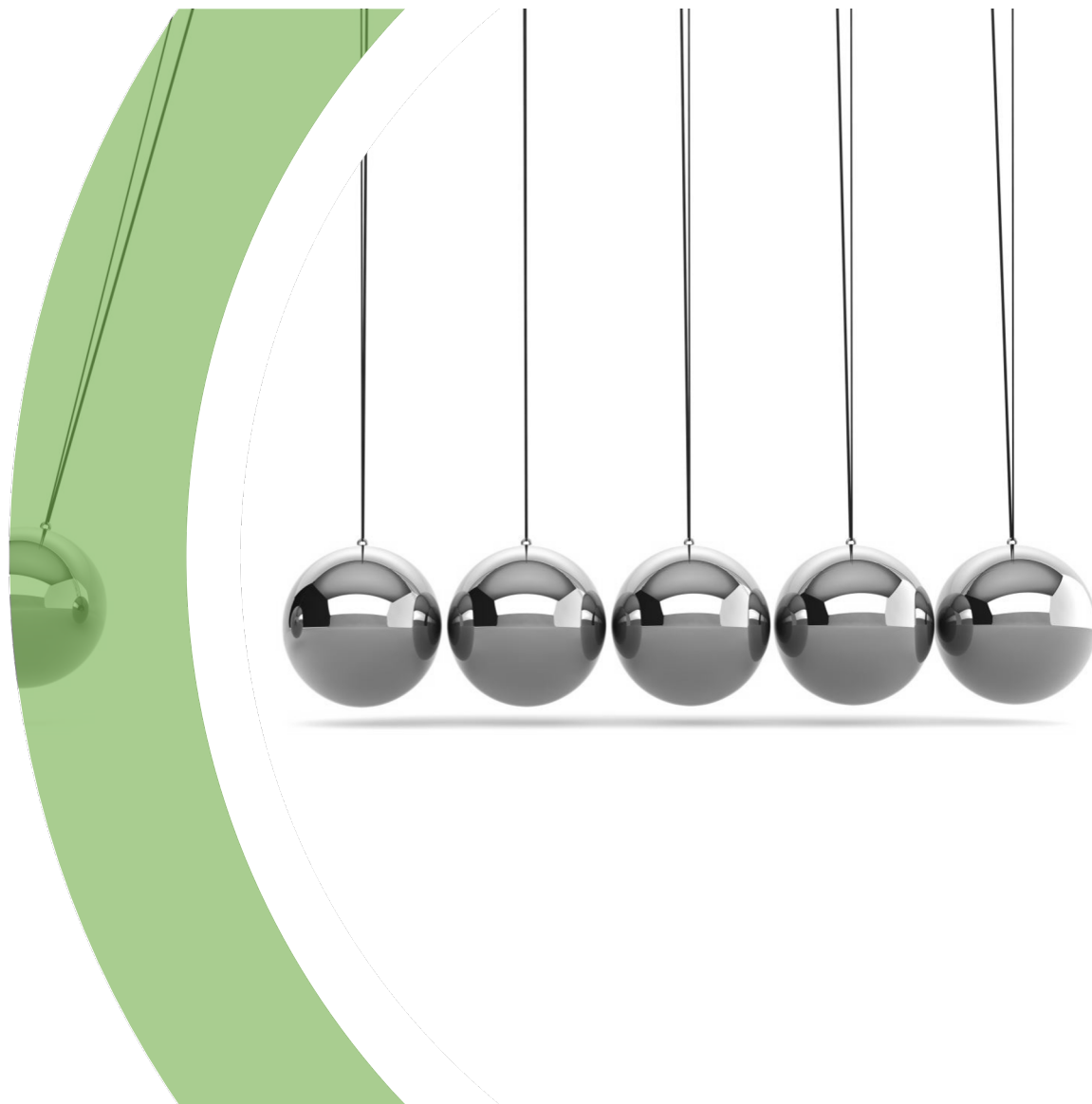




Stand Firm Part 1

Acts 25: 1-22





Background: Paul is in prison in Caesarea. In Acts 24, Paul was brought before Governor Felix to defend himself against accusations that he was a troublemaker, stirring up riots, and attempting to desecrate the temple. He asserts his innocence against these false charges. After 2 years, Paul remains in prison when Felix is succeeded by Festus.



Attribution: thebiblejourney.org



Setting the Stage



- Paul sets the stage in Acts 24 for what we'll look at this month in Acts 25, and I want to highlight 3 ways:
 - Paul identifies himself as a follower of “The Way”.
 - He expresses hope in God that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.
 - Paul says that he strives always to keep his conscience clear before God and man.



Follower of "The Way"



Paul identifies himself as a follower of "The Way".

- As Michael discussed last month, Paul rejected their characterization of Christianity as a "sect" or heresy. Rather, in referencing Christianity as "the Way", Paul echoes how Jesus described himself in John 14:6, when he said "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me". Jesus came not to abolish but to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.

Paul says he has "the same hope in God as these men" that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

- What men was Paul referring to? The Pharisees. Paul was a Pharisee. The Pharisees believed that on the last day, there would be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. One day God would judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth. (Psalm 96:13). One day, God would do away with all evil and death. What's tragic is the resurrection of Jesus was actually consistent with the hope the Pharisees confessed, but they couldn't see it.



Someday God will Judge the World

In light of the fact that God would someday judge the world, Paul said in Acts 24:16 : So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man. How can we keep our conscience clear before God and man?

2 Corinthians 1:12 (NIV) ¹² Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity^[a] and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace.

Hebrews 10:19-22 (NIV) ¹⁹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

1 John 1:9 (NIV) ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.





Keeping A Clear Conscience

To keep our conscience clear before God and man:

- Conduct ourselves with integrity
- Conduct ourselves with godly sincerity
- Rely on God's grace
- Draw near to God
- Confess our sins
- Remember that God is faithful to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness
- Therefore we can be cleansed from a guilty conscience





The Key Passage: Acts Chapter 25:1 – 22 (NIV)

Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, ² where the chief priests and the Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul. ³ They requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way. ⁴ Festus answered, “Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. ⁵ Let some of your leaders come with me, and if the man has done anything wrong, they can press charges against him there.”

⁶ After spending eight or ten days with them, Festus went down to Caesarea. The next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him. ⁷ When Paul came in, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him. They brought many serious charges against him, but they could not prove them. ⁸ Then Paul made his defense: “I have done nothing wrong against the Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar.”



The Key Passage: Acts Chapter 25:1 – 22 (NIV) continued

⁹ Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?”

¹⁰ Paul answered: “I am now standing before Caesar’s court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. ¹¹ If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!”

¹² After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!”

¹³ A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. ¹⁴ Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul’s case with the king. He said: “There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner. ¹⁵ When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him and asked that he be condemned.



The Key Passage: Acts Chapter 25:1 – 22 (NIV) continued

¹⁶ “I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over anyone before they have faced their accusers and have had an opportunity to defend themselves against the charges. ¹⁷ When they came here with me, I did not delay the case, but convened the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in.

¹⁸ When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. ¹⁹ Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive. ²⁰ I was at a loss how to investigate such matters; so I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. ²¹ But when Paul made his appeal to be held over for the Emperor’s decision, I ordered him held until I could send him to Caesar.”

²² Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I would like to hear this man myself.”

He replied, “Tomorrow you will hear him.”



STAND FIRM!

The chief priests and Jewish leaders requested to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem because they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way. They were trying to take Paul out!

Paul stood his ground when Festus asked him if he would be willing to go up to Jerusalem, proclaiming to Festus 1) I have not done any wrong to the Jews as you yourself know very well and 2) no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!

It's remarkable to observe the confidence and strength that Paul exhibits in the presence of this official, while he himself was a prisoner. Last week as he closed out Acts 24, Michael referenced the the passage in Ephesians regarding the Armor of God. We're going to examine the Armor of God further as we delve into Acts 25. One thing to note, Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians while he was in prison. Likely a little later, while in prison in Rome, but we can see the principles he highlights in action while he's imprisoned in Caesarea.



The Armor of God – Ephesians 6:10 – 18 (NIV)

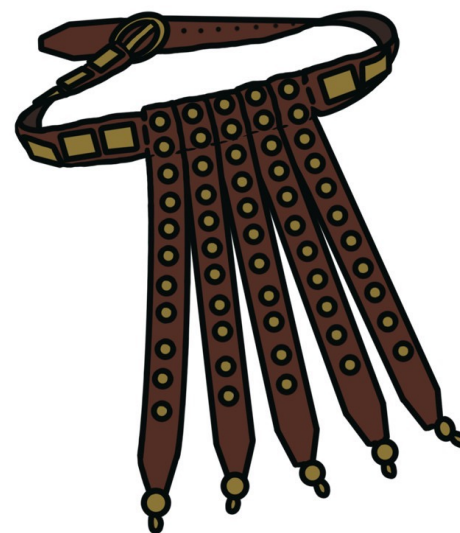
¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.



The Belt of Truth Buckled Around Your Waist

One of the things that a belt symbolized in biblical times is being ready for action. In that day, the clothing that was worn was loose fitting. So a belt was used to tie that loose clothing up so that you were ready for action. In other words the belt holds things together. And here when we're talking about the Belt of Truth, we're referring to the Truth of the Gospel itself.



Attribution: Aya and Nicole Velasquez

The Gospel is the Message of Truth

- Ephesians 1:13-14 (NIV) ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.
- Colossians 1:13-14 (NIV) ¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
- 1 Peter 1:3-5 (NIV) ³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.





Discussion Questions

What are some ways that we can keep our consciences clear before God and man?

Discuss the impact of knowing the message of truth. For example, discuss the impact of knowing each of the following.

As believers:

- We have the Holy Spirit
- We're rescued from the dominion of darkness
- We're brought into the kingdom of God's Son
- We have redemption, the forgiveness of sins
- We have an inheritance that will never perish, spoil or fade