

## You Become What You Worship Acts 24

**Main Idea:** *Joy, humility, and courage in the midst of trials is by-products of a heart fixated on the Lord Jesus (worship!).*

**Introduction:** Good morning! Please open your bibles to Acts 24. If you are new to the Bible, you can find Acts 24 following the gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)...

### **Orienting the Text: Where we are in the story**

To catch you up, remember that Paul returns to Jerusalem in order to bring an offering from the Gentile churches of Macedonia to assist in their struggles. For Paul, the offering shows the unity between the Jewish and Gentile factions of the church, and gives him a chance to clear up any misunderstandings regarding his own reputation and theology. However, Paul is arrested on trumped up charges that he brought Gentiles into the temple-courts (which he didn't), and ends up on trial before the Sanhedrin. If you recall, during his speech Paul divides the Sanhedrin against itself by bringing the focus back to the resurrection of Jesus (Sadducees say there is no resurrection; Pharisees say there is). In the midst of all this chaos, Jesus makes a personal visit to Paul and assures him he will be testifying in Rome (presumably before Caesar). Paul then continues moving up the legal channels and will now be going before the governor of the province in Caesarea: Felix.

As we follow Paul's journey through the Jewish-Roman legal quagmires of his days, I want to take note of the cheerful attitude Paul seems to exhibit. Things are going bad for him, and will continue to go bad, but despite it all, Paul's faith and commitment to Jesus doesn't waver, but instead seems to grow stronger. How come? How was Paul sustained? Two weeks ago, Pastor Michael showed how it was a trust in the goodness of God's character, and His providence; picking up on that theme, I want to see how Paul is sustained by worshipping Jesus, fixing his spiritual gaze on Him...

### **You are what you worship!**

Are you familiar with the old adage that "you are what you eat"? Well, in like manner, biblically speaking, *we become what we worship*. Too often when we think of worship, we think primarily of singing songs about God in church. Well, biblically speaking, this is one way we express our worship to God – but worship is much, much more than just singing. One of my favorite New Testament scholars put out a book a few years back called this (G.K. Beale), and his thesis is this:

*"What people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or for restoration." Beale traces the theme throughout Scripture to show that we are worshippers, and that our worship exposes us and changes us. We either revere the world and are conformed to the sinful patterns of the world, or we revere God and are progressively conformed into his likeness.*

Let me give you an example: In the book of Romans, Paul says that those who exchange the glory of God for an image (creature), are worshipping idols, and idol worship deforms their humanity, turning them into something other than what God would have them be. However, in 2 Cor. 3:17-18, we find exactly the opposite – when one beholds Christ, they become more and more like Him.

*Beale's point is that our worship and our affections right now are pointers to a future trajectory. Our worship is either aimed at our ruin, or our worship is aimed at our restoration, but it is aimed in either case. We are becoming what we worship. Thus the process of sanctification is the gracious redirecting of our worship and affections away from worldliness and toward God's image in Jesus as we are conformed to that image*

Today, we are going to explore the spiritual foundations of Paul's life as a Jewish-worshipper of God, who has found His Messiah, and how faith in Jesus (a living union with Jesus) enables Paul to be a joyful, courageous, and bold witness to Christ, even amidst trials, injustice, and hardship. In short, for Paul, *worshipping Jesus sustained his joy, and gave him courage and boldness, even when everything around him seems to be falling part.*

### **Exposition of Acts 24**

*Jewish leaders charges Paul with stirring up riots through false-worship - Acts 24:1-10a*

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Note that they begin with all of this flattery for Felix, praising him for his good governance and reforms. While it is true that he did suppress a potential rebellion, other Jewish sources show how tensions were raised during his tenure and that he was not the kind and gracious ruler these leaders seemed to be making him out to be.

As one scholar notes: “*Felix is usually credited with being most responsible of all the governors leading up to the Jewish War (66-70 AD) for stirring up ill will and trouble by his brutal suppression of various Jewish and Samaritan groups, some messianic, some more revolutionary.*” – Ben Witherington, New Testament scholar

More so, you can see that they don't really bring any charges of substance before Paul other than rumors, hearsay, and personal antagonism. It becomes very evident that these Jewish leaders are simply doing all they can to see Paul punished, and maybe even put to death.

What are these Jewish leaders worshipping? *Power and control*

The result: *bitterness, deceit, hypocrisy*

*Paul's defends his Jewish piety*

However, Paul gets a chance to give his defense. What I want you to notice is how Paul frames the entire situation around the issue of worship – worship! *In other words, Paul is going to defend himself as a faithful worshipper of the one true God, who honors the traditions of his ancestors, and the temple, but does in a way that everything points back to Jesus.* Let's look at this together now...

Acts 24:10b-13 - Paul honors but does not flatter Felix. But notice his disposition: cheerful; or enthusiastic about his defense. Paul does not flatter but expresses joy at the prospect of explaining himself. So, how does he present himself? *As a worshipper of the one true God!* Specifically, Paul states that he broke no laws, and did not start any riots, but instead is seeking to be a faithful worshipper of the one true God.

*Paul turns the focus back to Christ - Acts 24:14-16*

Again, we find that Paul identifies himself as a true Jew – a Jew who has found Jesus the Messiah to be the fulfillment of all he hoped for and desires in terms of worship.

*Paul defends his actions in the temple - Acts 24:17-21*

In other words, Paul presents himself as an innocent Jewish worshipper, though the entire orientation and shape of his worship is wrapped up in Jesus the Messiah.

What is Paul worshipping? *Jesus.* Result: *humility, courage, joy.* How will Felix respond? *Felix shows Paul favor - Acts 24:22-23* - Felix first gives Paul a degree of flexibility and freedom. Treats him well. But then it gets even more interesting...

*Paul calls Felix and Drusilla to worship Jesus - Acts 24:24-25a*

So, what does Paul say to them? Well, specifically, he talks to them about three issues: righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment. At first glance that sounds very – well, Jewish!

Some background here is helpful to understand the situation. Felix is married to Drusilla, who is the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I (who persecuted the Jerusalem church, had James put to death, and then God struck down back in Acts 12), and brother to Agrippa II whom we will meet in chapter 26. So, she is of a Jewish lineage. However, at age 14 she married a different king, but meets Felix and then starts an affair with him and marries him. She is not yet 20, but according to historical record, very beautiful and alluring. So, given that she is Jewish, and Felix is married to her, my guess is that Paul is talking to them about what the law requires of them, what their responsibility to God is in light of His call on His people to worship Him. I want to suggest that these verses would have been the basis for his conversations:

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 - In other words, you (Felix and Drusilla) are called to give your allegiance and worship to the one true God of Israel. However, he doesn't just leave it all there – look at the preceding verse: Acts 24:24 - Now, on the one hand, he is seeking to expose their adultery and affairs; but at a deeper level, if we follow the logic of the passage, what Paul is calling them to is the same thing he is calling the Sanhedrin, both Sadducees and Pharisees, along with everyone

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else, to: *worship the Lord Jesus, the resurrected Messiah, who is bringing about the restoration which the prophets predicted and will return to judge both the living and the dead.*

This trial is not about some inter-Jewish debate over whether or not there is a resurrection – Felix could care less about that. What Paul is doing is coming back to both Felix and Drusilla and reminding them that the real issue with his trial is not some irrelevant Jewish myth that has nothing to do with them; instead, he is saying that everyone is accountable to God, everyone must decide whether they are for or against this resurrected Messiah; everyone must decide who and what they truly worship!

*Paul frames the commands of God, and their duty to Him by explaining to them what it means to know and follow and worship, Messiah Jesus.* So what happens? Acts 24:25b-27 - Sadly, these conversations never really seem to get anywhere, and Paul is left again hanging in the balance.

What are Felix and Drusilla worshipping here? *Privilege and pleasure*  
Result? *Spiritual blindness and dulled conscience*

However, we need to remember that Paul is also viewing all of his circumstances in light of what Jesus had already promised to him: that he should take up courage and know that he will be testifying eventually before Caesar. Acts 23:11 - So, for Paul, worshipping Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of Israel's God, transforms what otherwise should have been a traumatic and horrific experience into a joyful opportunity to bear witness to the gospel in front of the Gentile rulers over his people.

**Main Idea:** *Joy, humility, and courage in the midst of trials is by-products of a heart fixated on the Lord Jesus (worship!).*

**Application:** **If worshipping Jesus transforms and sustains us, how do we keep our heart fixated on Him?** So, if worshipping Jesus shapes our character and forms our hearts, and produces in us by the power of the Spirit the kind of spiritual virtues we see in Paul, how do we keep our gaze fixed on him?

*It is by beholding the glory of Christ by faith that we are spiritually edified and built up in this world, for as we behold his glory, the life and power of faith grow stronger and stronger. It is by faith that we grow to love Christ. So if we desire strong faith and powerful love, which give us rest, peace and satisfaction, we must seek them by diligently beholding the glory of Christ by faith – John Owen*

Now, the only problem I have with Owen's program here is that it makes it sound very rigorous – and it is! But another approach is that of Hudson Taylor, famous missionary to China. Listen to how he talks about union and communion with Jesus in worship... speaking on the imagery of Jesus as the vine and us as His branches in John 15: "The branch of the vine does not worry, and toil, and rush here to seek for sunshine, and there to find rain. No; it rests in union and communion with the vine; and at the right time, and in the right way, is the right fruit found on it. Let us so abide in the Lord Jesus."

"But how to get faith strengthened? Not by striving after faith, but by resting on the Faithful One.' I looked to Jesus and saw (and when I saw, oh, how joy flowed!) that He had said, 'I will never leave you.' 'Ah, there is rest!' I thought. I have striven in vain to rest in Him. I'll strive no more. For has He not promised to abide with me—never to leave me, never to fail me?' And, dearie, He never will! "As I thought of the Vine and the branches, what light the blessed Spirit poured direct into my soul! How great seemed my mistake in having wished to get the sap, the fulness out of Him. I saw not only that Jesus would never leave me, but that I was a member of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. The vine now I see, is not the root merely, but all—root, stem, branches, twigs, leaves, flowers, fruit: and Jesus is not only that: He is soil and sunshine, air and showers, and ten thousand times more than we have ever dreamed, wished for, or needed. Oh, the joy of seeing this truth! I do pray that the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened, that you may know and enjoy the riches freely given us in Christ."

Hudson Taylor's advice to children: "Now, my darling children, I want you to love Jesus very much, and to know that He really does love you very much. Don't you think your far-off papa would be very pleased to see you and talk to you, and to take you on his knee and kiss you? You know he would! Well, Jesus will always be *far more pleased* when you think of

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Him with loving thoughts and speak to Him with loving words. Don't think of Him as a dreadful Being. Think of Him as very good and very great, able to do everything, but also as very gentle and very kind. When you wake, say to Him, either aloud or in your hearts:

“Good morning, dear Jesus. I am so glad you have been by me all night, and have taken care of me. Teach me how much you love me. Take care of my heart; make it think good thoughts. Take care of my lips: only let them speak kind, good words. Help me always to know what is right and do it.” He likes us to talk to Him. When I am walking alone, I often talk aloud to Him. At other times I talk to Him in my heart. Do not forget, my darling children, that He is *always* with you. Awake or asleep, at home or elsewhere, He is *really* with you though you cannot see Him. So I hope you will not grieve so constant and kind a Friend.”

Simple, right? But if we actually thought of Jesus this way, and talked to Him this way, and trusted Him this way, exalted Him this way – worshipped Him this way: our lives would look radically different than they often do.

And so, this is why we gather every week, to keep our gaze on Jesus, together as a community. To bear each other's burdens, spur each other on, pray for each other, so that Christ may be seen by all.

### **Notes: What is Israel's Hope (restoration) and resurrection (means of restoration) for Paul?**

I have so many questions, and only some probable answers... First, *Israel's restoration is a resurrection* (“life from death”, meaning restored life after exile has ended. To have exile conclude is to be brought back from death. While there is a general resurrection at the end of history, a resurrection unto judgement (which Christ is now the first fruits from), it seems that the emphasis is on the national restoration of Israel as the main “resurrection” which faithful Jews were looking towards. Is this correct?

Second, **to “live”** is also connected to the land. Life is a life before God, who resides in His temple, in the land. Therefore, to really experience life eternal means to be where God is, or at least near Him, which is deeply connected to both the land and the temple. Which is why restoration requires both secure land and a renewed temple – all of which are predicated on the people's faithfulness to the covenant. See the renewal promises in Deuteronomy 30 and Leviticus 26-27; also how “righteousness” in Deuteronomy 9-11 is connected to the works of law, in the land, and God's own mercy and not the people's goodness. Can we find evidence for righteousness also in light of “life” and “obedience” in connection to the land, temple, and Jewish institutions?

Third, **Paul says he is on trial for the hope of Israel**, that is the hope of restoration, that is the hope of resurrection, and the end of exile; but the end of exile also means that we are in the salvific presence of God (“life with God”, connected to the temple/worship, and God's dwelling place – all of which is again connected to the land). This promise, when fulfilled, does spill over to the Gentiles, beginning from Jerusalem (and hence the pilgrimage texts). What of Isaiah 19?

### **Fourth, Paul's exegesis of these texts and this hope is beautifully spelled out in Romans, especially Romans 10.**

Christ is the telos, fulfillment, the culmination (and not only the conclusion or “end”) of the Law – that is of the hope that is to be brought about. So in the renewal/restoration, we find some key things: first, repentance, then a regathering in the land, and then a new heart (see Jer. 31, Ezekiel 36), and then worship. What we find with Christ, there is now all of this having been fulfilled through Himself, His own body (incarnation?) which is the locale of God's presence in the Spirit for all people, Jew and Gentile. So, “faith” replaces works, Christ replaces temple, and “life” is the reward, inheritance in Christ, not in the land (inheritance is now Jesus, being with Him, for the new Jerusalem), and not the old.

So eternal life, restoration, resurrection, covenant renewal, and end of exile, are all tied back to Israel's promises, and the locale of land, temple, law, and so forth. However, Christ now supersedes and fulfills these things; it is elevated to Him. Meaning: he is life, land, temple, new heart, inheritance – everything! It's no wonder no one wanted to hear any of this.

All of this needs careful thought and nuance and more research, but I think I can make a connection between them all, and explain that if Christ is raised, then Israel and the world is being “raised” and “gathered” in Him (the new place where God dwells), with “faith” now being the key sign, which is experienced anywhere, and not just by Jewish works (which included temple-practices).

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The implications of this are quite staggering for the current conversations over the state of Israel and eschatology! Can it be true that Christ really is “all in all” and for “all”?

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*Acts 24:22-23 - Paul calls Felix and Drusilla to worship Jesus*

*Acts 24:24-27*

**Application: If worshipping Jesus transforms and sustains us, how do we keep our heart fixated on Him?**

**Questions for Reflection:**

- 1) “You become what you worship.” Agree or disagree? How should worship shape our character, habits, and mindset? (hint: see 2 Cor. 3:17-18).
  
- 2) In the text, we see three different types of “worshippers”: The Jewish leadership, Felix/Drusilla, and Paul. How does Paul’s faith in Christ make him different than the others? (hint: where does Paul’s humility, courage and joy come from?)
  
- 3) How are you being encouraged/challenged to keep your heart fixated on Christ?