

Scripture Reading:

Acts 24:10 “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 and 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 & 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. 24 And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. 25 Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." 26 Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him. 27 But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.”

“Paul Confounds the Experts”

When we began our journey through the Book of Acts, I made mention of how some see the end of this book as a little strange or at least anti-climactic. After all the excitement of Pentecost, the adventures of Peter & John, three mission journeys of Paul, an earlier council in Jerusalem and now the final journey to that beloved city...

- Many expect there should be a strong build-up to the climax of the story: Going to Rome!

Whether we see this properly depends on whether we truly understand the point of the orderly account that Luke is writing for his friend Theophilus. Let’s go back and hear again how Luke began his Gospel, the first of the two books that comprise almost a third of the New Testament:

Luke 1:1 “Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.”

- We see that Theophilus had been instructed in the faith and like the Ethiopian eunuch had believed on the Lord Jesus for his salvation!
- Luke’s goal was to put together an orderly account so his friend would better understand His faith: A point we have often stressed as we moved through the Gospel of Luke and now the Book of Acts.

But again we need to remind ourselves that Luke is telling his friend about those things which have been fulfilled among us... We see this again as Luke begins the second part of his orderly account in Acts chapter one:

Acts 1:1 "The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, 3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

- In his Gospel, Luke has told us the story of how Jesus came to save His people from their sins and His victory is confirmed by His resurrection from the dead...
- Just as Paul stressed to those who would listen here in Caesarea and as we studied at length last week.
- But Luke is not finished with his orderly account and reminds Theophilus of where God's story is going...

Acts 1:4 "And being assembled together with them, [Jesus] commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, which, He said, "you have heard from Me; 5 for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

- God's grand story of salvation does not end with the resurrection of Jesus or even His ascension...
- Now we will see the work of the Holy Spirit!

However, the disciples still do not fully understand how the Kingdom of Jesus is going to change ALL of the world:

Acts 1:6 "Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" *[speaking of course about the nation of Israel]* 7 "And [Jesus] said to them, *[patiently, I might add!]* "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

So Luke's orderly account is telling his friend about all that has been fulfilled: The Gospel of Luke is about all that Jesus began to do and teach until His ascension to the Father's right hand and now he is going to write the Book of Acts to show how the final command of Jesus is going to be carried out.

As promised, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost to give the disciples the power they need to be witnesses for Jesus.

- The Son's mission was to carry out the will of the Father by being THE sacrifice for sin: He came to save His people from their sins.
- The Spirit's mission is to carry out the will of the Father by filling the earth with the Kingdom of His beloved Son Jesus!
- So we should not look for, and we will not find, a climax at the end of the Book of Acts because that is not the end of the story!

Just as Luke describes his Gospel as being about all that Jesus began to do and teach, so we can, and must, see the Book of Acts as all that the Spirit began to do and teach!

As I have often said, the Book of Acts is the story of how the Spirit will bring glory to the Father & the Son by filling the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus!

The lessons that we see in the Book of Acts not only tell us how the Gospel went from Jerusalem to all of Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth, but it instructs us about what our mission is today as the Spirit continues His work!

- As we pointed out last week and read in our text this morning the Apostle Paul is in for a long stay here in Caesarea.

Last week we saw how we are called to be witnesses for Jesus, telling all the world that He is risen from the dead!

- Over the next few weeks I want to unpack this time here in Caesarea a bit to see how we are to witness to the skeptics of our day and how we should present the Gospel even to those with hardened hearts.

Lord willing over the next three weeks we will take a much closer look at what Paul shares with Governor Felix and his wife Drusilla...

- How he talks with them about righteousness, self-control and judgment.

These are critical themes which Paul uses to challenge the excesses of these Roman and Jewish leaders, and they also apply to many people that God will bring into our lives today. I trust that this morning we will see how the people that Paul must confront as individuals, are also representative of various groups we will and must confront in our witnessing today. Since being arrested by the Roman Commander Lysias, Paul has had to confront and confound, the high-priest Ananias, the skilled orator Tertullus and now Governor Felix & his wife.

- We can see them as a religious leader, an intellectual leader and a political leader!

Luke does not give us an extended look at what Paul shares with these men because he has already given us the fuller details in other places: Paul often confronted and confounded the religious leaders in the various synagogues that he visited.

In Acts chapter 13, we studied the full message that Luke recorded which Paul gave at the Synagogue in Antioch Pisidia on the first mission journey.

We saw Paul confront and confound the intellectual leaders of his day on Mars Hill and again Luke gave us a full account of his message in Acts chapter 17.

Now we have come to a place where we see Paul confronting and confounding the political leaders of his day, with his discussions with Governor Felix and his wife and the testimony that Paul will give before King Agrippa.

- So Luke in his orderly account tells us about how Paul presented the Gospel in the Synagogues, at the market place of ideas on Mars Hill, and now to various Roman officials in the political realm.

As we go through these final chapters in the Book of Acts we could have the tendency think that much of this does not apply to us in our everyday lives. I don't have to confront or confound religious leaders like Ananias, great orators like Tertullus or stand before governors and their wives!

- What I want us to consider is how important these lessons are for us to learn when you remember what and who we face today:

Our world is filled with Eastern mystics or religious liberals, who tell us that there are many roads to God! Our answer to them can and must be the same as the Apostle Paul gave to the apostate Jews of his day:

- God HAS revealed Himself in the Scriptures and you need to repent and believe them!

The intellectual giants of our day tell us that man no longer needs God because man's wisdom and reason have provided all the answers we need.

- We must be ready to challenge them as Paul did on Mars Hill or again with Tertullus in this court, that they have NO answers nor any evidence to support their case!

The recent stories out of Tennessee illustrate how humorous this can be at times! *[give some details about how insidious it is to suggest 'critical thinking']*

Finally it is good in an election year to consider how the Apostle Paul interacted with the political leaders of his day...

As I mentioned, my plan is to spend the next three weeks looking at the issues Paul shared with the governor and his wife and most of it will not be what we often see in today's discourses.

- The focus today will be on how we must be ready & willing to confront and confound these experts today.

Many that we talk with today will tell us they do not much care for religion, philosophy or politics, but I can assure you they have been greatly influenced by the so-called experts of our day! None of us will likely sit and talk with Oprah Winfrey or any of the major liberal pastors of our day... But Lord willing, God will give us opportunities to talk with friends and neighbors who have come under their influence, whether they know it or not.

- How would you respond to a co-worker or friend who made the statement over a cup of coffee, 'there are many paths that lead to God' or 'all of the major religions of the world worship the same God'?
- These are not a hypothetical questions because it is almost impossible to avoid people today who would make such statements.

Are we prepared to compassionately share with them that the one true God has revealed Himself through the Bible and His Son and that no one comes to the Father except through the Son?

- Are we prepared to make them a bit uncomfortable as we talk about sin the way that Jesus did with the Samaritan women at the well?
- If we truly love and care for these people we will NOT allow them to hide from the truth behind a veil of religious tolerance.

It is not just the religious "experts" who confuse people, but we live with many examples of Greek scholars or Tertullus in our day as well. They come with fancy titles like professor, scientist or intellectual and lots of smooth talk about how things really are: Always ready to put Christians in their place as ignorant trouble-makers.

- While we may not sit and have coffee with Richard Dawkins or other famous atheists or evolutionists of our day...
- We will certainly have the opportunity to have discussions with those who have fallen under their influence.

As we encounter people who put their faith in evolution with just enough god-talk to make them comfortable, are we ready to confront and confound them the way that the Apostle Paul did on Mars Hill when he said, "Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you."

And finally, the question that I want to have us keep in the back of our minds in the coming weeks...

- Are we ready to confront and confound those in the political world with talk of righteousness, self-control or judgment.

We were subjected to dozens, if not hundreds of hours of debates in the Republican primary in the past year.

- Can anyone remember any of these three issues being a major topic of discussion at any point?

Again, we will not likely even meet the candidates for President this year, but we will talk with many people who are listening to them and being influenced by them.

- Are we prepared to confront and confound those who God puts in our paths with honest talk about righteousness, self-control or judgment?
- I will argue in the coming weeks that we must & that this is what the Apostle Paul commands us to do!

I want to close this morning with some selected quotes from the Epistle of Paul that had perhaps the greatest influence on my life as a young Christian. They will be from his letter to the church at Colossi, which I would argue was likely written while Paul was in chains here in Caesarea! The Apostle Paul knew that the philosophies of this world had to be confronted...

- And he confronted and confounded them often.

He also knew and understood that it would be all too easy for the Saints to come under the influence of these philosophies if they did not understand them and stand against them. There is no neutral ground here: Either we will attack the gates of hell with the promise of Jesus that they cannot prevail or hold up against the assault of God's Church... Or we will be taken captive by these vain philosophies of the world as Paul warned the Saints at Colossi! Paul addresses, " the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae:

Paul gives thanks for their salvation and says, "from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. 11 May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

- Paul then glories in the preeminence of Jesus and discusses his ministry among them.
- In the second chapter Paul wants them to know who they are and warns them about the vain philosophies of the world that they must avoid:

2:1 "For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. 5 For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. 6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. 8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority."

- In the fourth chapter, the Apostle Paul asks for their prayers, that he might be faithful in his witness there in Caesarea ...

Colossians 4:2 "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; 3 meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, 4 that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak."

- And finally, Paul calls on these Saints to be faithful witnesses as well, making good use of the time and opportunities that God so graciously gives each of us!

Colossians 4:5 "Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. 6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one."

- May we be such faithful witnesses in an age that needs so much light!

Communion Meditation: Psalm 73:

"Truly God is good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart. 16 When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me-- 17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end. 18 Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. 24 You will guide me with Your counsel, And afterward receive me to glory. 25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. 26 My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. 27 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. 28 But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, That I may declare all Your works."