

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. ¹¹ You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. ¹² 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. ¹³ And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. ¹⁴ 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, ¹⁵ and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. ¹⁶ So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man. ¹⁷ "After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. ¹⁸ 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. 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. ²⁰ Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin—²¹ 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.'"

Speak Boldly

- **We stand on the sure prophetic word fulfilled in Christ.**
- **We proclaim the certain hope of the resurrection to life eternal.**

What does it mean to proclaim the Word of God boldly? Does it mean that we are to go out "looking for trouble"? Does it mean that we go out and do bold and brash and attention grabbing things? Does it mean that we must speak as forcefully as we can to win the religious argument? Or does it simply mean that we speak God's Word of truth in faith?

There are some today who purposefully cause scandal hoping that such tactics will garner attention for the gospel, but in so doing they compromise the message. When ministers burn books that are precious to others or when people lead aggressive and hostile demonstrations the gospel is not rightly defended, nor is it truly proclaimed, but it is tarnished. The gospel is better served and the gospel is proclaimed rightly when the simple truth of the Bible is declared. We believe in God's Word therefore we speak God's Word. Our faith has been created by the power of the word and so we put our trust in that Word of Christ. We speak with confidence as we use the Scriptures to serve as a powerful witness that easily defends itself.

Scripture clearly teaches from the beginning to the end that God promised to send a Savior. It teaches that the promised Messiah would suffer, die, and rise again. Scripture also clearly teaches that this chosen one, this Messiah, this Christ, will come again to judge the living and the dead. Scripture testifies to this message of eternal salvation through Jesus and so in faith we testify to these truths as well. We speak boldly as we proclaim

forgiveness through Jesus and the resurrection of the dead to eternal life even though both defy reason and logic. In faith we trust in God's Word and we proclaim its truth as we hold onto the hope that it gives. Like Paul and the other apostles we gladly proclaim Scripture that clearly points to the risen Christ!

Paul was on trial, dragged before a Roman governor, and he was brought there by those who took exception to his message. They accused him of being a rabble rouser. They accused him of trying to undermine the government and inciting a rebellion. But Paul had done nothing wrong. His only "crime" was to preach the word boldly. He was not taking on outlandish tactics because he was looking to gain a large rowdy following so that he might cause some sort of uprising against the religious leaders or political powers. He simply taught what God's Word had said all along because by faith he trusted in the Word of God. And then when he was put on trial it was no different. He did not give up hope but he proclaimed the truth of God's Word. He spoke boldly. He spoke in faith.

We would do well to follow his pattern. And so today we encouraged by Paul's example to **speak boldly. We can speak boldly because we stand on the sure prophetic word fulfilled in Christ. We can speak boldly because we proclaim the certain hope of the resurrection to life eternal.**

Paul stood before the governor and could have a clear conscience in his defense. Paul knew that he was a sinner, but he had been careful to conduct himself in way that reflected well on his Lord and he was careful to conduct himself according to the law of the land. Paul was not a trouble maker and the governor knew as much. Because Paul had traveled throughout the territory that Felix governed the governor could have easily verified that Paul had always gone about his business of proclaiming the gospel rather peacefully. Felix knew that Paul was not interested in inciting the crowds into upheaval and he knew that Paul was not doing anything outlandish and offensive like burning the books of the Jewish law. No, on the contrary Paul had conducted himself with sensitivity to the Jewish laws. During this last trip to Jerusalem Paul made sure that he was ceremonially clean before going to the temple. He did nothing against the law, nothing forceful or harsh to garner attention for himself or to brashly oppose the Jewish leaders or Roman government. No, he came to Jerusalem in order to distribute gifts to the poor and to worship the one true God.

Those who opposed him, however, were the ones who caused all the trouble. Paul was visiting the temple and while he was there all of Jerusalem was thrown into turmoil. Some Jews from the province of Asia accused Paul of defiling the temple and they called to anyone who would listen to help them seize Paul. A scene that could be described as nothing short of a riot broke out in the temple courts and they dragged Paul outside of the temple gates to beat him with the intent of killing him. Fortunately for Paul Roman troops were able to restore order and they saved him from death at the hands of this mob. As they put him in chains and sent him to barracks the mob shouted violently, "Away with him." And yet despite this intense level of obvious hatred Paul did not go silently, instead he spoke God's Word to them.

Eventually Paul would be taken before the chief priests and the ruling council of the Jewish people called the Sanhedrin. This meeting too broke into chaos when Paul spoke

about the resurrection of the dead. After this a plot was hatched to kill Paul, Finally Paul was finally transferred to Caesarea to stand before Governor Felix when this murder plot was discovered. There Paul would once again speak of the resurrection and testify that Jesus is the only way to eternal salvation.

Paul was not a trouble maker; and yet there he was in front of the Governor Felix as the high priest Ananias and a lawyer named Tertullus brought all kinds of accusations against Paul. Despite all this Paul spoke boldly trusting in God and trusting the Word that he gladly proclaimed.

As Christians we are not called to be trouble makers, but often trouble still finds us. We are not to go out with the intent to make trouble and offend others, but with that said proclaiming the gospel will sometimes “ruffle a few feathers”. God’s Word declared or confessed in its uncompromised purity has the ability to irritate the sinner. The logical mind is bothered and annoyed by the miraculous, and it has a hard time accepting a central truth of our faith, the resurrection. So, we who cling to the resurrection and proclaim the victory that we have in the empty tomb and the sure hope of the resurrection to life everlasting, are often viewed by those of this world as foolish, simple, annoying, and worthy to be mocked and mistreated. God’s word speaks plainly on a variety of issues both social and spiritual; and so when the people of this world want to leave plenty of wiggle room for their own opinions they often take exception when God’s people speak God’s Word of truth.

Christians are daily put on trial, figuratively and literally, for their beliefs by those who belong to this world. When faced with such pressure there is the temptation to hide our beliefs and cower in fear. We must all admit that there have certainly been times that we have all succumb to that temptation. We crumble under the pressure, but the Lord Jesus lifts us up, he forgives us, he strengthens us, and he enables us through his powerful word to stand firm in the faith. As we learn more about God’s word he enables us to defend the scriptures and to proclaim God’s Word of truth more clearly. Forgiven by our living Lord our hearts are renewed and our hearts are set on fire when we recall what our God has done for us. Forgiven by our living Lord we are amazed and compelled to speak when we see how all the Scriptures stand together as this powerful witness of God’s love and his will for our life and his plan for our eternal life.

God forgives us and lifts us up when we in our sinfulness fail to defend his word. He picks us up and then makes us bold to speak as we learn more about his remarkable Word. But we have to be careful that we don’t fall off into the proverbial ditch on the other side of the road either. Speaking boldly does not mean that we are to speak forcefully in order to win the religious argument, nor does it mean that we take the truth that we have been given and we go out pound people over the head with it until they listen. This might sound a *bit* over the top, but think about it, isn’t that the place where we find ourselves going? When you are tested for your faith are there not times that you and I snap back with excessive force. *“I’m right and you are wrong!”* should not be the proclamation to which we automatically resort. Instead we would do well to follow this example of Paul and how he spoke boldly with persistence and patience.

Like Paul we believe strongly in Jesus of whom the Scriptures clearly testify. Like Paul we stand confidently on the truths of Scripture and we confess and teach what God's Word says. As so like Paul we speak boldly, but let us be careful to speak the truth in love. We speak it with gentleness and respect. For we know that we have God's Word, we have the truth, and so we speak with persistence and boldness, but with compassion and concern for those to whom we are speaking. Like Paul we speak boldly but with concern. Or like another wonderful example, like Jesus did on the road to Emmaus, we speak confidently and clearly as we walk others through the holy words of Scripture which all testify to what the truth is and how it is found in Christ.

And that is where Paul's defense finds its stability. This is the source of Paul's courage and his boldness to speak. His hope was sure because he had the infallible and inerrant word of God. The Jewish leaders were opposing him, they didn't like what he had to say, and they had even cooked up all sorts of stories about his motives and his methods. He knew very well that they did not respect his message. He knew they disregarded those who followed Jesus as a sect. They saw him as ignorant and foolish and they treated him with contempt, but Paul was unfazed. Why? He had the word of God fulfilled in Christ. With faith in his risen Lord, with confidence that came from a faith built up by the Scriptures, and with compassion even for those who were trying to get rid of him Paul spoke boldly. He said to this impressive assembly, ***I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, ¹⁵ and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.*** His words are confident and yet they do not smack with arrogance or overt defiance, instead there is a hint of concern, even compassion. Even after all these Jewish leaders had done to him, he was still searching for some common ground and in essence he called them to repentance. There will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked and those that believe in Jesus will be raised to eternal life. The Scriptures testify to these truths.

Paul had not intended to cause any political or civil unrest he simply spoke the truth boldly. It seemed that every time Paul had a chance to speak, he made an effort to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the sure hope of the resurrection to eternal life for all who believe in Jesus.

Paul spoke boldly, we too can speak boldly. Yes dear friends, our hearts are set on fire as we think about what our Savior did for us: how he lived, died, and rose again. Our hearts are on fire as we think about how he will come again to judge the living and the dead and that he will bring his believers to our heavenly home. Our eyes our opened to this truth over and over again as we review God's holy Scriptures and then with this message beating in our hearts our mouths are opened to speak this truth and to speak it boldly even when we are challenged or our faith is put on trial.

May God continue to grant us faith that holds a persistent devotion to the Word! May the Lord help us confidently use Scripture to explain what the word of God truly says! May our God lead us to stand firm upon the truths of Scripture, trust in the power of his Word, and filled with compassion for all speak boldly about our resurrected Lord and the sure hope of everlasting life that he provides. Amen.