

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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The Defense Never Rests!

- 1. Because Paul's hope sprang eternal**
- 2. Because our hope springs eternal**

**Hymns: 147 – 149 – Distribution: 154, 167 –
Closing: 166**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Acts 24:10-21 –

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. However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, 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. "After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. 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. 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.' "

"The defense rests!"

You probably have heard that phrase before. It's a phrase that has been used in real life court settings, along with plays and movies. It can be a dramatic line. It means, "That's all there is to say." No more explanation will be given. No more defending of a person's words or actions for which they are charged.

Today as we look in the New Testament book of Acts, we will be going to court. We are jumping into the middle of a courtroom scene in the life of the Apostle Paul. However, we will not hear the phrase "The defense rests" today. In the Roman governor Felix's court, Paul will not say those words. In fact, in a way we can say that Paul will never get to the point in his earthly life when he will be done, when he would ever be able to say, "The defense rests!"

Let's see how this was true of Paul's courtroom trial in Acts 24 and how this is true of us as well.

1. Because the Apostle Paul's hope sprang eternal

This account might be a bit more obscure to you than other accounts in Scripture, so some background might be helpful in understanding the setting. You might remember that the Apostle Paul took three missionary journeys into the Mediterranean world of his day. He traveled from Palestine northwest into Asia Minor (now Turkey) and on into Greece. He preached the message of the Savior Jesus Christ and he founded many churches by the grace of God.

As Paul was sailing back to Palestine at the end of his third trip, he was determined to go to Jerusalem. This may not seem strange to us. In fact, it probably seems like the thing he should do. But the fact is, this was a dangerous thing for Paul to consider doing. It was not dangerous because of the Roman authorities.

In fact, Paul was a Roman citizen with many rights that non-citizens did not have. It was dangerous because there were enemies in the country among the Jewish religious leaders. These same leaders who had rejected Jesus and his message and who had crucified him were still in Jerusalem and were obsessed with mightily persecuting the early Christian Church that proclaimed the message of the Savior Jesus. Yet Paul was determined to go.

He wanted to see the leaders of the Christian Church in Jerusalem. He wanted to bring the collection for the needy Christians that he had collected during this time of famine. And he wanted to go worship at the Temple. After he arrived in Jerusalem, he accompanied four men to the Temple who had made a special vow to the Lord and had to present themselves before him there. This would show that he came in peace, right? However, when he was at the Temple, some Jews from Asia Minor who were in Jerusalem caused an uproar, collected the Jewish leaders who hated the Christians, seized Paul, and began beating him.

The Roman guard saw what was happening and intervened. For Paul's safety they arrested him to answer to their charges. The next day the Roman commander oversaw a hearing before the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin. This also ended in a great uproar when Paul professed his faith and hope in the resurrection. So the hearing was ended. Since the Roman commander caught wind of a plot to ambush and murder Paul, for his safety he sent him to the seaport city on the Mediterranean where the governor was now located, called Caesarea. Paul now had to stand trial before the Roman governor Felix. Those who were interested in pursuing charges against him had to travel there to confront him in court.

As the court convenes in Acts 24, who is present to accuse Paul? The high priest attends, along with representatives of the Sanhedrin. And they have hired a lawyer to represent them!

Why did these men hate Paul so much? They were devotees of the Old Testament laws. They subscribed their obedience to the laws of

Moses and had added hundreds of their own laws to them. They had rejected the teaching of Christ and had clung to these laws as the way of salvation. The Jews from Asia Minor who had originally risen up against Paul at the Temple even made it a habit to follow Paul on his mission trips and preach to his new congregations that they must still obey Old Testament law, notably circumcision, to be saved.

What charges did they specifically bring to Felix's court? In the verses before our reading, their lawyer said, *"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."* Does this sound familiar? I think we can remember another trial that had similar accusations!

Paul must defend himself. In our reading we read, *"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.... After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. 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. 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."*

Paul has two parts to his defense. The first is rather straightforward. Paul defends himself against the charges dealing with the law of the land:

- Paul had not been gathering a mob. He was not trying to carry out any "May Day-like" activity.
- In fact, Paul said, he was bringing a gift of charity for the poor and an offering to the Temple. How volatile are those acts?!
- Paul stated that there is no proof that his accusers have against him.

- And Paul also said that his original accusers were not even present! (the Jews from Asia Minor) In the Roman world, it was a rather dastardly thing to give up your cause and not address your adversary with your complaints.

Paul's defense also covered a second area, the religious, spiritual area. As Paul spoke about this, he proclaimed the hope that he had: *"I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, 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... 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.' "*

Paul brought up a couple points that were sore spots of contention between the members of the Sanhedrin, some of whom were Pharisees and some of whom were Sadducees. The Sadducees did not believe in supernatural things, including angels and the resurrection. They also based their faith on the first five books of the Old Testament – the Law of Moses – and not the prophets.

These were key points for Paul to bring up in his defense! Why? We find the reason not only in their disagreement among themselves, but also in the meaning of the great event of the resurrection. We see the importance of that event in our second lesson today from 1 Peter: *"You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times*

for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God."

Christ served as the Redeemer, paying for the world's sin and guilt not with gold or silver, but with his suffering and death. He successfully paid the price of the world's sin and fulfilled the picture of the Passover lamb from the Old Testament, which caused the wrath of God to pass over underserving people. Therefore, God the Father raised him from the dead and glorified him. **He put his stamp of approval on the Son's sacrifice, and now the sure hope for Paul's future in heaven was rooted in this resurrection of Jesus Christ!**

Paul even made it clear where the plan of this Messiah had come from. It had been prophesied in the law and the prophets, namely, the Old Testament! The same Old Testament that these accusers clung to prophesied the coming and the work of the Savior, Jesus Christ. He was no cultic leader. This was the God of Israel's plan to save the world!

What was the governor's reaction to the testimony of Paul in his defense? Would he receive a favorable judgment? After our reading it says, *"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... He was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him. 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. "*

Paul was interrupted and never had the chance to say, "The defense rests." And Governor Felix, who was corrupt and was also looking to stay on the good side of the Jews, would never release him. But did it matter? Did that take away Paul's hope? Or dull it? No! **Hope sprang eternal (literally) in Paul's heart!**

2. Because our hope springs eternal

That's quite an involved account to review today. But as we apply this truth to our own lives, it is well worth the time. How can we apply this to ourselves?

First of all, we need to ask, "What do people base their hopes on today?" Have you noticed? Some people base their hopes on bunkers. I've seen more than one news story where an individual was found to have built an elaborate bunker under his house or deep in the wilderness, a safe house that was to serve as a fortress. This reinforced bunker would save him from tornado, from earthquake, from natural catastrophes, from the authorities, from the Russians, or from whatever would threaten his safety! He could only hope.

Others base their hopes on bankers. The chase to accumulate wealth and financial security holds the hope that all will be secure and fine. If the bank account and retirement funds are big enough, catastrophes, accidents, and illness can be covered. Security can be gained. One can only hope.

The common thread between all earthly ways to try to find hope is that they are based on our own works and efforts. Where will we be left if we try to base our hopes on these things when adversity strikes? What will happen when the stock market plunges or when catastrophe or accident consumes the earthly wealth we worked for and saved? Where will hope be?

What will happen when illness strikes and death looms? Will our secure bunker or friendly banker give us hope and comfort? And what will be our hope when we have to meet our God, the righteous Judge, one day? Imagine for a moment that all you had to stand on were the works you have done. Your plea before him would be how you have been so noble in your thoughts, so loving in your words, so caring for your family, so compassionate toward your neighbor, and so on. Your works could be your security blanket and your hope for heaven. Is this thought comforting to you? If you're honest, it should terrify you.

Rather, let our hope be the same hope that the Apostle Paul knew and professed in the court in which he stood 2000 years ago. Let it be in sacrifice that Jesus Christ offered on the cross when he paid for our forgiveness, not with gold or silver, but with his innocent suffering and death. Let it be in the sure hope of the resurrection of his body on the first Easter Day. Let it be in the victory over sin, guilt, and death that he completed, which was sealed in the surprise of that first Easter Day when the angel announced, "He is not here; he has risen, just as he said." Let it be in the eternity of heaven that will be ours one day because of the service that our Savior has carried out for us. This is our hope!

If injustice, ridicule, or persecution comes our way that will not be rectified on this side of eternity – just as Paul had to endure his circumstances – let us continue to give our witness as to the hope within us as he described it: gladly! For what does it matter if we are not acquitted before our fellow man? Not a bit! For hope springs eternal (literally!) for us as well!

Finally, as we close our look at the phrase "The defense never rests," we could ask the question, "Will it ever 'rest' for us?" If we think of the Apostle Paul's life, the defense would never rest. Until the end of his life he would proclaim the gospel and defend the Christian faith. God would give him many opportunities to do so.

It will be the same for us. There will always be people to talk with, doubters to witness to, and opponents to speak up to concerning our risen Savior. We cannot "argue faith" into any of them, but when it comes to the truth of Jesus Christ, the defense will never rest until time has ended. Therefore, may God make us faithful believers and witnesses of the same truths that Paul professed long ago in Governor Felix's court that "Christ is risen; he is risen indeed!" Amen.