

# Acts 24:1-27

## Outward Church: Gospel Courage

*Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022*

I remember the first time I jumped off the high-diving board in my hometown pool. This wasn't an Olympic high-diving board, nor was it a diving board at pool level. You had to climb up four or five rungs. I was young enough to be wearing a life vest, and I was scared. And I went out to the end of the diving board. I looked down at the water. And then I turned around, and I climbed down.

As a seven or eight-year-old, I lacked diving-board courage. And maybe you're standing on a similar diving board, looking down at the waters. Jesus is asking us to jump into, but you're afraid. We have a choice. Will we jump in with Jesus, or will we turn around and climb down? Last week we heard about the life-vest Jesus offers us. We're fine. Jump in! At the end of our message two weeks ago, after Paul's near-flogging and the Jewish council's sharp division, Jesus appeared to Paul. And this is what Jesus said.

“Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”  
– Jesus to Paul (Acts 23:11b)

I want to talk about two kinds of courage—the courage to share the gospel; and the courage to believe the gospel. Gospel means the good news about Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and I'd include how he's changed your life too (1 Peter 3:15). We need courage to believe the story, share the story. I'm going to talk about two people in today's text, one a super-strong believer, Paul, and the other about as far from Jesus as you can get, the Roman official Felix. The first kind of courage is...

### **The courage to share the gospel.**

Jesus knew what he was talking about when he said, “Take courage, Paul!” Paul has nearly been assassinated by 40 conspirators and now has been swept away to Caesarea, where he is put on trial before the procurator Felix. His accusers wanted him dead, and Felix was not a good guy. He was a freed slave who was ruthless and cruel. One Roman historian had this to say about him.

“Practicing every kind of cruelty and lust, he wielded royal power with the instincts of a slave.”  
– Tacitus, Roman historian

Felix was known for his immediate executions of Jewish zealots. One of Jesus' disciples was Simon the Zealot, who may have been a member of those rebels. Felix conspired and succeeded in putting to death the high priest Jonathan (which personally offends me).<sup>1</sup> Felix later brings his wife Cruella, I mean Drusilla, to hear Paul speak.

Drusilla was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I, the ruler who had James, one of the twelve disciples, executed (Acts 12:2). Drusilla was Jewish and married a Syrian king at about fifteen years of age. That king got circumcised and became Jewish so he could marry her. But Felix sent a sorcerer to convince Drusilla to leave her husband and marry him, a Gentile, and he was successful. These two are like Bonnie and Clyde. You don't want to mess with them.

It's before Felix, and eventually, Drusilla, that Paul is dragged in for a trial with trumped-up false charges. The prosecuting attorney for the Jewish religious leaders, a lawyer named Tertullus, first accuses Paul of

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold, Clinton E.. Acts (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary) (p. 234). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.  
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being a “troublemaker, stirring up riots.” (v5) This is a political charge, and it is very serious, the most serious of the three charges he brings. Paul later denies the allegations, saying he did not stir up the crowd and his accusers cannot prove the charges.

Second, Tertullus accuses Paul of being the “ringleader of the Nazarene sect.” (v5) This is not as serious a charge to Felix because it’s mostly a religious matter. However, under Roman law, it was illegal to have unapproved sects, so this could get Paul in trouble. Paul basically accepts this accusation but reframes it. He emphasizes that he worships the same God of Israel, believes in the law and the prophets, and says he believes in the resurrection like his accusers, the Pharisees. Before Christianity was called Christianity, believers were called “followers of the Way”—as in Jesus is “the way, the truth, the life” (John 14:6). They call it a sect or an offshoot of Judaism, but Paul identifies it as the fulfillment or continuation of Judaism.

Third, Tertullus accuses Paul of trying “to desecrate the temple” (v6), which is a lie. Felix would care about maintaining order. Paul denies the charge and talks about the offerings he brought. He also does something interesting. He asks where his accusers are, which would be the Jews from Asia who stirred up the riot against him at the temple (Acts 21:27-29). Paul says in Acts 24:19, “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>2</sup>

Paul knew that according to Roman law, his accusers were supposed to be present to present their charges against him face-to-face.<sup>3</sup> But his accusers from Asia knew their charges were false and could face immense consequences for their false charges or abandoning their charges. And then you know what Paul does? He goes right back to the hope he has from the resurrection, saying maybe he’s on trial for that (v21).

Paul, in the face of immense threat, has the courage to share the gospel. Gospel means good news. The heart of that good news is that Jesus is God, died for our sins, and rose again from the grave. And in the middle of his court proceeding’s, Paul talks about the resurrection not once, but twice.

v15 “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.”

v21 “It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.”

If you are on trial, would you have the courage to make it about Jesus? I don’t think I would, but Paul got that it was his mission, and it’s ours too. Paul is simply practicing something we call “faithful presence.” He’s been faithful to Jesus and the gospel and being present where God has led him, before kings and rulers. He’s preaching the gospel, and it’s risky. But we might not pick up just how risky it was at first. Because Paul doesn’t preach some generic version of the good news, he makes it personal.

#### **Acts 24:24-25 (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.”

Felix is an unrighteous man, and he knows it. Felix lacks self-control. His relationship with Drusilla shows it. Felix doesn’t want to hear about the judgment to come. He doesn’t want to believe in something like that. Not only does Paul talk about the resurrection and faith in Jesus Christ (v24), he talks about the three things Felix would find most difficult to accept: righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come. It’s like

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<sup>2</sup> NIV

<sup>3</sup> David G. Peterson, [\*The Acts of the Apostles\*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 638.

trying to convince a steak-lover they should go vegan. It's like trying to convince a dog they should love cats. It's like trying a toddler not to make a mess while they eat. Repentance is not in his nature.

I can think of times when I've shared the gospel, I've talked about the resurrection, but I've left out some of the more difficult aspects. I haven't told them that you must only believe in Jesus or that God doesn't save everyone. I do think there's a place for wisdom and the Holy Spirit's guidance, but we just want to be careful that we don't want to ignore the Spirit when he does prompt us to say hard things. I can think of many times when I've felt prompted by the Spirit to say something hard, and I've said no. I don't want to be like that. I want to be like Paul, who displayed immense gospel courage.

But maybe you're sitting on the other side of things. You don't believe yet. You've climbed up on that diving board and are surveying whether you really want to jump into the water with Jesus. You hear Christians say, "the water's fine; come on in," but you're not so sure. You don't know if Jesus will catch you or if this life-vest called faith will be enough. You also need courage...

## **The courage to believe the gospel.**

When Felix heard Paul speak, the NIV says he was "afraid." That word just doesn't summarize what Felix was feeling. He was terrified! Some translations say he was "alarmed" (ESV), "frightened" (NASB), or "trembled" (KJV). Something about Paul's message messed with his heart. Maybe that's where you're at. Jesus is messing with your heart, challenging some of your deepest convictions and loves. But Jesus doesn't do this because he hates you, but because he loves you and died to make a way for you to know him.

Life didn't work out well for Felix. He was deposed for being a bad ruler. The thing he loves the most, power and money, let him down. Those things we think will satisfy us will let us down too, but Jesus offers us peace with God. Jesus offers us resurrection, eternal life with him. Come on in; the water's deep, but God's mercy is deeper. If you're too scared to jump, maybe you're standing on the end of the diving board but can't do it; pray, "Jesus, please push me in." Jesus would love to push you in. Just ask him.

Some of us need the courage to share the gospel. It's been too long, or never since we shared. Others of us need the courage to believe the gospel. But all of us need Jesus to help us do it.

## **Jesus can give you gospel courage.**

We can't jump off the diving board without Jesus. But he offers to help us. God was there with Paul, and through Paul's words, God was extending grace to Felix. When we don't share, we don't give the opportunity to another to respond. I believe in God's sovereignty over all people. So he can save them without you. But God loves working through his people. He loves to give us just the right amount of courage. Let's pray about that and then have some awkward but fruitful conversations about it in our small group discussions. Let's pray.

*Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA. You can listen to his other sermons at [CornerstoneWestford.com](http://CornerstoneWestford.com) or on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCv3v3v3v3v3v3v3v3v3v3v3).*

## **Service & Sermon**

You can watch the full service on Facebook or only the sermon on YouTube (coming soon).

## Discussion Questions

**Upward** – Paul emphasizes the resurrection. How is the resurrection at the center of the gospel message (good news)? Paul shows great courage in how he handles himself in this text. What other examples of courage do we have from the Bible? How does showing courage reflect God?

**Inward** – Have you had a time recently where you had an opportunity to show courage for Jesus? Did you? What gets in the way of our courage? What encourages you to be courageous?

**Outward** – Are there any situations you know of where someone else has the opportunity to be courageous? What can you do to encourage them? Do you need to seek forgiveness for missing an opportunity? Is there a way you can be courageous this week?

## Spiritual Exercises

**Confess** – Confess anytime you've lacked the courage to obey God or lacked the courage to talk about Jesus in an honest and truthful way. The Father forgives you and loves you. Ask the Holy Spirit to come and change you from the inside out, recognizing in your own power you'll forever lack the courage to believe the gospel or share about Jesus.

**Worship** – Listen and worship with *Lord I Need You* by Matt Maher. YouTube: <https://youtu.be/e37m3I5eH8g>

## Content Curation

**Sermon** – Professor Kent Hughes of Westminster Theological Seminary preached a clear, contextual, and convicting message on Acts 24 (31:08). I found it helpful, and you might as well. *Paul Before Felix*: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/paul-before-felix/>

**Sermon** – Scottish theologian Sinclair Ferguson preached a sermon on Acts 24 that highlights the parallels between Paul's trial and Christ's (43:30). <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/felix-an-unhappy-choice/> You got to love his Scottish accent.

**Video** – Our own Monica Romig recently created a video overview of Acts 1-8 for her high school Bible class at Bradford Christian Academy (BCA) in Lawrence. This 13:40 video is a great way to review the first part of the book. <https://youtu.be/2ixK0-GvGyw>