

RESURRECTION HOPE

Acts 24:1-27 (Key verse: 24:14a)

“...and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.”

Today's passage is about resurrection hope. Generally, everyone has hopes in their hearts. But only sincere Christians have resurrection hope. In today's passage, we will learn that resurrection hope is a living. A hope that revives a fatalistic heart. A hope that makes the soul lively and vigorous. It is such a strong hope that Christians who cherish it in their hearts, no longer want to live pleasure-seeking lives. But lives that please God each and every day. May God ignite resurrection hope in our hearts as we listen to His word this morning. Amen.

Let's look at verse 1. Five days had passed since Paul was arrested in Jerusalem. Do you still remember how it happened? Yes, a Jewish mob dragged Paul from the temple and was about to kill him. When the Roman commander came to his rescue. Then, when the Roman commander learned about a plot to assassinate Paul, he sent Paul away to Caesarea to face his accusers in a Roman court. Now it does not take a lawyer to realize that the Jewish leaders had no case against Paul. Simply because Paul did not commit any crime; right! Yet, this did not deter the high priest Ananias and some of the elders to go after Paul. They simply made up false charges. Then they hired a smooth-talking lawyer named Tertullus and immediately went down to Caesarea. There they brought their charges against Paul before the Roman governor, Felix

Let's listen to Tertullus as he addresses the court. Look at verses 2-4. Tertullus said: *(In a flattering tone)* “Governor Felix. We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.” Have you ever heard the saying: *Flattery makes friends and truth makes enemies?* The truth was not on their side. So the religious leaders had to resort to flattery to make governor Felix their friend.

Look at verses 5-8, including the footnote. “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. (Footnote)..... and we would have judged him in accordance with our law. But the commander Lysias came and took him from us with much violence, ordering his accusers to come before you. By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him.” This sounds more like a political speech than a lawyer charging a criminal in court. What do you think? According to Tertullus, the Jewish authorities already found Paul guilty. Yet, as we know, Paul's trial before the Sanhedrin descended into chaos without any fact-finding process or verdict. Nevertheless, the religious leaders were determined to kill Paul. So they lied, saying that they found Paul to be a troublemaker. They also made up groundless accusations filled with politically sensitive words like “riots,” “ringleader,” and “sect” to portray Paul (not as a criminal) but as a threat to the peace within a Roman-occupied territory. It is like the FBI saying that they have classified evidence that Paul is a terrorist and a threat to world security. We know what the Americans do to terrorists, right!? The religious leaders wanted governor Felix to do the same with Paul. To simply hand Paul back to them so they could make Paul “disappear.” That is why, (look at verse 9) the other Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.

Then it was Paul's turn to speak. Let's listen to his defence, beginning with verses 17-20 then continuing in verses 11-13. Paul said: “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.....(Verse 11). 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. What do you think about Paul's defense? It was legally sound and based on verifiable dates, places, and events that unequivocally proved that the religious leaders were lying. Case closed, right!! Yes, legally, Paul did enough to prove his

innocence. But Paul was not done yet! Instead of closing his case, Paul shared a personal testimony about his faith as a follower of Jesus.

Let's look at verses 14-16. (Someone read) This is spiritual gold! For in these three short verses, Paul accurately sets out the foundational elements of the Christian faith. Firstly, a Christian is someone who worships the God of Israel as a follower of the Way. Here, "the Way" refers to Jesus. Jesus said, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" (John 14:6) With the New Age movement these days, people believe there are various **ways** to God. But a Christian knows that Jesus is the only way to God. Without Jesus, no one can come to God. For when Jesus died on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Mk 15:38). This curtain represented the wall of separation between God and men because of sin. Yet Jesus poured out His blood on the cross for our sins. Now **those who have faith in the blood of Jesus**, can confidently come to God and have a personal relationship with Him.....through Jesus.

Secondly, the Christian faith is rooted in Scripture. Look again at what Paul said in verse 14b. He said: I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets. These days there are some 'so-called Christians who by all means try to keep the Laws in the Old Testament. Yet, like the Jewish religious leaders, they fail to acknowledge that the only way to please God is to believe in Jesus. This is so tragic! For Old Testament *are the very Scriptures that testify about Jesus yet they refuse to come to Him to have life.* (John 5:39-40) Here we can learn that our faith should not be based on the wrong interpretations of the Scriptures. Nor should it be based on personal experience alone, or what others say about God. It must be rooted in all the Scriptures that points us to Jesus as the Christ of God. **Our world is ever-changing. So we have ups and downs in life. But our faith in Jesus.....must be constant. We can have this faith when we study the word of God deeply and diligently.**

Thirdly, a Christian has resurrection hope. Let's all read today's key verse together, verse 15.....and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. The first two elements of the Christian faith relate to action. Firstly, a Christian worships the God of Israel through faith in Jesus. Secondly, a Christian's faith is rooted in Scripture that points to Jesus. But here in our key verse, however, we discover the natural fruit of our faith in Jesus; **namely resurrection hope**. But what does it mean to have hope?.....(Think about this for a moment).....To have hope is to have an expectation.....An expectation of something good that is still to come or materialize! As a student, I am certain you have a hope to obtain your degree and get a good paying job, right?! It is hope because it has not yet happened.....but you expect it to happen, right? Or perhaps you have a hope to one day marry a handsome man of God or beautiful woman of God. It hasn't happened yet, but you expect it to happen in the very near future!! These are two examples of general hopes that many people have, regardless of their faith.

But resurrection hope is different. It is a hope that only those who have sincere faith in Jesus have in their hearts. For it is a spiritual fruit that we come to bear when we believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, according to the Scriptures. To have resurrection hope, therefore, is to have a joyful and confident expectation that just as God raised Jesus from the dead.....so he will also raise both the righteous and the wicked from the dead. Listen to what Jesus had to say about this. He said "*....a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good (the righteous who believed in Jesus) will rise to live, and those who have done evil (the wicked who rejected Jesus) will rise to be condemned.*" (John 5:28-29) Everyone will be raised from the dead, both the righteous and the wicked. For death is **death is like sleeping**. (Jn 11:11)

Unbelievers do not have this hope. They cannot have this hope because they do not believe in Jesus. Sadly, sometimes of us once had this hope. But it has faded from our hearts. Consequently, we too like unbelievers, are *held in slavery by our fear of death.*" (**Hebrews 2:15**) That is why instead of living powerful lives for God, we are timid, fatalistic. We despair when faced with challenging situations. So we too become followers of Hedonism that is so popular these days! Do you know what hedonism is? It is the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of suffering. The pursuit of worldly riches is the ultimate form of practising hedonism. The world deceives us to think that hedonism is the best way to live our lives in this fallen world. But we must know that hedonism is rooted in the fear of death. And those who practice it lack resurrection hope! The religious leaders who falsely accused Paul are excellent examples of so-called believers who gives themselves over to hedonism.

Now some may argue that resurrection hope is just a theory. Something abstract. But this is not true. Peter calls resurrection hope “a living hope.” (1 Pet 1:3) A hope that revives a fatalistic heart. A hope that makes the soul lively and vigorous with a great expectation of one day enjoying eternal life with God in heaven. It is a hope that practically transforms how we live in this fallen world. Look again at verse 16. Because of Paul’s hope in the resurrection, he strived always to keep his conscience clear before God and man. In other words, instead of pursuing a life of pleasure.....Paul made it his life goal to please God in all that he did! This explains why despite knowing of the hardships that awaited him in Jerusalem, Paul still went. For he had resurrection hope and therefore wanted to please God more than avoid pain and suffering. It also explains why despite the false accusations the religious leaders brought against Paul, he still shared his faith with them in court. For he had resurrection hope and wanted to please God.

What about you? Do you have resurrection hope in your heart? Indeed, it is not something you can fake. For your life will be testimony of what kind of hope you cherish in your heart. Those who have resurrection hope resist participating in hedonism. Yet those who lack it..... freely engages in it. Those who have resurrection hope can stand up when they have failed a semester module to try again! Yet those who lack resurrection hope are overcome by fatalism. Those who have resurrection hope can joyfully set time aside to study the bible. Yet those who lack resurrection hope see studying the bible as a burden. Those who have resurrection hope manage to set time aside to teach the Bible one-to-one to friends and classmates. But those who lack resurrection hope are always busy with work or studies.....The point is: resurrection hope is not something abstract. Instead, it is a living hope that practically transform us from people who pursue worldly pleasures to people who pursue God and live to please Him alone.

But what if, while you are listening to this, you realise that you do not have resurrection hope? Or you have it but it is merely flickering like a candle in the wind? How can you receive this powerful resurrection hope in your heart? We find the answer in the rest of today’s passage. Look at verses 22-23. (Read) Felix is an excellent example of someone who is acquainted with the ways of Jesus but lacks resurrection hope. We know this because after listening to both sides of the case, it was clear that Paul was innocent. But instead of doing what is right before God by setting Paul free, Felix kept Paul under guard to not offend the religious leaders.

Look at verse 24.Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. Felix also seemed to like Bible study. He found the truth of God refreshing to his soul. However, look at verse 25. As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, “That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.” The word of God convicted Felix of his sin. There and then, he should have repented before God. Then not only would God have forgiven him but ignite resurrection hope in his heart! But Felix postponed until a more convenient time. Then, when two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus and his indecision not only became a rejection of Christ. But prevented him from enjoying resurrection hope in his heart. Here we can learn that for resurrection hope to burn hotly within our hearts, we need to make a personal decision to repent of loving the world more than God. Felix solidly failed to do so when he rather hoped Paul would offer him a bribe. May none of us here ever be like Felix!!

In conclusion. I am certain that as you sit here, you all have hope in your heart. The question is, what do you hope for the most? As believers, this is an important question. For our hopes will determine our actions! Those of us who claim to be believers yet hope for material success and prosperity will live for ourselves, just like the religious leaders. They claimed to be men of God. They also claimed to believe in the resurrection of the dead. Yet, they were determined to get hold of Paul to kill him, though he did absolutely nothing wrong. This shows that they did not have resurrection hope. But the hope of the world to pursue pleasure through selfish living.

But Paul lived differently. Resurrection hope burned brightly in his heart, and therefore he strived to have a clear conscience before God. That is why he lived to please God more than anything else. If we are indeed Christians, then we should cherish resurrection hope, just like Paul. This morning, you and I must be honest with ourselves. Do we have resurrection hope in our hearts or not? What does your life look like? What are the things you cherish most? There are many believers who like Felix are familiar with the way of God. They know the bible. But when push comes to shove, they refuse to make a firm decision to repent of their sins before God. They love the pleasures of the world too much. If this is you this morning, then be warned. Things did not turn out well for Felix and it also will not turn out well for you. Let's all sincerely repent of our pursuit

of pleasures in this world this morning. Let's all turn our hearts to God and ask Him to ignite a burning hope in the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked. Amen.