

Acts 24:1-27 – The Way of Christ – Sermon Outline

Intro: What is the “way” of Christ? What is the true Christian life like?

Need: It is not easy. It is a constant struggle against the world, the flesh, the devil, and false Christians. It is the only way of salvation – by trusting in Christ then taking up the cross & following after Him in obedience.

Theme: Christ as the risen Lord and Savior is the only way to salvation.

1. Following Christ faithfully enrages the ungodly because it exposes their sin. (1-9)
2. The “Way” of Christ requires knowing & worshiping God according to the Bible. (10-21)
3. Christians pursue godly lives in light of future judgment. (22-27)

I. Following Christ faithfully enrages the ungodly because it exposes their sin. (1-9)

A. In 5 days the Jewish Sanhedrin Court gathers an orator, Tertullus, to skillfully slander Paul.

1. Tertullus is a hired hand, a lawyer essentially, who will try to get Paul convicted of blasphemy, rioting, disloyalty to both Jews and the Roman Empire, profaning the Temple, etc. Whatever will stick.
2. **V. 2-4**, Tertullus flatters Felix, buttering him up to win him over to his deceitful lies about Paul.
3. Felix was actually quite licentious and greedy overall, so the words are not really true.

B. 5, Tertullus calls Paul a plague, creator of dissension in all the world among the Jews, and a heresy/”sect” ringleader.

1. When things are bad in the Church, better to be branded with this than to be in league with Tertullus and the religious establishment/Sanhedrin council.
2. “Nazarenes” referred to the Christians in Judea, a derogatory term in line with Nathanael’s words in John 1:46, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”
3. Jesus was regarded as nothing by man, and so were the Christians. Yet Christ prevailed, and in Christ we shall prevail also. Take heart. Be of good cheer. If God is for us, who can stand against us? None.
4. **“Dissension”** is really the charge that Paul is trying to foment a rebellion, a sedition against Rome and its leaders among the Jews.
5. Of course, these Jews liked that in itself, when it suited their purposes and theological convictions.
6. They were often pro-rebellion and wanted the Christ to be a political and earthly ruler that would rule on an earthly throne and topple the Roman Regime. But that is not the Gospel/not the power of God.
7. The power of God is higher, greater, it is the throne of heaven. Christ therefore has all authority in heaven and on earth, for the purpose especially of making disciples of all the nations.
8. Our greatest need is not to have one of our own people on a throne punishing everyone else.
9. Our greatest need is the forgiveness of sins. That cannot come from a merely human King, or a merely human priest, or a merely human prophet or preacher.
10. It must come from Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, God incarnate. His blood bought and Spirit wrought Kingdom is the only hope for humanity.
11. The Sword of His Gospel Word is what must pierce through the enemy, and all of us apart from Christ were His enemies due to our sin. We must be slain as sinners, to rise as born-again Christians.

C. That slaying is conversion, the new birth producing repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ, following Him as the Way, Truth, and the Life.

1. Paul preached this true Gospel after being converted from persecuting the Church/Christ/Christians.
2. The very Sanhedrin court and leadership had once supported Paul as he destroyed the Church, now they seek to destroy Paul and the Apostles laboring for Christ and His Church.

3. If we live faithfully for the Lord, speaking the truth to sinners about the only way of salvation and the sinfulness of their lives, many will hate us for doing so, no matter how kindly we speak the truth.
 4. **Warn of judgment**, make it clear that they, even as we, are worthy of damnation, and they'll **hate** you.
 5. But only the truth can set any of us free. The devil clouds the truth by making us fear him and his schemes among his sinful people to destroy and afflict us. But do not fear them.
 6. Fear God, keep His commandments, and pray with Him to save those whom He wills, and to deliver us from those whom He will not save because of their unbelief and rebellious hearts.
 7. Sanctification/growth in the Lord requires a sober assessment of our remaining sin and need to put it to death. **"Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you"**, as John Owen once said.
 8. We must be willing to have our sin exposed by the light of God and His Word, and we can do so with great assurance in Christ, who has purged us of our sin and is filling us with His Spirit to live for Him.
- D. **6-9, Tertullus claims Paul even tried to profane/pollute the Temple, and the Jews were ready to judge him according to their law, but the Roman Commander Lysias disrupted their efforts by taking Paul.**
1. Tertullus makes it sound like Paul would admit all these things, which of course is nonsense.
 2. The other Jews agreed with Tertullus, either by raising their voices at this time, or perhaps themselves took a turn testifying against Paul.
 3. Yet with all this, the case itself against Paul is incredibly weak. The Romans won't care much about the Jewish Temple being polluted, and further, the charge of sedition and tumult falls flat.
 4. If anything, the disturbers of the peace have plainly been the unbelieving Jews!
 5. Lysias had explained the Jews' plot to kill Paul in the letter to Governor Felix, so he knows what's up.
 6. It is the madness of the Jewish mob, hating their sinful pride and ungodliness being exposed, and lashing out at Paul to the Romans that is driving all of these proceedings before Governor Felix.
- E. **Paul could be tempted to hide the Gospel and light of Christ, even as we can be tempted today.**
1. The scoffers, scorners, and threateners may tempt us to mute our message and our godly lives.
 2. Do not hide the light of Christ under a basket, Beloved! Do not think you can simply move to a safer neighborhood, keep your head down, and go about life as a Christian privately, as if that pleases God.
 3. Christianity must be public, for it to be faithful. We are all to be witnesses of Christ in our lives, and as we heard last week, we must be ready to give a defense/apologetic for all that we believe and do.
 4. Some Pharisees and other Jews while Jesus was on earth tried to split the difference, believing in Christ in their hearts but publicly afraid to make that known to the unbelieving Jewish leadership.
 5. **John 7:13**, many in the crowd we are told did not speak openly of Jesus **"for fear of the Jews"**.
 6. Do not fear fellow Christians today, much less the world. Be faithful, be righteous, God will provide.
- F. **Confession: It can be frightening to preach pointedly and with application to you all.**
1. You may love to hear a good exposition of Scripture, but do you love when your sin is called out?
 2. When I preach on things we all agree with, a lot of "Amen's" will be heard. But if you never have to say "ouch", has the sermon been faithfully preached? Have you faithfully received it/examined yourself?
 3. Do not take offense at the preached word. Take offense at your sin. Don't let the flesh enrage you.
 4. A faithful pastor and faithful Elders will preach the truth to you, the actual flock, and not merely warn of the sins "out there". Reform your lives, renew your minds, live more faithfully to the Lord Jesus Christ.
 5. A sermon should be preached to the whole congregation. It certainly is not the place to call out individuals or families by name and rebuke them. That should be handled privately.
 6. But, the congregation as a whole should be called to repent, believe, and grow in holiness.

7. Cattle his corralled by the shepherd and the sheep dog all at once, together. Likewise, the preached word should move the entire flock of sheep/congregation in the right direction.
8. When some sheep straggle behind or go the wrong way, then the shepherds go to them and leave the 99 as it were to help the erring sheep. But that of course is done more privately.
9. So if you think the sermon is about you, it is, but not you alone, to all of you, and indeed myself. The Word of God convicts me of my own sin, righteousness, and the coming judgment.
10. God uses the preached Word to shepherd the flock in the right direction, and private study, family worship, counseling, encouragement and exhortation from the whole body of Christ, is also needed.
11. In all these ways, may we grow in the Lord and follow Him faithfully together as His people.
12. Do not become enraged like the ungodly, but examine your hearts and grow in the Lord.

II. The "Way" of Christ requires knowing & worshiping God according to the Bible. (10-21)

- A. **V. 10-11**, Paul is now permitted by the Governor to make his defense of his actions/explain the truth.
 1. Paul puts things into the true and proper frame. He is innocent, and so he will frame things to show and maintain his innocence. Again, this is good and proper, and it brings clarity/reveals reality.
 2. Paul is able to gladly/cheerfully make a defense knowing that Felix has judged for years, and Paul has only been there for 12 days, and before that, had not been in Jerusalem for perhaps some 14 years!
 3. Paul went to Jerusalem to worship, to show respect, to pay homage and perform a vow.
 4. It is true that Paul wishes to do more than this, but for now, this is all that he has done. So he doesn't need to say more and so make it sound like these unbelieving, lying Jews are correct.
 5. Paul is laying out the true context, and building from there.
 6. Yes, he must preach that Christ has fulfilled the law and brought an end to the animal sacrifices, Temple worship, and Spiritual divisions between Jew and Gentile, such that peoples of all nations can worship God in Spirit and in Truth from their own land.
 7. But this is precisely what the Jews hated. They thought their system worked fine, for them in particular, and they liked that the Gentiles prior to Christ were at a disadvantage even when they converted.
 8. So they chose to interpret Paul's words, like Christ's, as the result of demonic deception.
- B. **V. 12**, Paul had often debated/"disputed" in the synagogues before, but hasn't done so there thus far.
 1. So the charges are all the more outlandish that Paul was stirring up a revolt or causing division.
 2. Note, when our churches need reformation and reviving, as they do today, that will only come with a stir and division. But better to be divided over the truth and for the sake of the truth and godliness, than to be united against the truth of God and His Word.
 3. Paul's Nazarite vow seems to have been wise and used/blessed by God – it made it all the more clear that Paul was not a despiser of God's law to Israel under Moses – rather, Paul honored it and was pointing to its fulfillment in Christ.
- C. **V. 13**, Paul says they can't prove any of the charges against him, appealing to innocent til proven guilty.
 1. When you are charged with something falsely, demand that they prove the charges. When they impugn your motives or claim to know the real sinful and hateful intent of your heart, tell them prove it.
 2. Paul did not raise sedition against the Roman government, nor even Jewish leadership in itself.
 3. Christ had said to pay tax and tribute, to render to Caesar what was Caesars. He paid the Temple tax.
 4. He told his followers not to be hypocritical like the Pharisees, and yet also said to do what they say, since they sit in Moses' seat of authority, Matthew 23:2-3.

5. He pronounced woe upon the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders, yet also respected their authority given they were in the office of authority by God, and at times did teach or command things that were biblical, lawful, and required. We should apply that today as well, to preachers and to political leaders.
 6. Respect their office & authority, obey them when they command what is right even if they themselves are unrighteous. But, do not be afraid to speak against their hypocrisy and ungodliness, and expose it.
- D. V. 14, Notice what Paul wants to be noticed – the Gospel of Jesus Christ known from the Scriptures.
1. The “Way” which the Jews call a sect/heresy, the way of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, the God-Man who has atoned for sin and risen to glory, Paul believes and proclaims all of that.
 2. This “heresy” **is the true way of Christ**. Christ is to be worshiped as God, and received by faith and followed with sincere repentance. Apart from this “Way” there is no salvation, only damnation, for Jew and Gentile.
 3. No Christian should travel to Jerusalem to an earthly Temple, for we are united to Christ the risen Temple in heaven above, and are filled with His glory and Spirit so that we in Christ are His body, bride, and Temple as well. And we are saved by grace through faith in Christ, for His glory.
 4. Paul says the Scriptures that he and the Jews had, the Old Testament, all point to and proclaim Christ.
 5. It’s actually the heresy of Judaism for Christians to “unhitch” from the Old Testament. The Old Testament is Christian Scripture. It is full of Jesus Christ, always pointing to Him/speaking of Him.
 6. Do you want to know Christ better? Then see Him as revealed in both the O.T. and N.T.
- E. V. 15-16, Paul tells Felix that even the Jews against him accept that the dead rise, both just and unjust.
1. That was true, at least in part. Remember Paul used that effectively to divide the Pharisees and Sadducees against one another, for only the Pharisees believed in the resurrection.
 2. But what united them against Paul was in denying that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, God in the flesh, who atoned for sin and had risen to glory to the Father’s right hand, with authority over all things.
 3. Further, that Christ would give salvation to the Gentiles and favor them over the Jews for their hard-hearted rebellion, only further hardened many of the Jews to their own destruction in their pride.
 4. They thought Jesus was still dead, for He was a blasphemer that claimed to be God, and therefore Paul blasphemed for preaching Jesus as the Christ, as God risen to glory with power/authority.
 5. **16**, but Paul says because all this is true of Christ, and he will return again someday to judge the world, Paul strives to live a godly and just life before both God and man. So should we.
- F. 17-21, Paul was gone perhaps for 14 years from Jerusalem, Gal. 2:1, so how could he stir up strife?
1. Paul came purifying himself in the Temple with a sacrifice, not armed with a mob to riot.
 2. Imagine visiting a town after not being there for 14 years to commemorate some important event there, and to pay homage/respect, and you are accused of trying to destroy the city and its customs!
 3. This is the charge of these Jews from Asia Minor, who evidently aren’t now before Governor Felix to present their charges as supposed eye-witnesses.
 4. V. 19-21, So Paul says the witnesses aren’t even willing to come down and testify against him in the court of law! For the ones present, Paul says let them dare claim he has done anything wrong.
 5. Paul mockingly and cleverly appeals again to his words in Acts 23:1ff., “Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.” Is proclaiming the Gospel of Christ and His resurrection really causing a riot, gathering against Rome for sedition, and worthy of death and damnation?
 6. Paul’s defense is solid, and once again he is defending himself as an Apostle who is proclaiming Christ, and so as such the defense of himself is one and the same with defending the faith!

7. Christ has given Paul the words, wisdom, and boldness to testify in this way so clearly.

G. We, too, should strive to be so eloquent, wise, and bold before slanderers and unbelievers.

1. Indeed, the “Way” of Christ requires this, in order to know, worship, serve, and defend Christianity.
2. Sell the truth of the Gospel without cost. Proclaim the excellencies of Christ in your word and deeds.
3. Do so, knowing biblical Christianity is hated even among some who profess to believe the Bible!
4. But do so knowing the Lord will be with you in all the flack that it brings, and He will be glorified.

III. Christians pursue godly lives in light of future judgment. (22-27)

A. 22, Felix better understands the way of Christ now -- the Gospel, resurrection, holiness, judgment.

1. He wants, perhaps, to have a more impartial witness come in and testify – none other than the Roman Commander Lysias himself.
2. After that, Felix believes he will have enough information to render a verdict in Paul’s case concerning his guilt of sedition against the Romans, and of heresy and false religion in the Jews’ mind.

B. 23, Paul was kept as a prisoner but not locked away into solitary confinement.

1. He likely could move about in the prison, but with a chain attached to him to prevent escape.
2. So he was kept fairly comfortable and permitted the visitation of his friends and fellow believers, who could encourage him and provide the necessities for him while kept in custody.
3. We should be willing to help faithful men who are standing for the cause of Christ’s kingdom. Paul often asked for prayers for boldness and ministerial success, & received bodily provisions with thanks.

C. 24-25, Paul preaches godliness and warns of coming judgment to Felix and his Jewish wife Drusilla.

1. Drusilla was an adulterous woman, the daughter of Herod the Great and sister of Agrippa mentioned soon. She left her living husband Aziz to marry Felix, who was enraptured with her beauty.
2. Felix sent to get Paul to tell him and his wife more about the “way” of faith in Christ.
3. He got more than he could have imagined, for Paul like John the Baptist before rebuked their immorality and reasoned with them about being righteous, having self-control in our lusts, and that judgment according to our works will come on the last day.
4. No wonder Felix was “afraid” and sent Paul away. Felix’s conviction was both too much and yet not enough. It was too much for him to handle, so he sends Paul away – but not enough to save his soul, for he refused to repent. *When confronted with your sin like Nathan did with David, repent!*

D. 26-27, Historians note that Felix was lustful and covetous/greedy, which is on full display here.

1. Paul is kept in prison limbo, free to roam about yet on a chain in the prison.
2. Felix hopes either Paul himself or his friends who are permitted to see him will finally give Felix some money to release him. It is an unstated bribe, as it were, that Felix is setting up here.
3. But Paul and his companions do not take this dishonest bribe. Paul is innocent! Felix shouldn’t have to be paid off in order to administer justice for Paul! Yet his greed and avarice get the best of him here.
4. Yet God’s promise is sure. Even though it is likely some 2 years that Paul is in this condition, Felix did not kill or beat Paul, as John the Baptist was beheaded for rebuking Herod in his day.
5. Paul and his companions walked by faith in the Lord in this extended trial/delay in ministry.
6. We have many righteous hopes and aspirations, prayers and plans. Let us be patient and keep pursuing them. If we are faithful, the Lord will grant them in due time as they glorify Him/help us.
7. We must slog ahead for many years, our whole lives, for the sake of Christ and His kingdom.

8. It will not get easier, ultimately, though it will get increasingly fruitful. Imagine scaling up a business – more fruit/productivity occurs over time while there is growth, but with the growth brings new and increasing challenges. So it is in our Christian life, with our families, friends, church, and community.
 9. But as Christ said, we shall reap if we do not lose heart. So keep laboring for the harvest.
 10. 27, The Jews themselves eventually accuse Felix to Emperor Nero, and only Felix's brother Pallas is able to get Felix's life spared. Yet Felix is removed for Festus, but Felix, probably fearing for his life if this historical data is correct, does the Jews a favor by leaving Paul bound as power is transferred.
 11. But behind all of that, of course, is the hand of God's providence, protecting Paul and building His Church. May we trust God's hand of providence in hardship as well.
- E. Christians are called to persevere in the faith.
1. So often in churches today, we only focus on the moment we pass from Spiritual death to Spiritual life, neglecting sanctification and only speaking about justification. It is true that if we are justified, we will be sanctified and ultimately glorified.
 2. But our faith must persevere to the end. How do you know that it will if it is not tested? The Lord tests our faith, to strengthen those who have true faith, and to weed out those who have false faith.
 3. The Lord even motivates us with both carrots and sticks, rewards and the reality of eternal damnation, to shepherd us into the everlasting kingdom of heaven.
 4. Paul in 1 Cor. 9:24-27 says this of himself, and apply this to yourself as well: *"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, **I myself should become disqualified.**"*
 5. Paul knows it is possible to preach the Gospel to others, yet wind up in hell yourself, by an unbelieving heart by which you even deceived yourself about the state of your soul before God.
 6. We would be foolish as Church to think that this is not possible for ourselves, or for other professing Christians here, or for our covenant children. What local church in a single generation, of any decent size, has ever had a situation where someone did not leave the fold or eventually deny the faith?
 7. What is the antidote? To preach as Paul preached, as Christ spoke, and to heed the warning and obey the commands. Pursue godly living by running the race of faith so as to win heaven! Discipline your mind and body, restrain your lusts and release your righteousness so that your works reveal your sincere faith and trust in Christ for salvation, including not only justification but ongoing sanctification.
 8. Paul was armed with this mind – you should be as well. It is dangerous to rest on your profession of faith, and to never examine the fruit of your faith. Christianity requires constant repentance and struggling forward for godliness.
 9. Only who have lived such a life of faith, repentance, and growth, bit by bit, prove to have Christ as their Lord and Savior. So press on in godliness with the confidence that as you do so, you are forgiven in Christ, and will grow, and God will give you strength to persevere.
 10. For we have been united to the risen Christ who has overcome the world, and are now ready to come and dine at His Table, upon His life-giving flesh and blood, by sincere faith in Him. **Let us pray.**