

Acts 24 | David Vinyard

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Date: 15 February 2026

Preacher: David Vinyard

[0 : 00] Good morning. Oh boy, I got one without a bottom. That's not going to work. That'll work. I'm supposed to be working on keeping my neck up, part of getting older.! My wife's Valentine's gift to me was a... How would you describe that thing?

A neck pillow. So I'm thinking about the height of this podium. I should be practicing more of a better posture and not looking down. That's when you know you're getting older, is when you get orthopedic stuff for gifts.

And you actually like it. You're like, sweet. That's good for me. I needed that. But it is mid-February, which means two things.

One, a little bit of extra pink hearts and flowers and roses, hopefully. Hopefully you guys had a nice Valentine's Day. And the second part of mid-February has already been called out, which is pretty much unanimously everybody's ready for winter to be done.

[1 : 02] Pass along. I found this quote. Favorite thing about winter is when it's over. You know? So, even though the weather's warming a little bit, just thinking about this feeling of mid-February, I was thinking about what we're studying today.

And it kind of lines up, right? We're kind of tired of the cold and gray, tired of the lingering coughs. I myself have a little something still, which I'm sure you yourselves or you know somebody in your immediate family has the same.

But we're kind of stuck. Stuck in this final countdown. Like, I use the phrase, like, prisoners of the cold and dark. Small rations of vitamin D, awaiting the hope of a better season to come.

And I know that sounds way too dramatic, right? But it's fitting because in our study of Acts 24, the Apostle Paul is also being held a prisoner. Still.

He's still stuck in this camp, this scenario, this circumstance of trials and courts and accusations.

And just this dreary feeling. I kind of picture him in this season of, I can't imagine prisons or anything like what we think of today.

[2 : 11] You know, they're a little more, probably a few less amenities, you know, back in the Roman day. But that's where we're at. Acts 24, if you want to turn there. Oh, I may have missed my Jim Gaffigan quote, I think.

Pause right through it. I had a, he's one of my favorite comedians and he says this of mid-February. He says without Valentine's Day, February would be just January still. And I thought, that's fair.

There's not a whole lot to love at this time of year other than Valentine's Day. Anyway, here we are, Acts 24. I did miss last Sunday. We were running around a little bit, getting home from out of town. But looking back in the last couple of weeks, if you've missed a few, if you've, if in the whirlwind of other activity, you kind of forgot. Paul has been in this season of defending his testimony and his honor and his reputation and everything about himself before a few different audiences.

You can go to the next slide. We don't need to look at Jim. Yeah. He's been struck in the face. And yet you see he doesn't kind of lose his, his, his collection.

[3 : 17] He's been falsely accused. People are saying things about him that are just completely not true. Does that ever happen to you? You know how irritating that is? Like, this is just completely not true. He's surrounded by what would have been his peers.

This, this chorus of his legacy comrades, right? The Jewish leaders. That was the track he was on. It just, their folly and their noise and their nonsense, right?

And yet he's standing there. What appears most of the time to be by himself. But standing in the truth. And we saw he was visited in prison by the Lord and encouraged.

And he's told, hey, don't lose heart. I've got a, I've got a plan for this. I've got a purpose. You're actually going to go all the way to Rome. And I thought of just as an introduction and a recap.

His whole prison trial scenario is really a testament to God's sovereignty. If you think about the life of Paul in this circumstance. That God could use sinful men, sinful courts, pagan governments even, for his own purpose.

[4 : 23] It's kind of a neat, neat testament. I found this verse in Habakkuk chapter one, where God says, look at the nations and watch. And be astounded for I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe.

Kind of feel like that would be, that would be those around Paul at the time. You know, you're not, you're not going to believe where I'm going to send you. And who you're going to talk to. And the conversations you're going to have. And so with that, we're going to pick it right back up in Acts 24. We're going to look at Paul's examination before Felix. Let's pray. God, I thank you for this morning. Thank you for the hope of a new season. Thank you for your word.

Thank you for the example that you preserve for us in the life of the apostles and these men. And just the testament that you've written down. That we can look to just for encouragement and challenge and to strengthen our faith.

I pray that you would do that today. In Jesus name. Amen. All right. So we're going to read this. It's a bit of a text, a longer text, but I put it up on the slides. We're going to go through in three chunks, three pieces to this story, starting in verse one of Acts chapter 24.

[5 : 29] It says,

Last bit. Verse 22.

And Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.

All right. That's a lot. All right. That's a mouthful. But it's kind of broken up in those chunks. I wanted to read it for the sake of the morning. Did you notice the very last bit of that text though?

The timestamp. Two years later, that whole thing happens and two years later, he's still in the same spot where he was before. Paul was faithful. Paul was obedient.

[9 : 30] Paul didn't do anything wrong. It's just a quick nod that God's timing is often not our timing. Or I should say, God's timing is not often what we expect it would be.

Maybe a better way to say that. That's a lesson for another day. We're not going to dive deep into that. I just thought it was worth noting that we can read scripture in chapters and you see these things, you're like, wow. Two whole years.

What did that look like as a prisoner? Anyway, my AI image of the week is not that entertaining. It is just an AI-generated recap of the last two chapters from what Dave shared on last week and now. But it does paint this picture of all the involvement he's going through. And there's a couple of these photos where you look at Paul and you see this thing where he is just kind of stuck.

And so thinking about the theme of today, thinking about what he's going through, we're going to look at the characters. We're going to look at three different characters in Acts chapter 24. But I also wanted to ask this rhetorical question.

[10 : 31] Like, have you ever felt stuck? Have you ever found yourself kind of just treading water in this never-ending battle? There's something that just won't resolve. I think I've been there.

I'm probably there now in a few ways, you know. Feeling tied down or feeling just strung back and forth with a challenge that won't go away. I think the Apostle Paul could relate.

Which makes the study we're going to do this morning, looking at Paul's character, that much more impactful. Knowing that he's probably not on some Christian high.

He's probably not at this amazing retreat. He's not at this fellowship-oriented moment, right? He's doing all this from this circumstance.

Okay, so that's where we're going this morning. We're going to look at two practical applications from Acts 24. One from each of the non-apostles in this text. And then we're going to look at Paul.

[11 : 28] Sound good? All right. With that, let's look at the first character. We're kind of going to move through some verses here, move through some text. You can write some of these down. This man, Tertullus.

Who was he? What is he up to? Tertullus was a Roman-trained orator hired by Jewish leaders for the reason of prosecuting Paul. He's known for his careful words and his flattering speech.

He's known for his capacity for influence. So it kind of stands to reason this is one of the top lawyers in the courts, right? If you want something done, you want to pin somebody down, you want to make certain a proclamation or a judgment, you find Tertullus.

That's the guy. So you have to ask, why would the Jewish leaders hire him? You ever think about that? My deduction here in the circumstances, it's really in the absence of a compelling testimony. You know, if they had a key witness or a rock solid case, why bring in a lawyer that's going to knock it out of the park? Without a legitimate case against Paul, the Jews have turned to this sort of verbal manipulation.

[12 : 40] They've resorted to flattery and artificial influence. And that might seem obvious. You might think, well, okay, who cares? Like, whatever. It didn't work. But there is something in that.

When you start to look at how much the Apostle Paul writes to the churches about this concept, he says four or five different times, talking about this idea of just falling into the trap of leaning on flattery or leaning on vain words.

Or if you look at 1 Thessalonians, maybe this is up there. Yeah. He says, we never came with words of flattery. Paul says, that's not who we are. It was used against me, but it's not who we are. And yeah, nor with a pretext for greed, as God is our witness. Right? In Romans 16, 18, he writes again, for such men are slaves, not of the Lord, not of our Lord Christ, but of their own appetites. And by their smooth and flattering speech, they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. Colossians 2, Paul warns the church to be on the lookout for these types of things.

[13 : 45] It says, lest any man should be gaily with enticing words. So my point is, Paul is no stranger to this. Paul is not unaware that this is out there. In fact, he talks about it often.

So I thought, hey, right at face value. This guy, Tertullus, is kind of an odd character. I don't think we see him ever again in scripture, but maybe there's something there. Right? Let us consider the warning from his person in Acts 24.

This vain example and his failure to persuade, but his tactic is using an empty tool such as flattery. That we might not do the same. And not just for ourselves, right?

I think the more important thing is when you're thinking about that example, that we would avoid it. That we would look past empty words, but that being careful that we're not influenced by it.

Being careful that knowing that this is a common practice for 2,000 years more, maybe all of human history. That we take that caution, right? Lest we find ourselves placing our faith in the flattering words of men.

[14 : 47] I think that could be translated in a different frame given the time that we live. Right?

We live in a time where men and women and society dress up lies as truth constantly. At least I see that. Where fake versions of reality are presented.

Kind of like Tertullus presented this false version of Paul's testimony. But through appealing words or catch phrases or themes, whether it's politics or corporate jargon.

Like, it sounds good. Might land well. But is it the truth? Is it real? I think there's a need, right?

There's a, there is a ever increasing concern that we would be on the lookout for those things.

And Paul warns Timothy. He says, the time will come when men will not insert, endure sound teaching. I think that has a lot of application right inside the church. But also just the idea that our society, we are abundant with individuals who have departed from wisdom.

[15 : 52] Who have said the things that throughout time mankind could count on. Well, we're going to reject that too. Just, it's a unique time. So that's the first caution from Tertullus.

Be aware, be on the lookout for the flattering schemes of our time. Make sure we're not placing our hope there. What about number two? We have this other character. Not Paul. We have the life of Felix.

The governor. And what exactly do we know about this man Felix? We know he's part of the Roman structure. Found like the least flattering picture of Felix I could find. I found, just looking into the back story of this guy.

Former slave. He was known for his violence. So I think if he didn't like something or he wasn't about it or you made yourself to be his enemy, he didn't hesitate. He was known for expecting and accepting bribes.

No surprise what we see in Acts 24. We're also told that he married a Jewish woman. This was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I. Based on what I could see too, I think he actually took her from another marriage.

[16 : 59] Like there was this involved circumstance. But anyway, I think the most interesting thing about him, other than the fact that he was married to a Jewish woman, is what it says in Acts 24 of him.

It says that he understood the way or it says he had a more accurate understanding of the way or is familiar with the way.

Which puts him in a very interesting place in this courtroom, right? You've got all these Jews here that are heaping insults and accusations of Paul. You've got God's apostle here. Then you've got this unique receiver of the testimonies.

He was not merely a naive, confused, heathen ruler is the point. Personally, I think Felix could see what was transpiring in the courtroom. I think he could get a sense of what they were up to.

That's just my own personal opinion. But what do we see, right? This is the second man character we're looking at. What do we see in Felix? It says he's afraid.

[17 : 58] Mostly for political reasons. And it says in that fear, he kind of tarries, he delays, he hopes for a bribe. He's waiting for something to benefit him. All while allowing Paul to continue to share the gospel, which is very interesting.

But you get the sense that Felix is out there just trying to appease and play both sides. So what's the caution? What's the lesson? What's the application? What's the use of a guy like Felix?

We see him hesitating. We see him resisting the truth. But ultimately we see selfishness take precedence instead of what's right. So there's this thought. There's this idea.

I found a couple studies suggesting that there's kind of an underlying caution against suppressing the convictions of the gospel. Right? Felix is familiar with. He's hearing it.

He spends time with Paul. But that conviction, slight conviction, awareness without repentance, there's this risk of a hardening of your heart. You're hearing the message.

[18 : 58] You're thinking about it. You're pushing it back. You're deferring. I have a buddy who I would say that describes really closely. He was surrounded by thoughts of the truth, introduced to the gospel, made aware of the value and the grace and all of that.

And just holding on to this Felix perspective of it. Like, I'm just going to be close, but why don't you come back tomorrow? You know, that sort of thing. Something Jesus told his followers right before he ascended.

And there's the sun. How about that? John 16 verse 8. Speaking of the Holy Spirit, Jesus says, And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.

In verse 9 it says, In verse 9 it says, Concerning sin because they do not believe. Concerning righteousness because I go to the Father and you won't see me. Concerning judgment because the ruler of this world is judged.

It's an interesting thought behind this one I was kind of stewing over, but personally I tend to forget that encouragement from Jesus. You know, the Spirit was sent into the world to convict the world of sin.

[20 : 12] I think on the law, I think we're told the law is a tutor, right? We would all agree with that. But a key part of God's plan to address sin has always been conviction. And an operation being led by the Holy Spirit.

It's kind of interesting. So if you're here today as one who does not believe, if you're familiar with or you've heard of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, don't tarry.

Don't sit on it. Don't delay. Don't be a Felix is the lesson there. Time is not guaranteed. Felix had about two years and then he was yanked. Who knows what happened to him.

You may have two years. You may have two days. I think there's a call to action when presented with the gospel, when presented with the truth. For me, I can assure you I'm no better than anyone else.

I have a heap of sins and mistakes and failures that stink. They all stink. The only thing that would make someone like me different is a reception, is an understanding of that gospel.

[21 : 16] And the finished work of Christ to pay for it. If you're here as a believer, grateful for that sacrifice as I am, take caution in your convictions upon sensing the Holy Spirit.

God has given us these things as a guide and a tool. And that's when Paul writes that you have the faith that you have keep between yourself and God and blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.

So that's number two. Just a maybe not find ourselves with a Felix heart. Right? As much as you can relate to that or see that. Struggling between what is right, what is wrong, what our motives are, what benefits us, what fears we have.

It sort of leads us to the very last piece. I know I said we're going to look at three men. The first two, a little bit of a miss, a little bit of a gap. But we have the Apostle Paul.

We've seen the flattery words of the top lawyer. We've seen the selfish dismissal of the governor. One of our main character.

[22 : 21] Testifying in his own defense, on trial, one audience after the next. I decided to look back a few weeks. I was talking to Dave. He and I traded passages so it would work out for the schedule.

But we had read each other's passage. And just looking at Paul's character, looking at his history, looking at how he carries himself. There's kind of two things that come through on this. The way he speaks, the way he defends himself, and what he says of it.

So I kind of found these two as like a summation of Paul on trial. Here they are. These two things, if you want to take them, much easier to read than to do.

I'll say that right from the onset. But the first is this. Paul has an integrity of heart. He calls this a clear conscience. And this thing comes through in each of Paul's defenses.

If you look back a couple chapters. But it's his internal integrity. And he stakes his reputation. He puts his whole defense on the fact that his convictions and motives align.

[23 : 23] He shares at the beginning of Acts 23, Brothers, I have lived my life before God and in all good conscience up to this day. And it sounds similar to what he said in Acts 24 just a minute ago.

So I always take pains to have a clear conscience towards both God and man. But consider what that actually meant for Paul. Upon all the things he was going through. Taking pains to deal with the weaker brother in all these places.

All the things that he had to encounter and wrestle through. I mean, that's a burden. That's a struggle. That is a near continuum of focal point for Paul.

To be able to say that. Right? Paul's conviction, it wasn't just about being right. I think Paul was right almost every time he came into a confrontation. Right? Someone else needed a correction.

God gave him the truth and said, Hey, this can be a tough one for you, but you're wrong. You know? But his example shows us the peace that comes from not compromising. Even at the threat of death.

[24 : 21] So that's the first one. This integrity of heart. This maintaining a private life and an internal conviction that honors God. Which is very difficult.

The second piece of Paul's example is a perfect match to the first. If you hang on here for a minute more. He not only has integrity of heart, but he also has an integrity of his actions. The consistency in which he lives and behaves points exactly to that match on the first part.

So if you notice back in Acts 22, Paul invites the Jewish leaders to testify to his past. And his near flawless track record as a Jew. Here in Acts 24, he challenges his accusers to name one evidence of wrongdoing.

Can you imagine the boldness of that statement? You're standing in front of people that hate you. You're standing in front of people that would love to see you burned. And you're like, Name one way. Name one thing that I've done where I missed.

I can promise you I'm not saying that from today. Myself. We'd be here all afternoon. I'm not going to open myself up, lad. That's like a firing spot. I mean, that is essentially what Paul is doing.

[25 : 26] Name one way in which you would accuse me beyond, you know, obviously these lies. Paul brought that integrity of his behavior to match his integrity of conviction.

His confidence came from God. His confidence came from God and the truth and the purpose for which he lived in his actions. And the gospel was his vindication.

It's a pretty neat example when you think about it. Very challenging. I've just wrestled over this like, my gosh, how far off I am. But to see that, you know, to see the emptiness and the failures of Felix and Tertullus, the vanity of their practice, the lack of just the lacking of those things in the face of God's apostle standing for himself and representing as a man of God.

All right. High standard, high bar, a high mark has been set. That's what I kept feeling as I was studying this. Like, man, where am I ever going to get to?

You might be thinking, I've got a ways to go. And certainly my selfishness, my pride takes me elsewhere. But here's an encouragement. We can live faithfully even when the system around us is broken.

[26 : 44] We can avoid the risk of putting our faith in the vain words of men or the selfish gain that we think we need. But as difficult as this may be, when I think about getting discouraged by

something like that, like, man, I'm not going to hold up in court.

Right. When I think about trying to attain that. In my men's group, I think this verse actually was shared just in the other room for the study. But we're in Lamentations.

And this concept came up in chapter three. It says God's mercies are new every morning. Or I forget the other translation it said in there. But this idea that even in the grim, right, even in the frustration, it's not ourselves that has to show up.

It's our leaning back on what God has done. And so, in an effort to not lose heart in face of such a high standard, Paul reminds the Corinthians, so we do not lose heart.

In chapter four, verse 16 to 17, I think is the next verse up there. So we do not lose heart, though our outer self is wasting away. Our inner self is being renewed day by day.

[27 : 53] I think when it comes down to it, you know, there is this ongoing temptation, especially in my line of work. I don't know if you guys have a job where you face customers or you are out in the world often, but just, man, I want to lean on my own capacity.

Man, I want to feel really prepared. When I sit in front of somebody, when I have a big thing on the line, I'd love to lean on some flattering speech. You know, I'd love to, I'd love to bank on some of the empty promises of what humanity has structured.

But we don't need that. As believers, we don't, that should not be our hope. Our stable, our stability, our base, our function should be rooted in Christ.

So here it is. This is my last, my last concept. There's, jump the gun on me, that's okay. There's a famous bodybuilder. Some of you may know the name Ronnie Coleman.

This guy can move a lot of weight. Does anybody know Ronnie Coleman? Is that name familiar to anybody? All right, there's a few. Mark, I know you have, you know him. He has a famous catch phrase.

[29 : 00] It's lightweight, baby, lightweight. No matter what he's lifting, no matter what he's pressing, right? And it's usually a lot, but it's not, it's not to make light of what he's doing.

It's not to discourage anybody, but it's just, it's a mindset. It's lightweight. We're going for this no matter what it is. It's lightweight. And I think it's a fitting perspective, you know, thinking about the need to be renewed each day, thinking about the need to build our integrity of heart and action and not to lean on self, right?

Think about Paul, the example where God has placed him in. And I think of the trials, I think of the things that I've struggled through for years. I think of the things that beat me up or where I fall short. And like, there's this tendency, there's this, it feels like heavy weight. You know what I'm saying? Like you hit these places where you're like, I'm not going to win that one. And you picture Paul just defending himself in front of these hordes of enemies.

And it's like, from God's perspective though, it's lightweight, baby. It's lightweight. If you musicians want to come up, we can wrap this up. I just, I love that concept from this text in Acts 24.

[30 : 15] One man against the world, but that man has God. That man stands on the truth. That man has labored through his integrity such to a point where he can say, try it, try me on anything.

And I think, I think that matters. I think if, I think if the apostle Paul were here, he would say, be encouraged. He'd say, aim for integrity.

He'd say, don't let your convictions be ignored. He'd say, pursue what is right over what is temporal and believe on the hope that is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I think that's what he'd say. So I hope that renews you each day. I hope that encourages you. And yeah, lightweight, baby. Let's sing.