

Hope in the Face of Opposition

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good day everyone. It's an exciting part of Acts. Paul on trial before his own people, everything that happens there. But it's a story which helps us as we think about how we live as we follow the Lord Jesus.
- So we're going to look at this together. If I haven't met you yet, I'm Dave. I'd love to say good day after church. And I normally out with the youth and the kids. But let's look at this passage together and be encouraged by what God has to teach us.
- Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the Apostle Paul. We thank you for his faithfulness to you in proclaiming your message. We thank you for the encouragement that you gave to Paul that night after he testified in the Sanhedrin.
- We pray that as we look at your word now, you will teach us and you will encourage us. Amen. There is an outline in the bulletin, so you can follow along with that.
- I'm wondering if you've ever felt this thing of opposition to the gospel. Possibly personally, where you've tried to share the gospel and people have attacked you personally.
- [1 : 1 7] Or attacked the Lord Jesus. Someone has told you to keep quiet or punished you for your faith. Or perhaps just the broad opposition.
- You see the world around you, you see the culture being anti-Christian. You see laws being made which are anti-Christian. You see it just seems all a bit disheartening.
- That trying to follow Jesus, trying to proclaim him, he's king of everyone, but it doesn't really seem like this mission is going all that well sometimes.
- Have you felt the disheartening lack of fruit in evangelism? Maybe your friends and colleagues know that you're a Christian, but no one's yet fallen on their knees and said, what must I do to be saved?
- Perhaps you've witnessed shocking injustice, corruption, sin. How do we press on when things seem so disheartening?
- [2 : 1 5] In terms of lack of gospel results, or opposition, or overwhelming injustice? Acts is descriptive and just telling us what did happen, not prescriptive. But it tells us a lot about how God works.
- It offers us great insight and encouragement. And so, we'll hopefully see some of those as we look at this passage. The story so far, Paul has ended up in Jerusalem, delivered gifts to the church.
- He's gone and visited the temple. And then, as he's leaving the temple, some Jews see him and they start attacking him. They drag him outside, shut the gates, start beating the socks off him.
- Because they think that he has brought a Gentile into the temple, which he hasn't. While they're beating him up, the Roman Tribune comes down, rescues him and arrests him.
- And then, as he's about to be led into the barracks, Paul speaks to the crowd and they all listen to him until he says that Jesus sent him to go proclaim the salvation to the Gentiles.

[3 : 16] At which point, they all want to kill Paul again. And so, the Tribune rescues Paul again. Then, the Tribune wants to have Paul flogged to find out, why does everyone hate you so much?

And then, Paul says, I'm a Roman citizen, you can't do that. So, the Tribune's like, right, okay, I won't do that. So, he calls for this meeting of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews, puts Paul down in front of them and says, right, what is going on here, guys?

He wants to get to the bottom of, why does everyone want to kill Paul? What even other charges against him? Why is he even under arrest? So, that is the story so far.

Then, Paul is on trial and what happens? Verse 1, looking intently at the council, Paul said, Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.

Here's a claim, he's done nothing that he needs to apologize for because he doesn't think that God has done anything wrong. He doesn't think God thinks that he's done anything wrong. He's lived openly before God and so he's not asking for forgiveness, he's not pleading guilt before any of these Jewish bigwigs that are arranged before him.

[4 : 31] So, what happens? Verse 2, the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. The idea being that, that's a shocking thing to say. You've lived in good conscience?

Repentance, right? That demands swift judgment and requires repentance, right? Those words coming to your mouth need your mouth to be smacked, right? They think that Paul should be apologizing, not defending himself.

And so, Paul has a fiery retort, doesn't he? Verse 3, Paul said to them, God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall. Are you sitting to judge me according to the law? Yet, contrary to the law, you order me to be struck?

Whitewashed wall is the idea of a cover-up. Right? Something that looks pretty but it's only, you know, skin deep. It's only covering the uncleanness beneath, right? Like a dirty, dodgy wall that's got a fresh coat of white paint over the top but it's still just that dirty, dodgy wall underneath.

Paul is saying the guy who ordered him struck is filthy and corrupt and just has this mere appearance of order or cleanness. And so, then he calls down a curse upon him, right?

[5 : 35] God is going to strike you. Why? Because you're a hypocrite. Here you are trying to judge me by the law yet you're not even pretending to follow it, right? You've made yourself accountable to the judgment of God himself.

He's not wrong, is he? The Sanhedrin has shown itself to be corrupt by this action. But then, verse 4 and 5, Paul is rebuked for cursing God's high priest.

And so, he answers, verse 5, I didn't know, brothers, that he was the high priest for it's written, you shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people. And he quotes there from Exodus 22, verse 28.

Now, what's going on here? There's a suggestion that Paul is just dripping with irony here. So, Paul knows very well the government title that Ananias has.

He knows that he's called the high priest, but he's claiming that he's unrecognisable as high priest by his actions. So, then the quote is, you shall not speak evil of the ruler of your people, and I did speak evil about him, therefore, I'm saying he's not actually ruler of my people.

[6 : 46] That's possible, interesting suggestion. Certainly, Paul uses buckets of sarcasm in 2 Corinthians when he's arguing against the so-called super-apostles. I don't think that's what's going on here, though.

And the reason I don't is because Luke doesn't give us any hints or any clues that there's irony being used here. Rather, Luke just straight-up calls Ananias the high priest in verse 2.

The high priest ordered him to be struck. So, I take it that Paul is genuine here in not realising. So, perhaps, seeing as the Roman Tribune ordered this meeting and was obviously present at it, Ananias is maybe not in his high priestly get-up, right?

Hasn't had time for the ceremony of getting dressed in priestly robes or has chosen not to do it. Paul's been away from Jerusalem for years, may not recognise him by sight. Luke has just called him the high priest, and then after that fact is pointed out to him, Paul confesses, well, I didn't realise he was the high priest, the implication being that if he had, he wouldn't have said what he did.

And he quotes the law to back up why. So, the force of this chunk of the story, either way, is the high priest completely disregards the law even as he claims to judge by it.

[8 : 01] And Paul, who's been judged by the law, is more concerned with the law than those who are judging him. So, don't be surprised by sin.

Don't be surprised by hypocrisy. Don't be surprised by those claiming to have positions of authority, not actually living under authority themselves. And the very sins that require Jesus to come and die for us, they're still very much in evidence, aren't they?

There's still a constant sign that points us to our need for repentance and the grace offered by the Lord Jesus. And Christians do and will and will continue to face opposition from sinful men using their authority in sinful ways.

But God's providence will prevail. His gospel will go out. Those who oppose him will be struck down. And actually, we know from Josephus what happened to Ananias, that he was a corrupt, greedy, brutal man he ended up being hunted down by fellow Jews and killed as he healed in an aqueduct during civil wars that happened just before the Romans came and wiped them out less than a decade later.

Don't be surprised by sin. Know that God will judge and he will prevail. So then, Paul sees there's both Pharisees and Sadducees in the Sanhedrin and so he cries out in verse 6, Brothers, I'm a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees.

[9 : 30] It's with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial. And that causes argument and division among the two parts of the council. And so, verse 8, we get an explanation note from Luke.

For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. So, two camps, Pharisees believe in the resurrection, Sadducees who don't.

That's why they're Sadducee. And Paul says, I'm a generational Pharisee. I'm a Pharisee, I'm a son of Pharisees, son of Pharisees, son of Pharisees.

The reason I'm on trial is because of the hope of the resurrection. He's saying his beliefs are orthodox Pharisaical beliefs in line with everything they believe.

He's not in a cult, he's not some kind of weird group of people, he's actually standing in line with these group of people who read the Bible really carefully and take it really seriously.

[10 : 32] Old Testament Scriptures. That's what he's saying. This is standard belief that has him on trial. Now, there's a few things to unpack in this statement, aren't there?

Firstly, the Pharisees believed in the resurrection. Why? Because it's taught in the Old Testament. Most explicitly, Daniel chapter 12.

They were looking forward to everyone being raised from the dead and then judgment and vindication for God's people. The Sadducees, on the other hand, they really only believed in the Torah and they rejected the later prophets but they only believed in the Torah in kind of like a weird, anti-supernatural way where they didn't believe in angels even though they're talked about in the Torah.

So, how then is Paul on trial because of the resurrection? He's actually on trial. Why? Because some Jews attacked him at the temple and wanted to kill him because they thought he was desecrating it.

Then he was rescued by soldiers and they wanted to kill him again because he said he was sent to the Gentiles and he was rescued again and now he's actually been bought before the Sanhedrin so the Roman Tribune can figure out what's going on.

[11 : 42] That's why he's on trial. What does he mean he's on trial with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead? That's because he's only doing what he is doing because of two truths.

Firstly, Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. He is Lord of all. He's appeared to Paul and said I've appointed you as my messenger. And secondly, Jesus' resurrection is the first fruit of the general resurrection.

That is because Jesus has been raised from the dead everyone will be raised from the dead. It's coming. It's happening. He's on trial because of his belief in the resurrection of the dead and his hope in that.

It will happen and that's been shown because a man has already been raised. So now this is the time where people need to hear the good news that Jesus is Lord. This is the time where people need to submit to him as king.

They need to come and receive his gracious pardon. And Jesus has been raised up not just as king of the Jews but as king of all peoples, all nations. The king of kings.

[12 : 44] And so Paul proclaims what the Pharisees were looking forward to has actually come about. The Messiah, the son of David, the promised king has come.

And with him comes the hope that they were looking forward to. The resurrection of the dead. And so as Paul goes around proclaiming this hope, he's opposed.

And trouble and riots follow in his wake. Yet, he's not a lawbreaker. He's not the one causing these riots. He's up on trial.

Why? Because he's acting in line with the resurrection hope. There really is a king who has been raised from the dead who rules over all kings, all nations, all people and they need to hear this great news.

And so he's been acting in line with that. And that's how he's ended up on trial. So why did he call this out after he noticed that there's a bunch of Pharisees and Sadducees here?

[13 : 40] Why did he say it's because of the hope and the resurrection of the dead that he's on trial? Well, he's appealing to the root issue, isn't he? He's making them actually get to grips with what the real issue is.

I mean, is he a troublemaker who's stirred up trouble all over the world? And so the Pharisees and the Sadducees can actually unite and say, we're not like you, you're a troublemaker and you're on trial because of all the trouble that you've caused everywhere.

Well, is he like that? It depends on if there actually is a resurrection or not, doesn't it? If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, well, yeah, he's just a troublemaker. But actually, if Jesus is truly alive and Paul is just being obedient and everyone else causing all the riots are the troublemakers.

So, the issue that needs to be dealt with is the resurrection. So, what happens when Paul calls this out? Identity politics, that's what happens.

Completely ignoring the issue at hand, declaring someone guilty or innocent merely by the tribe they belong to. That's exceedingly wicked, unjust, unrighteous.

[14 : 53] That's exactly what happens. The Sadducees and the Pharisees start having a big punch-up in the midst of this, you know, ruling council. The Pharisees who stand up for Paul in verse 9, they're not right to stand up for Paul.

They have no interest in justice or truth. They declare him innocent on the most ludicrous of basis. Maybe a spirit or an angel spoke to him. That's a defence they know the Sadducees aren't going to accept.

They know it's actually just going to rile them up more. They haven't dealt with the real issue at all. They haven't actually asked Paul what the truth is. They haven't actually gotten to the bottom of truth. They're just, oh, you're one of our tribe.

Well, we don't think you've done anything wrong then. That is just tribal allegiances and wicked judgments by the rulers of God's people. And it's all fake support anyway because we've seen a couple of paragraphs later, the next day in fact, the whole council is agreeing to have Paul murdered.

And so, things turn violent and so violent that the Roman tribune has to rescue Paul again by force. Can you imagine that? Because he's concerned that Paul is going to be torn to pieces.

[16 : 08] These are supposed to be the elders of Israel turning a trial into a punch-up over tribal politics and a punch-up that gets so violent that the Roman soldier is afraid that Paul is going to be torn to pieces by these old men who are the rulers of the Jews.

Something almost comical about it, isn't there? But something deeply horrific about just how far they have strayed from righteousness into violence.

When the rule of law is gone, people become untethered from true justice and other allegiances start to take shape where we don't care what God cares about. Righteousness, justice, fairness, truth, power and identity take their place as what we really care about.

Instead of caring about what God cares about, we care about whatever it is that will keep us as gods. What will keep or give me more power? And that's exactly what's going on here.

And again, we shouldn't be surprised by sin and the opposition from sinful men or even a sinful government or even among leaders of God's people.

[17 : 15] We shouldn't be surprised by a lack of justice. But that's why Jesus came. That's why a hope in the resurrection is so significant.

And we have that same hope. This is why Jesus died to forgive even such grievous sins as these. That if anyone were to repent, they would be forgiven.

That's why He rose that He might rule now and His kingdom might be proclaimed. The disciples would be made of all nations and justice would flow from that as a natural consequence of nations repenting.

And there's a day coming when we will all be raised, where there will be just judgment and those who trust in the Lord Jesus will live with Him forever and the corruptions of terrible sinful people and governments and opposition to His reign will be no more.

people. And so Paul here, what's happened? He's been rescued a third time by the Roman tribune. This guy's a bit of a hero, isn't he? Tribune still has no idea why Paul is under arrest.

[18 : 25] He just can't get to the bottom of it. He's taken, still under arrest, back to the barracks. But the risen Jesus in whom Paul hopes comes and stands by him.

Verse 11, the following night the Lord stood by him and said, take courage for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.

That's a commendation of what Paul's been doing, isn't there? Just like you did here, you will do there. What's he done in Jerusalem though? Been attacked by a mob, been rescued, been attacked again, been rescued again, been put in trial, said one thing about the resurrection and then caused a punch-up and now been rescued again.

What has he done? He's won no converts, he's planted no churches, he's persuaded no one and yet Jesus shows up to say, do more of the same.

What did Jesus say? As you've testified to the facts about me. That's it, testify to the facts. Sair ■■■■■■■■■'s and gospel what's called to the fact he's going to Rome.

[19 : 55] right must there in verse 11 is divine imperative it must happen in God's plans you are going it's certain so for the rest of the book of Acts Paul has this word of certainty and comfort both that you're not going to die yet but also that he's got a mission that he must fulfill and he's on track and God will bring it about now I've never personally had Jesus stand by my side tell me where I must go what I must do but Jesus is just as providentially over my life as he was over Paul's I've got my ministry from him and he'll continue to put me where he wants me for his sake he'll give me his work to do until my part's done whether I get hit by a bus tomorrow or in 10 years or 60 years or whatever it might be Jesus is just as providentially over your life too he's got work for you that's why you're still here you're his servants just as Paul was and the Lord provides the means for his work our mission is to disciple the nations and that's under the direction of Lord Jesus and what are we to do just testify to the facts about Jesus and this mission will happen though it looks disheartening at times though it seems opposition against us is great nothing's really changed that's what it looked like for Paul too but the Lord Jesus is in control of his mission he provides the means for his word to go out and until the Lord returns at God's good pleasure the gospel will continue to go out by God's spirit empowered church under the direction of Lord Jesus to testify to the facts about him well as it turns out Paul really needed a word of encouragement didn't he because the next day there's a plot to kill him again verse 12 when it was day the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they'd killed Paul there were more than 40 who made this conspiracy they went to the chief priests and elders and said we've strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we've killed Paul now therefore you along with the council give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you as though you were going to determine his case more exactly and we are ready to kill him before he comes near now here's the government completely untethered from righteousness or justice or from the God that they're supposed to represent right they're conspiring together to kill one of their own citizens now some conspiracy theories are completely cuckoo right but there have been many many real conspiracies before don't be surprised if people in government or other authority who oppose the gospel conspire together to thwart it who would even destroy their own citizens or act in terribly sinful and destructive ways or highly illegal highly corrupt when people abandon God sin at its height is a terror to behold this isn't a small plot by an isolated group of extremists right this is the chief priests and the elders the high priest of all of Israel is in on this this is at the heart of the leaders of the Jews plotting such utter evil but Jesus is Lord he said Paul must go to Rome and he provides the means

Paul's nephew somehow hears of the plot and tells Paul and then the tribune so the tribune again rescues Paul by having him sent off to the Roman capital of the area Caesarea and to the governor Felix sends him with a horse for Paul and 470 guards so again the tribune he's a bit of a hero isn't he Paul's nephew he's just acted against his own religious leaders he's conspired with the Romans to thwart his own people's leaders' plans is he a traitor to his people?

no he's righteous and they're corrupt he's done the right thing and been an instrument of Jesus' providence seeing that Paul would continue to testify about the facts of Jesus in Rome the tribune he's rescued Paul four times now but he still has no idea why he's under arrest he can't get to the bottom of what they're accusing Paul of doing but in this passage we've got this Gentile Roman commander being more righteous more upright than the Israelite high priest and all the chief priests and all the elders and the ruling council of the Jews right he's a man who cares more about justice and due process than any of those who claim to know and represent God and so the tribune shows starkly by his upright character the contrast with the corrupt hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders and the Jews show themselves to be exactly the hypocrites that Jesus said they were they don't actually know God they don't actually care about justice the Messiah that they've been waiting for has come and they put him to death and now they want to murder his messenger but the Messiah has beaten death and now there is a resurrection hope what the Pharisees were looking forward to it's actually come but they're not interested in it they don't believe in it they're more interested in murder than in resurrection and this Messiah the king they've been waiting for he's king not just over Israel but the whole world he's king of the Gentiles too but instead of seeing this as an amazing glory of Israel wow our nation has a king who's actually king of all the kings of all the world they see actually including Gentiles no that's a threat that's a problem they don't know God and they've missed all the wonderful things that God is doing their hearts are far from him and hypocritical and they seek to judge according to the law while actually acting contrary to it striking arguing fighting plotting murdering while the Roman Tribune upholds justice

God provides means for his gospel to keep being proclaimed Paul is headed to Rome proclaiming the risen Lord Jesus as he goes now Acts is descriptive it's not prescriptive but it describes what happened describes the way of the world and frankly we should be expecting these same kind of things to keep going on Paul has this mission divinely given to him by the Lord Jesus and so do we we're not apostles of the Lord Jesus but we are his servants his disciples anyone who trusts him and that includes being given the task of discipling the nations that's what we're on about and that includes things like discipling our children bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord it includes supporting the work of those who are testifying to Jesus in other parts of the world includes living good lives among the pagans honouring the Lord Jesus both in our conduct towards outsiders and our love for each other and particularly involves testifying to the facts about Jesus Christ just like Paul did last week at Kids Church

I was with Heidi's group and they used two to three kids and she asked the kids if God wanted Paul to keep on telling people about Jesus then why isn't Paul still around today telling people about Jesus and a couple of kids I spoke to they said something along the lines of well my mum told me about Jesus we don't have the Apostle Paul because God is using us in his plans to proclaim the risen Lord Jesus and so those kids had their mums some of you telling people about Jesus and all of us have this mission from him but it's hard isn't it there's three principles I want to finish with sinful opposition the thing that we saw in Paul's day happens today opposition from sinful men opposition from those who claim to follow God secret meetings conspiracies plots those whom we expect better of governments others in authority untethered from justice righteousness we should be expecting opposition we should be expecting not just for us personally but for us as a church for the wider worldwide Christians there's going to be opposition there will be people who are opposing the gospel and doing it in ways which are untethered from justice righteousness but are just pursuing their own power through identity politics rejecting God rejecting God's message rejecting God's king rejecting God's messengers somebody in my Bible study this week shared they had a social work dinner and there were conversations about Jesus that they were having with some of their colleagues but someone from the other end of the table overheard those conversations and then the next day rebuked that person at work saying that was socially inappropriate to have those conversations at a dinner we don't need saving thank you very much it's painful isn't it it's disheartening and we're often surprised by the willful wickedness of sin that's why God sent Jesus isn't it because sin is so bad expect opposition expect it to look like the opposition is mighty and powerful expect corruption expect hypocrisy but know that

[30 : 00] God provides right because we know that Jesus is king second point Jesus providence he's providentially over his word going out to the ends of the earth and he'll do it just as he stood by Paul he's with us as he promised in that great commission surely I am with you to the very end of the age just as he provided means through the tribune to rescue Paul through nephew to uncover the plots of the Jews so Jesus will continue to provide means for his word to go out and it won't be stopped for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea that's going to happen the nations are being and will be disciplined Jesus is at work through his church to see it happen so in the midst of opposition and when it seems so disheartening trust him he really is providentially over his mission and lastly our hope is the same hope of Paul isn't it it's the hope of the resurrection of the dead what does Paul have to fear well a lot of opposition a lot of people seeking earnestly to murder him

I'm not going to eat or drink with 39 other people here we're not going to eat or drink until he's dead like we are deadly serious about killing this guy real incredible threats on his life but why is he on trial because he's hope in the resurrection how do you stop someone who's going to be resurrected you can't Jesus just got back up again Paul's hope in the resurrection means death is not a threat it's just a call home it's not the end of the mission others will take up that mantle the providence of the Lord Jesus mums everywhere will keep telling their kids about Jesus will keep testifying to the facts about him the gospel will go out our hope is the same resurrection when we die we'll get back up again that's our hope that's our future that's where we're headed sinful opposition looks mighty it looks powerful it will come from those who we think should know better but the Lord

Jesus is with us to the very end of the age that we might proclaim him that we might disciple the nations and the gates of hell will not prevail not sinful man not conspiring government not corrupt leaders will prevent his plans and so with confidence we can live for the Lord Jesus because our hope is that just as his risen from the dead there will be a resurrection for us too the message of the risen King Jesus cannot be stopped praise God let's pray father we thank you for this part of the book of Acts that shows the opposition that even your appointed messenger Paul faced we thank you that it shows us the reality and the starkness of sin and opposition father please prepare us for that we thank you that you are providentially over your mission we thank you that the

Lord Jesus is with us in the task that he's given us to make disciples of all nations thank you that nothing can stop him because of our hope in the resurrection of the dead that Jesus is raised and will never die again that our hope is that we too will be raised we pray that we might proclaim this hope the facts about the Lord Jesus and hold fast to it Amen