). By confessing that he worshiped God according to “the Way,” Paul aligned himself with Jesus Christ. This opened the door for Paul to preach the gospel both to Felix and his wife, Drusilla (24:24-26). Paul didn’t wallow in self-pity but waited faithfully for God to give him the opportunities to make Jesus known.



How has God created an opportunity for you to make Jesus known while you were in the midst of suffering?

Point 2: God sends His servant where He wishes (Acts 25:9-12).

⁹ But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, replied to Paul, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem to be tried before me there on these charges?”

¹⁰ Paul replied, “I am standing at Caesar’s tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as even you yourself know very well. ¹¹ If then I did anything wrong and am deserving of death, I am not trying to escape death; but if there is nothing to what these men accuse me of, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar!”

¹² Then after Festus conferred with his council, he replied, “You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you will go.”

Before Felix left his post, as a favor to the Jews, he kept Paul in prison (24:27). The next governor was of a similar mind. The Jews wanted Paul tried in Jerusalem, planning to kill him during the transport (25:2-3). Festus was willing to move Paul to increase his stature with the Jews, but Paul, being a Roman citizen, had to agree to the change of venue.



What are some ways you process decisions to make sure you choose wisely and obey in faith?

Paul rejected Festus’s request. Perhaps sensing the danger and by knowing his rights, Paul appealed his case to be taken directly to Caesar. This appeal would relocate Paul’s trial in the opposite direction of Jerusalem, namely, to the city of Rome, the destination the Lord had declared for him (23:11). Providentially, the Lord worked through Paul’s chains and his citizenship to send His apostle to the capital city of the empire.

God’s Providence: Christians believe in God’s personal and direct intervention in the world—as opposed to a hands-off approach to creation—that affects

not only the _____ but also the _____ and _____ within human history.



Voices from Church History

“Someone might ask, ‘Why it is that when [Paul] heard “You must testify about me in Rome,” he did this, as if he did not believe?’ God forbid! He did this ... because he believed very strongly, for it would have been the action of one who is tempting God to be bold on account of that declaration, to plunge himself into ten thousand dangers and to say, ‘Let’s see if God can deliver me even so.’ Paul did not do this but made use of all that was in himself, entrusting everything to God.”¹

—Chrysostom (c. 349–407)

Point 3: God controls His servant's circumstances (Acts 26:27-32).

²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you believe.” ²⁸ Agrippa said to Paul, “Are you going to persuade me to become a Christian so easily?” ²⁹ “I wish before God,” replied Paul, “that whether easily or with difficulty, not only you but all who listen to me today might become as I am—except for these chains.”

³⁰ The king, the governor, Bernice, and those sitting with them got up, ³¹ and when they had left they talked with each other and said, “This man is not doing anything to deserve death or imprisonment.” ³² Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

The Lord set up yet another providential conversation, fulfilling in part His call on Paul's life to share the gospel with kings (9:15-16). Paul capitalized on this moment and shared his personal story of embracing Jesus as Messiah, even though previously he had persecuted the people who believed as he now did (26:1-23). This testimony and the truths Paul proclaimed were too much for Festus, and the Roman governor dismissed Paul as being crazy (v. 24). But Paul responded with respect to Festus and boldly stated that Agrippa, a Jew, knew the truth of what he was saying (vv. 25-27).

Agrippa's response to Paul insinuated it would take more than a short, compelling speech to persuade him to become a Christian. Indeed, it takes a work of God in a person's heart, but God does that work through the proclamation of the gospel of Christ. Paul gave everything he had for this message to go forward. He stood before Festus, Agrippa, and others while in chains and enduring their criticism in the hope that everyone who heard the gospel through him would believe just as he had. What a life goal to have—for everyone you share a meaningful conversation with to be supernaturally compelled to embrace Jesus as Lord.



What are some circumstances in your life that could lead to sharing the gospel with others?

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Acts 24:1-27

It's tough to sit in silence while someone is lying about you to another person in your presence. Think of all the "court TV" shows and how often people interrupt the other person who is speaking falsely to the judge about them. Here we see Paul not only enduring Tertullus's speech but waiting patiently for his opportunity to respond.

When Paul does respond, it is a careful defense of himself that is filled with facts and truth. We can rest assured that it is okay to defend ourselves with truth when we are being lied about. It is also beneficial in building trust with others that we own up to the blame if there are things we have done wrong.

As human beings, we are prone to make mistakes, and others are prone to make mistakes in their judgments about us as well. In all of this, we should keep striving to live holy and humbly, both in private and in public.



In what ways will you strive to walk holy while living humbly today?

Day 2: Read Acts 25:1-12

Paul was able to give his defense before Festus. Paul's accusers knew they couldn't get what they wanted as long as the trial was in the Roman court system. This helps us reflect on Jesus' trials and how execution was granted by Pilate. Jesus' execution was not only because of the pressure applied by Jesus' accusers but more importantly because this was part of God's plan to redeem and save sinners.

Even in our darkest moments in life, we can have assurance that God is guiding us. It's hard to wait and see how God will work things out while we're in the midst of a trial. Yet we must remember that enduring trials build us up spiritually. James 1:2-4 reminds us of this truth: "Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing."



What are some ways you can improve your spiritual endurance?

Day 3: Read Acts 25:13-27

God provided Paul with the opportunity to speak to King Agrippa and Bernice. The leaders of the Roman court system acknowledged Paul didn't do anything worthy of death. We have to acknowledge how God continuously protected Paul while he was in custody. It was God's plan for Paul to preach the gospel in Rome, and no one or nothing could stop God's plan (see Job 42:2).

Sometimes we have to sit in this truth and thank God for His protection over our lives. He's regularly working on our behalf, even when we don't realize it. Psalm 147:5 reminds us, "Our Lord is great, vast in power; his understanding is infinite." Also, Isaiah 41:10, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand." Take time today to rest in the protection of God, no matter what circumstances you find yourself in.



Why is it difficult during hardships to believe God is with you and working things out for you?

Day 4: Read Acts 26:1-23

There's power in a person's testimony. We may turn to people's reviews online to determine if we want to try a new restaurant or which company to go with for a maintenance issue in our home. Personal testimonies are used in court cases to help the judge and jury determine what took place. Testimonies are given space in our society so someone can be heard.

We must realize that our personal testimony of how we embraced Jesus carries power. Why? Because it is centered on the gospel. Our personal testimony communicates how we once lived before we knew Jesus. It expresses how we heard about Jesus, His death and resurrection, and what took place within us by the work of the Holy Spirit to help us realize our need for Jesus to save us. Our testimony helps us share the gospel of Jesus Christ with those who do not know Him.



When was the last time you shared your personal testimony with someone? With whom could you share your testimony this week?

Day 5: Read Acts 26:24-32

Not everyone we share the gospel with will embrace Jesus as Savior. We have to remember that salvation is a work of God, not us. God the Holy Spirit is the One who changes the hearts of non-believers in order to give them new life (John 3:3-8). We must couple our evangelistic efforts with prayers for God to remove the blinders from the eyes of non-believers (2 Cor. 4:4). At the same time, we must practice the work of evangelism since God has determined that the gospel must be preached in order for non-believers to call upon the Lord to be saved (Rom. 1:16-17; 10:9-17).

We see in Paul's life that he made it a habit to pray for those who didn't know Jesus to be saved by God. He prayed for his fellow Jews (Rom. 10:1), and he prayed that every type of person would come to know Jesus, even kings and rulers (1 Tim. 2:1-6). Spend some time today praying for people in all positions of life to know Jesus.



Which person or group of people has God impressed upon your heart to pray for, specifically for their salvation?

