

## Acts 24

### *Justice vs. Injustice*

#### Learning Objectives

- Even when Christians are doing right and being honest, that does not mean they will be treated fairly or spared suffering.
- God calls Christians to live their lives focused on Him, despite our circumstances.

**Pray for your time together today.**

**?** What is your favorite courtroom drama – whether it's a play, TV show, video game, or book? Why does it resonate with you?

#### Read Out Loud: Acts 24:1-9 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup>Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. <sup>2</sup>When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: "We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. <sup>3</sup>Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. <sup>4</sup>But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.

<sup>5</sup>"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 <sup>6</sup>and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him. <sup>8</sup>By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him." <sup>9</sup>The other Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.

#### Previously in Acts

The book of Acts shows how the Holy Spirit – working through early Christians – helped spread the Gospel and build the global church. In the last couple chapters we've seen how Paul was arrested in Jerusalem for speaking the truth about Jesus. He said to the Pharisees and teachers of the Law, "I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead," referring to Jesus coming back to life. The leaders were furious because he caused a division among their own people. They tried to kill him, plotting against him in several ways. Lysias was the commander who was told about the plot to murder Paul, and presented Paul safely to a Roman governor named Felix.

? Today's passage plays out like a courtroom drama! Who are the key players in this passage?

*Possible Answer:*

*The Defendant:* Paul

*The Prosecutors:* High Priest Ananias, Jewish elders, lawyer Tertullus

*The Ruling Authority:* Governor Felix

? Flashback to last study: What did Paul say in the last chapter that made the Jewish leaders so furious with him (Acts 23:6-10)? What action did the Jewish leaders take in retaliation (Acts 23:12-35)?

*Possible Answer: Paul spoke the truth about Jesus. Specifically, he said "I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead," referring to Jesus coming back to life. The leaders were furious because he caused a division among their own people. The leaders tried to kill him, and plotted against him in several ways. Lysias was the commander who was told about the plot and got Paul safely to Felix, filling him in on all the details he needed to search out the truth of this case.*

? What accusations about Paul did Tertullus bring to Felix?

*Possible Answer: They called him a troublemaker that incited riots and led people into a sect, and they said that he tried to desecrate the Temple.*

**Read to the Group:** That was Act One of our drama, the Accusation. Now it's time for Act Two, and Paul gets a chance to speak and defend himself!

**Read Out Loud: Acts 24:10-23 (NIV)**

<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. <sup>14</sup> 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, <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

<sup>17</sup> "After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. <sup>18</sup> I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin— <sup>21</sup>

Note the presence of the rabble-rousing crowd. They're not meant to present clear testimony or evidence, but to go "Yeah, yeah!" whenever the accusations were made. They added volume and put pressure on Felix as a group, without being legitimate contributors to the trial.

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.'"

<sup>22</sup> Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. "When Lysias the commander comes," he said, "I will decide your case." <sup>23</sup> 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.

? What four main points does Paul make regarding his innocence?

*Possible Answer: Point 1 (verse 11): His presence in Jerusalem twelve days before is easy to verify.*

*Point 2 (verses 12-13): His accusers are lying, and cannot prove their points.*

*Point 3 (verse 16): He strives to keep his conscience clear before God and before men.*

*Point 4 (verse 18): He did everything peacefully and according to the Law.*

? The Jews presented an emotionally-charged accusation, but Paul responds matter-of-factly. What is your typical response when falsely accused?

*Possible Answer: Personal; will vary. People may feel betrayed, bewildered, angry, defensive, self-righteous, aggressive, embarrassed, frozen or stuck, or any other way. This is a way for people to put themselves in Paul's shoes and relate to how he's feeling.*

? What can we learn from Paul's calmness in the face of false accusations?

*Possible Answer: Paul's restraint is admirable. It is good to present the truth calmly and clearly, asserting it earnestly, rather than being drawn into emotional battles, where things are subjective and your character can be assassinated.*

? Paul finds common ground with the men who are accusing him. How might finding common ground with people who treat you badly help you resolve conflicts?

*Possible Answer: Personal, will vary. Finding common ground can de-escalate conflict and open channels of communication closed by anger or aggressiveness. See cross-reference 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, also written by Paul, about this topic.*

*Leader's Note: Finding common ground doesn't seem to have helped Paul in this case, but it helped in Acts 23, where the Pharisees and the Sadducees began to fight because Paul talked about the resurrection from the dead. By relating to their belief, they changed their view of him to be favorable.*

? What does Paul say is the true reason for the accusations and danger he's been put in?

*Possible Answer: In verses 20-21 Paul reveals the TRUE reason for the attacks on his person and his*

*character: he is a believer! He spoke this truth before the very people that are accusing him today, and the division it caused led them to hate him even more.*

**?** Why were the Jews so threatened by Paul preaching about Jesus?

*Possible Answer: These Jews had authority, and Paul saying that they had caused the death of an innocent man, who then turned out not to be a man but to be God, shows them to be corrupt, petty, and powerless in the face of Jesus. However, they didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah, so Paul's claims undermined their authority and put them at risk of being rejected by the people. More personally, the Jews didn't want to acknowledge Jesus' lordship because he wasn't their idea of what a leader "should be."*

**Read to the Group:** Now we come to the third act of our drama.

**Read Out Loud: Acts 24:24-27 (NIV)**

<sup>24</sup> Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup> 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." <sup>26</sup> At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.

<sup>27</sup> When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

**?** What actually happened to Paul in the end?

*Possible Answer: He was left to rot in prison.*

Injustice Is Blind  
Judicial corruption is a problem that many believers have to navigate in their personal and professional lives on a daily basis. In many countries, corruption is a way of life, an ever-present, insidious problem, and even doing everything "right" doesn't mean you'll be treated fairly. God doesn't promise us an easy life, but He does promise us ultimate freedom in heaven.

**?** How do you feel about this result? How does this go against our American/Western "good guy wins" narrative?

*Possible Answer: Personal; will vary. People may be upset or frustrated, or think it's stupid that it turned out this way. It offends many people's sense of justice.*

**?** How do you think Paul felt? How would you feel in his place?

*Possible Answer: Personal; will vary. This is a way for people to relate to Paul, and as an extension, with the struggles that believers in many places still need to face today.*

**?** What did Paul do with his time while he was imprisoned by Felix? What can we learn from that?

*Possible Answer: Paul didn't try to gain his freedom, but instead boldly talked about the Way and about God, sharing the gospel in these difficult circumstances. We can learn from Paul's example by continuing to speak the gospel in love no matter our circumstances, knowing God is taking care of us.*

**?** What happens to Paul seems unjust, so why do you think God would allow these events to play out the way they did?

*Possible Answer: God can bring good out of any situation. Even though this was unjust to Paul, it opened an avenue for Paul to be protected from people who wanted to kill him while he was imprisoned by the governor, and it gave him a chance to speak the gospel to people in authority. God doesn't waste any experience! Other examples include Joseph and Daniel.*

*Leader's Note: Read Isaiah 55:8-9. The drama doesn't always go the way we want, but it follows the Author's (God's) plan, and we can trust in His outcome.*

#### **For Discussion and Accountability**

**?** What drama are you currently facing in your life that feels unjust or too hard for you? How might God be trying to speak into your life using these events? How can we better trust God in the midst of the injustice in your own life?