

“A Ready Defense”

Acts 22-26

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We are coming up on the last two weeks of our *Forward Series*. I think we have preached nearly thirty sermons covering the mass majority of this book that I have fallen in love with all over again as we have walked through it – *The Acts of the Apostles*.

Today, we’ve got our work cut out for us because what we are going to do is combine chapters 22-26 into one message and let me tell you why. Last week for Easter, I preached a sermon I called, *Why I Believe*. And what I did in that message was give a defense for why I follow Jesus and believe in the resurrection.

I was inspired to preach that message on Easter because of what I read here in Acts 22-26. In these five chapters, we see Paul having the opportunity to share on five different occasions before five different audiences what he believes about Jesus and why he believes it.

And what we are going to see is, it doesn’t matter who Paul is standing before OR what is at stake (in this case, his life!), when he gets the opportunity to speak, he shares with all that will listen how the resurrection of Jesus changed his life.

I’m calling the message today: **A Ready Defense**

Now, let’s review and catch everyone up to speed on what has taken place up to this point. Context always matters when you are studying scripture and it especially matters here because we need to remember why Paul is in the predicament of having to make a defense for his faith and ministry in the first place.

If you recall, Paul has just completed his third missionary journey. His goal toward the end of this missionary excursion was really two-fold:

One, Paul wanted to get to Jerusalem so he could drop an offering off with the Jerusalem church that he had collected among the predominately Gentile churches in Asia, Macedonia, and Greece on his last missionary journey (**SHOW MAP**).

Paul loved what this offering signified in that Jesus broke down barriers between Jew and Gentile and he has made something new in his bride, the Church. And for him, this offering represented so much in that the barriers had been broken and it reflected the unity that should exist in this newfound church because of Jesus’s death and resurrection.

Second, Paul wanted to drop this offering off and get to Rome. For Paul, Rome was going to serve as headquarters to reaching the rest of the known world at the time, and so he couldn’t get there fast enough.

Paul is laser-focused on the spread of the gospel...reaching people who have never heard the name Jesus before, and he believes Rome is the springboard to accomplish this mission

We read about this two-fold objective of delivering the offering and getting to Rome and in the letter that he wrote to the church in Rome – what we know as the book of Romans.

Remember, he wrote this from Corinth on this third missionary journey.

Romans 15:23-33 – “But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, (Paul knows his time in these regions is done...it’s time to go to the furthest most parts of the known world with the gospel!) and since I have longed for many years to come to you, ²⁴ I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. ²⁵ At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. ²⁷ For they were pleased to do it, to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. ²⁸ When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. ²⁹ I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, ³¹ that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³² so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. ³³ May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.”

Paul had in his heart, drop this offering off, and get to Rome. But he also knew in his heart that tough times awaited him in Jerusalem. It’s why he requested prayer from these believers in Rome! And boy did tough times await him!

Now, this is where we left off the week before Easter. Paul goes to Jerusalem and when some Jews from Asia spot him, they raise holy...they raise a ruckus and falsely accuse Paul of bringing Gentiles into the Temple.

A literal riot breaks out...they seize Paul, drag him out of the temple (Acts 21:30) and they start to beat him to death!

I started to call this message: Wanted: Dead or Dead. Because that’s what the crowd and Jewish leaders were after – Paul dead - and we are going to see in our text today that they were like a dog on a bone for this!

They wouldn’t let it go...FOR YEARS. They for real want him DEAD. If it wasn’t for the Roman brigade showing up when this riot broke out in Acts 22, they WOULD have beaten him to death.

Now, here is what I want to do. As we look at the five defenses Paul gives, we'll also look at the accusations leveled against him – we'll see in this why he is having to give a defense in the first place.

And here is what you are going to notice. The accusations in each scenario are nearly identical. The defenses Paul gives are nearly identical. Really, the only difference is the audience in which he is giving them and the length of the defense.

Let's get after it. If you are taking notes, label this: **Inquisition One.**

I like using the term "inquisition" because the definition is: a period of prolonged and intensive questioning or investigation. It has overtones of a religious tribunal and that's pretty much what Acts 22-26 is.

Now, fair warning...we're going to move fast through these and catch only the highlights of each inquisition. So, Inquisition One...here is the accusation leveled against Paul. We'll just read straight from the scripture as it relates to the accusations and defense given.

Acts 21:27-28 – “When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him,²⁸ crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.”

Now, we know just from what we studied in Acts that Paul did not do such a thing. In the immediate context of this passage of scripture, Paul was in the Temple having just taken a Nazarite vow in honor of the Law and presenting an offering (v. 26)

He's not teaching against the law and temple. Secondly, he didn't bring Greeks into the temple. **Acts 21:29 – “For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.”**

The reality is, these Jews that had come to Jerusalem from Asia, didn't like Paul when he was in their home city, and they didn't like him being in their holy city.

So, they stirred the pot, created an uproar and it nearly got Paul killed. He's rescued by the Roman Tribune and as he is being led away, he asks permission to speak and gives his first defense.

Here it is...and spoiler alert...we'll see this in nearly every defense, he just shares his story of how Jesus changed his life.

Acts 22:3-8 – “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. ⁴ I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women,⁵ as the high priest and the

whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.⁶ “As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. ⁷ And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ ⁸ And I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’”

His defense is his testimony:

- This is who I was before I met Jesus...
- This is how I met Jesus...
- And this is the change he made in my life...

Listen to me...we're going to come back to this at the end of our time together. The best defense you have for your faith is your testimony!

Illus. Testimony - If you have been saved from your sin, you have a testimony. EVERY person here that has placed their faith and trust in Jesus, has a testimony. If you don't have a testimony, you don't have Jesus.

Your testimony, while it might not be as dramatic as Paul's, will be the same as Paul's – in that you have a life BEFORE CHRIST. All of us were at one time walking our way, doing our own thing.

For me, I was 11 years old...not a lot of sin in my life as an 11 year old raised in church, but enough sin to keep me separated from God and without a hope of heaven.

But then, I met Jesus. (Share story). Each of you have a story of meeting Jesus. He changed your life.

The final part of your testimony is simply sharing what your life has been like since trusting Christ. Doesn't mean it's been trouble free, but I have hope...I have peace.

Your testimony is your best defense, and I would encourage everyone here to write out your testimony. First of all, you'll begin to thank God even more for what he has done in your life and it will be fresh on your mind so when given an opportunity to share your story you can. Also, if you start trying to write it out and don't have a testimony, then it's time to start with one today by giving your life to Jesus.

This crowd...they listen to Paul's testimony for a while, but when he tells them that he was called by God to go to the Gentiles (v. 21) – this is his life since trusting Jesus, this audience has had enough, and shout him down and eventually he was led away from the crowds and into the barracks where the Roman Tribune presided.

Now, you need to read Acts 22-26 because again, we're just covering the highlights today. Paul is about to be flogged by the Roman Tribune – they figure, we'll just beat the truth out of Paul and find out what the real issue is here...who is this guy and right as they are about to whip him, Paul pulls out an "ace in the hole" he had up his sleeve, and that's his Roman citizenship.

By law, you could not beat an un-condemned Roman citizen. And when Paul tells them he's a citizen of the great Roman Empire, the Tribune about loses it because you beat a Roman citizen without cause or proof of a crime, and if found out that punishment would be brought back on you!

So, the Roman Tribune decides, we ain't doing that...but he's got to find out what this is all about because he's in charge of keeping the peace, and this fellow, Paul has caused an eruption!

So, the next day the Roman Tribune, a man by the name of Lysias decides to get the Sanhedrin together. You remember, the Sanhedrin...this was the Jewish ruling council made up of scribes and elders and chief priests.

- They ruled in civil cases and criminal cases as it related to the Old Testament Law...
- They set the national and religious policy for Israel...
- They are important people...

And Paul, while he was never on the Sanhedrin, as a Pharisee he would have been VERY familiar with them and their role, and The Roman Tribune brings Paul to them according to:

Acts 22:30b – "...desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews..."

This begins the: **Second Inquisition**

Now, the accusation hasn't changed – Paul is accused of "teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and the temple and he is accused of bringing outsiders into the inner court of the temple.

The accusations are the same, only this time, the audience that Paul is in front of is the Sanhedrin...this powerful group of religious and civil leaders.

Keep in mind how dangerous this group is. They trumped up charges on Jesus and had him killed...they can do the same with Paul if they choose to and put enough pressure on the Roman authorities.

Paul knows this...and he knows he is NEVER going to get a fair hearing with these religious leaders and so in a GENIUS move, look at what Paul does in this second defense. He throws out a theological bomb!

Acts 23:6 – “Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.”

Why was this genius? Because the Pharisees and the Sadducees...they were the one's who made up the Sanhedrin, they had different views on whether there could be a physical resurrection. The Pharisees believed in a future resurrection although they certainly didn't believe and embrace the resurrection of Jesus.

One of the main reasons the Sadducees would NEVER embrace the risen Christ is because they didn't believe in anything supernatural.

So, Paul when he throws this bomb about being on trial due to the hope of the resurrection (he of course meant Jesus, but conveniently left it out) – I believe to create this dispute because he knew he wasn't going to get a fair shake anyway and this diversion would prove to the Lysias, the Roman Tribune that this little exercise of putting him in front of the religious leaders to determine what he was “on trial” for was going NOWHERE.

And it worked If you read (v. 7-10), these religious leaders start arguing with one another and it becomes so violent, the Roman Tribune sends the soldiers to get Paul and lock him up.

Now, at this point, Paul is locked up...a fulfillment of what was prophesied over him by the way! Paul knew from his own relationship with the Lord:

Acts 20:22-23 – “And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem (Ephesian elders), constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.”

God had prepared Paul to a degree for this, but it just gets worse for him. Not only is he in prison in Jerusalem, but he finds out – you can read about this in (v. 12-22) that there is a group of Jews that took an oath and made a commitment to kill him.

Now, their plan is foiled, but because of it, Paul is sent from Jerusalem to Caesarea. And they send Paul there for two reasons:

One: it gets him out of the hotbed that is Jerusalem, and two: Paul is a Roman citizen, so it makes sense to Lysias, the Roman Tribune (Police Chief if you will) to send him under protective order to the Roman Governor, who lived in Caesarea so that he can determine what to do with him.

And it's here that we find the: **Third Inquisition**

The Roman governor at the time is a man by the name of Felix. Lysias sends a letter with Paul explaining to him the situation and when Felix reads it, he agrees to hear the case out.

And we hear the accusation beginning in **Acts 24:1-9 – “And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid**

before the governor their case against Paul. ² And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying:

“Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, ³ in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude. ⁴ But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. ⁵ For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. ⁶ He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. ⁸ By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him.” ⁹ The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so.”

Now, Paul’s defense. He simply explains that what they are accusing him of is NOT so, and that it can be verified by simply asking around. He tells Felix, the governor, (v. 13) – they can’t prove anything they are accusing me of!

And then listen to what Paul says and I want you to notice he makes the statement twice.

Acts 24:14-15 – “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, ¹⁵ having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.”

Paul then goes on the offense and tells Felix very plainly what he was doing in Jerusalem.

Acts 24:17-21 – “Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. ¹⁸ While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia— ¹⁹ they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me. ²⁰ Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, ²¹ other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: ‘It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.’”

Paul is underscoring here and going on record...he’s stating loud and clear to anyone that will listen – ALL this going on...don’t get distracted by sideways energy – what ALL this is about is the Resurrection of the dead!

No decision is made by Felix at the time. He puts Paul in custody and according to scripture (v. 24-26) – Paul gets an opportunity to speak to Felix and his wife about “faith in Christ” on multiple occasions in the – GET THIS – TWO years that Felix holds Paul in prison.

Now, I’m going to come back to this at the end of our time together, but Paul’s goal is to be in Rome and use it as a launching pad to reach the world with the gospel.

- And he’s been obedient to Jesus.
- He’s been faithful to Jesus...

And look at where it's gotten him? Not any closer to Rome (at least on the surface!)

- Anybody ever disagree with how the Lord handles situations in our lives?
- Have you ever felt like God isn't hearing your prayer?
- Or maybe that he has forgotten you?
- Or maybe that you have done something that put you outside of God's will and he has shelved you?

I bet Paul felt like this from time to time...like his waiting time was wasting time! I assure you though, God is doing something in Paul's heart in this time that he can't accomplish in any other way.

God uses these waiting times in our life to strengthen our faith...to deepen our trust...waiting time is not wasted time to the Lord. He cares way more what's going on in our heart...he cares way more about conforming us to the image of Christ than he does our goals and ambitions no matter how lofty they may be.

Don't miss this! God is working in Paul's heart. He's working behind the scenes getting things in place...he's working in the church – who knows, he may be using this time to strengthen the prayer life of the Church in Rome.

We have NO IDEA how God is working while we sometimes wait in silence, but don't doubt for a second he is working! God is ALWAYS working...and he is working in ways that we may never ever see!

Illus. WAYMAKER

Paul is left in prison for two years, but I assure you, God was working in a million different ways!

Felix moves off the scene...is transferred away and a man by the name of Festus takes over. He's not on the job long before Paul falls in his lap.

For any Roman Governor, the goal is keep the peace...and the best way to keep the peace is have a good working relationship with the religious leaders in Jerusalem. As we have seen, they can create chaos!

And so, Festus goes to Jerusalem to meet with some of the leaders and it's not long before they ask for the prisoner being held in Caesarea be returned to Jerusalem. And look at why they were asking this:

Acts 25:3-5 – “asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem— because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way. ⁴Festus replied that Paul

was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly.⁵ “So,” said he, “let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him.”

So, here we go again. Let’s begin: **Inquisition Four**

It’s essentially the same accusations: **Acts 25:6b-7** – “he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. ⁷ When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove.”

And then Paul’s defense. I think he’s had two years to think about this and has just determined, the next time I’m given the opportunity, I’m doing it! And what’s he going to do?

Acts 25:11-12 – “If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.” ¹² Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, “To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.”

Paul’s finally going to get to Rome. As a citizen, you invoke your right to stand before Caesar, that’s exactly what you get! And I think in Paul’s mind, he’s been to Jerusalem – no use in standing trial there – let’s go to Rome and stand before Caesar...if I’m going to die, let it be preaching Jesus to him!

Now, there is one final defense that Paul gives...one final inquisition. It’s before Herod Agrippa. Herod Agrippa and Festus would have been contemporaries....colleagues if you will.

While Agrippa didn’t rule over Judea – that was Festus territory. Agrippa ruled in the surrounding gentile regions – however he did have the power to rule over the temple in Jerusalem and appoint the high priest. This made sense due to him being Jewish and his knowledge of the Jewish law, rituals and way of life.

Well, with the installation of a new governor over the province of Judea, Agrippa comes to meet him (they need to have a good working relationship) and as it happens, Festus shares the case of Paul with him.

And before we get into Inquisition Five, I want you to notice the observations of Festus from the FOURTH inquisition. He’s in conversation with Agrippa about what’s happened and look at:

Acts 25:17-22 – “So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. ¹⁸ When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. ¹⁹ Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. (This is the root issue! It’s the resurrection of Jesus. Paul has been preaching it and the religious leaders of Jerusalem can’t stand it! – this is

what Paul meant when he wrote in 1 Cor. 1:23 – “but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews” – it doesn’t make sense and in the hardness of their heart, they will do whatever it takes to shut Paul and this business of the resurrection up just like they shut Jesus up!)²⁰ **Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them.** ²¹ **But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar.”** Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I would like to hear the man myself.” “Tomorrow,” said he, “you will hear him.”

This leads to the: **Fifth Inquisition**

And you really need to go and read Acts 26 because Paul given the time to speak, shares his testimony:

- What his life was like before Christ...
- How he met Christ...
- How his life has been since he met Christ...

And talk about persuasive? Agrippa hears Paul speaks and listen to how this final defense goes.

Acts 26:24-32 – “And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.” ²⁵ **But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words.** ²⁶ **For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.**

²⁷ **King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.”** ²⁸ **And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?”** ²⁹ **And Paul said, “Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.”**³⁰ **Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them.** ³¹ **And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, “This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.”** ³² **And Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”**

Paul gives a ready defense. And this leads me to three quick points of application that I want to make today as we bring this message to a close. The first has to do with being prepared to give a ready defense. It’ simply:

1. Be Prepared

You know the scripture tells us:

1 Peter 3:15 – “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”

Paul modeled this in his five defenses. As you think about being a witness for Christ, and prepare to make a defense for the hope that is in you study these five defenses of Paul...they are so rich!

- Defense One – Be Ready
- Defense Two - Be Wise
- Defense Three - Be Clear
- Defense Four - Be Honest
- Defense Five – Be Bold

2. **Be Faithful** – Trust and entrust. Paul wanted to make it to Rome...and he will, it just might not be on his timetable and he may have to go through some ups and downs to get there.

Remember, God cares way more about conforming Paul to Jesus than he does Paul's dreams and ambitions, no matter how spiritual they are.

Our job is to trust the Lord and entrust ALL of our lives – everything about them to him. We trust that he is working his plan...doing whatever it is that will bring him the most glory!

3. **Be Thankful** – I look at Paul's life and from the outside looking in, I can see how God used Paul, and to a degree see what God was doing in Paul and accomplishing in allowing him to suffer and keeping him in prison.

It's not fun, and I wouldn't want to switch places with Paul. But I can look at it now and be so thankful for how sovereign and good and trustworthy God is. He allowed Paul to preach Jesus to hundreds of people through these defenses and some of the most powerful people in the world...he also used this as the catalyst to get him to Rome.

Who knows how all God used this, but we can read and be thankful that just as God fulfilled his purpose in Paul, he will fulfill it in me and you.

Let's pray together.

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