

Acts 2: Lesson One, Paul's Imprisonment and Trials

Acts 21:17 – Acts 28

Subject: After Paul's arrest, he faithfully testified in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome.

Main Idea: Following God's calling, whatever it may be, it is likely to be costly.

Principles:

1. *God's promises will sustain us in our darkest moments.*
2. *Faithfulness to God's calling requires patiently awaiting His timing and wise stewardship of every opportunity while we wait.*
3. *Increased obstacles, threats, and personal loss may precede great victories for the kingdom.*

Introduction

Every Christian has certain callings. All of us have been commissioned as Jesus' witnesses (Matthew 28:19-20). We are all called to love, pray for, and assist our physical family, as well as our spiritual "family" (1 Timothy 5:8, Galatians 6:10). Then we each have spiritual gifts we are called to use, and these usually lead to specific "jobs" or callings, such as teaching the Bible, church leadership responsibilities, hospitality, and so on. God may also use a certain gift or ability He has given us in one season of our life and another in a different season. Do you know exactly what God has called you to do at this time?

The resurrected Christ called Paul to testify of Him to the Gentiles and their kings, as well as the people of Israel (Acts 9:15-16). In this lesson, we find five specific occasions in which Paul fulfilled this calling by testifying to large groups or government officials. Some less formal fulfillments are also implied. Paul's faithfulness to God's calling was not without personal cost. Whatever God's calling on our lives may be, following it is likely to cost us something.

Early in church history, the four gospels were circulated as one collection under the title "The Gospel" and the New Testament epistles were collectively called "The Apostle." Luke, the author of Acts, was Paul's close friend, traveling partner (at times), and perhaps also his physician. He wrote Luke-Acts as two volumes of a single work addressed to someone named Theophilus. The second volume of his work continues the history contained in the Gospels and gives context to the New Testament epistles, so it was eventually separated from the first and used to bridge "The Gospel" and "the Apostle."

No one knows for sure who Theophilus was. Since the name means "lover of God," some have suggested that it was not a real name but a pseudonym used to protect the letter's recipient from persecution. Another possibility is that Theophilus was a high-ranking government official with authority to influence the outcome of Paul's trial in Rome or with authority to protect certain Christians from persecution. He might also have been the patron who financed Luke's writing.¹

Acts contains no reference to the AD 70 fall of Jerusalem, Paul's death (traditionally dated at AD 67), or the outbreak of Christian persecution that followed the great fire of Rome (AD 64). It is hard to believe that a historian such as Luke wouldn't have mentioned events of such great importance had they occurred. Presumably then, he completed his works before AD 64. Acts ends with Paul in Rome, and those years can be dated quite conclusively. Either Luke composed it in Rome, just before Paul's release, or he started it during Paul's two-year imprisonment in Caesarea (AD 58-60) and completed it in Rome. Thus, AD 60-62 (the years of Paul's Roman house arrest) are generally accepted as the time of Luke's writing.

The last chapters of Acts tell of Paul's arrest, imprisonment, and trials and have three settings: Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome. The Holy Spirit had warned Paul that prison and hardships lie ahead but nevertheless, compelled him to proceed to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22). Paul's life was no longer his own. His only aim was to complete the task to which he had been called (Acts 20:24).

I. Paul's Arrest and Defense in Jerusalem – Acts 21:17-23:35
A. Paul's Meeting with Church Leaders and Their Plan – 21:17-26
 i. Tensions

1. *Political Situation*: Rome was the enemy of Jewish independence and in the years leading up to Rome's destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70), Jewish sentiment against all things Roman was feverish. Paul arrived in Jerusalem at a time when it was difficult for the local church to show support to his mission to the Gentiles (who might also be Romans) without seeming disloyal to their own nation and people. The elders in Jerusalem had officially sanctioned the Gentile mission (Acts 15) but realized it would be a stumbling block to the Jews they hoped to convert, as well as a difficult perspective for new converts to embrace. By showing Paul support, they could possibly destroy their own congregation. It was a delicate situation; it called for wisdom.
2. *Misunderstanding about Paul's Teaching*
 - a. In addition to the tension of the political situation, the church had to figure out how to deal with a misunderstanding about Paul's teaching. Many had come to believe that Paul encouraged new Jewish believers to renounce the customs of the Mosaic Law. These practices were sacred to the Jews, circumcision in particular. Adherence to the Law, especially the ceremonial portions, was at the heart of the Jews' identity.

- b. The misunderstanding likely resulted from the fact that Jewish believers outside Palestine no longer practiced certain rites. They lived a long way from the Temple in Jerusalem. Observing them was impractical. In addition, the Christian congregations they joined were primarily comprised of Gentiles. Certain Jewish customs (especially regarding food) made fellowship with them difficult, if not impossible.
 - c. In reality, Paul never told Jewish believers that they needed to break their cultural ties. He himself had taken a Nazirite vow (Acts 18:18) and participated in the Jewish festivals (Acts 20:6). What he did teach was that Jewish believers were no longer under obligation to the ceremonial laws. Christ had fulfilled these. The Law could not save them; only Christ could. Adherence to the Law was no longer necessary, but any sincere Jewish believer *could* still keep it for social or symbolic worship purposes. “In short, Paul saw one’s status in Christ as transcending the distinction between Jew and Gentile (Galatians 3:28). Being in Christ neither required that the Gentile become a Jew nor that the Jew cease to be a Jew.”ⁱⁱ
3. *The Offering Paul Delivered:* To complicate the situation for Paul and the Jerusalem church even further, Paul came bearing a gift from the Gentile believers. Nothing is said about this offering in Acts 21, but many other passages affirm that it was Paul’s reason for coming to Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-27, 1 Corinthians 16:3, 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:5). Receiving the Gentiles’ gift carried implications for the Jerusalem church. Many would perceive it as evidence of siding with the Romans.
- ii. The Elders’ Plan: In order to relieve suspicion about Paul and his financial gift and keep tensions from escalating, James and the elders recommended that Paul prove he did not oppose the Mosaic Law by participating in a purification ceremony and also paying the required fees of a few other participants. While Paul was not obligated to do so, he gladly complied in order to promote unity for the sake of the gospel.

B. Paul's Arrest – 21:27-39

- i. Accusation Against Paul: Some Jews who were visiting Jerusalem from Asia saw Paul at the Temple and accused him not only of opposing the Temple and the Mosaic Law but also of bringing Gentiles into the inner court (something that was illegal). They had seen Gentiles with Paul in Jerusalem and jumped to this false conclusion. Given the political climate, the thought of Gentiles in the inner court especially infuriated the Jewish worshippers and they attacked Paul with the intention of killing him.
- ii. Claudias Lysias
 1. The Antonia Fortress was a military barracks that overlooked Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. It assisted the Roman troops in policing the area. The Roman commander stationed in Jerusalem at the time was Claudius Lysias (Acts 23:26). He faced the difficult job of enforcing Roman peace while maintaining a good relationship with the local people.
 2. Lysias suspected Paul of being an Egyptian revolutionary who, not long before, had duped a large number of Jewish freedom fighters (“Sicarri,” translated “terrorists” or “assassins”) into challenging Rome (21:38). As he bound Paul and led him toward the barracks, Paul surprised Lysias by addressing him in Greek. This was the mark of a cultured man, not a rogue rebel. Paul explained that he was not Egyptian but Jewish, and a citizen of Tarsus. The commander was so impressed with Paul’s calm and clear frame of mind under such circumstances that he granted his request to address the crowd.

C. Paul's Speech to the Jerusalem Crowd – 21:40-22:29

- i. Paul's Testimony
 1. Paul's testimony to the Jewish crowd is the first of five speeches he gave that are recorded in the last chapters of Acts. Surprisingly, Paul never mentioned anything about the Jews' charges against him. He was more concerned with his heavenly call than with defending his actions. Paul emphasized his common ground with the crowd, addressing them in Aramaic (the common language of Palestinian Jews at that time) and telling of his Jewish upbringing and former zealotry for persecuting Christians.
 2. Indirectly, however, Paul addressed the real source of their irritation with him. They viewed him as a Jewish apostate. Thus, Paul showed that his conversion had occurred in the context of scrupulously keeping Jewish laws. He also showed that what they considered apostasy (ministering to Gentiles) was actually work that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had assigned to him.

3. The crowd listened to Paul's speech until he said that God had sent him to the Gentiles. They found the idea that Gentiles could be on equal footing with them before God intolerable.

ii. Lysias' Search for a Cause

1. *Flogging*: Lysias did not understand why the people were shouting at Paul. It seems unlikely that he didn't understand the language. It was probably the religious terms and implications of Paul's speech that he didn't understand. In any case, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks, interrogated and flogged. Roman flogging was sometimes fatal. The scourge was a bundle of leather straps, each containing pieces of bone and lead. Paul's Roman citizenship made such treatment illegal. Roman citizenship could be gained in one of four ways: reward for military or other service, being freed from slavery to citizenship, bribery of a Roman official, or (the most prestigious way) by birth.ⁱⁱⁱ When Paul announced that his citizenship was by birth, he averted the flogging, and the commander protected him more carefully from that time forward.
2. *An Informal Trial*: In order to discover the reason for the Jews' accusations, Lysias ordered the Sanhedrin to assemble and released Paul from confinement to stand before them.

D. Paul's Testimony to the Sanhedrin and the Result – 22:30-23:35

i. Paul's Speech to the Sanhedrin – 23:1-10

1. *The Sanhedrin*: The Sanhedrin was the 71-member high council of Judaism, which Rome had given authority to pass judgment over matters pertaining to Jewish religious laws. The group had condemned Jesus and persecuted the early church. This was the group to whom Paul gave his second defense. Before his conversion he had had close association with them (Acts 9:1-2).
2. *Ananias the High Priest*: The high priest Ananias ordered Paul to be struck before he even made his defense. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Ananias had a reputation for corruption and violence.^{iv} The hypocrisy angered Paul, since Jewish law presumed innocence until guilt was proven (Leviticus 19:15), but when he lashed out, he was accused of insulting God's high priest. Paul replied he did not realize Ananias was the high priest. The high priesthood changed regularly and this was certainly possible. However, Paul might also have been replying ironically, implying that a man of such actions could not possibly be recognized as the high priest.

3. *Paul's Defense*: Some of the Sanhedrin were Pharisees and others, Sadducees. Paul took advantage of a long-standing dispute between the groups by stating that he, a Pharisee (Philippians 3:5-6), was on trial because of his hope in the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees believed in a physical resurrection while the Sadducees did not. As a result, some of the Sanhedrin came to his defense, even confessing that Paul wasn't guilty of any offense (23:9). The meeting became so heated that the Roman commander had to take Paul away.
- ii. Paul's Transfer to Caesarea – 23:11-35
1. *The Lord encouraged Paul*: The following night, the Lord “stood near Paul” (whether in some physical manifestation, a vision, or simply by the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit). Having just endured two violent encounters (the Jewish mob and the Sanhedrin), the Lord's presence must have been especially comforting to Paul. The Lord also assured him that he would live to testify in Rome. Witnessing in Rome had been his expressed desire all along (Acts 19:21, Romans 15:23-29). Now this calling was confirmed.
 2. *Plot Thwarted*: Paul's nephew learned of a plot to kill Paul in Jerusalem and informed Lysias. That very night, Lysias sent Paul safely to the coastal city of Caesarea, fifty-five miles to the north. Lysias sent a letter to Felix, the Roman Governor of Judea (AD 52-59) who lived in Caesarea, confessing that he had found nothing with which he could charge Paul. He just wanted to protect him as a Roman citizen.

Summary Statement: Paul went to Jerusalem knowing that he was likely to meet trouble. In his humanness, he surely had moments of self-doubt, wondering if he had in fact made a mistake by going. In my personal experience, those doubts are often most troubling in the solitude and darkness of nighttime. The night after Paul stood before the Sanhedrin, while he was alone in the Antonio Fortress, the Lord stood near him and assured him that his trouble had a purpose. Just as he had testified in Jerusalem, so also he would testify in Rome (23:11).

Principle: *God's promises will sustain us in our darkest moments.*

Moments of God's manifest presence are sweet to every believer. However, God does not always make His presence known so keenly. Learning to trust Him, even when we do *not* sense His presence, is important in developing our faith. God wants us to learn to stand firmly on His promises. Long after God's presence was not so clearly manifested to Paul, he could still count on the promise God had given him. God's promises are what anchor us in our calling.

Illustration: Over the past eighteen months, I have often suffered from intense doubts, especially in the night. At first, I did not recognize the Satanic origin of them (he often disguises himself as the “voice of reason”), but as the doubts turned to fears, I realized they could not be from God (2 Timothy 1:7). Knowing that Satan is the Father of Lies (John 8:44), I began to search for the lie that was behind each troubling thought. Jesus used Scripture when Satan attacked Him (Matthew 4:1-11), so once I had discerned the lies, I searched the Scripture for promises that contradicted each one. When the doubts come, I quote these verses aloud.

Application: Are you currently experiencing fears or doubts, perhaps with regard to your position in Christ or His calling on your life? If so, what are the lies behind them and which promise or truth from God’s word will you use to counter it? I strongly encourage you to memorize as many of God’s promises as possible so that you can recall them word for word when a Bible is not immediately accessible. Almost every believer eventually has dark moments. To remain faithful to God’s calling, we will need to rely on His promises.

Transition: Paul was faithful to his calling in Jerusalem and also in Caesarea.

II. Paul’s Imprisonment and Trials in Caesarea – Acts 24-26

A. Trial Before Felix – 24:1-27

i. Tertullus’ Presentation – 24:1-9

1. *Flattery of Felix:* The Sanhedrin brought their charges against Paul to Governor Felix in Caesarea. Since Roman law was complex, they brought a lawyer named Tertullus to represent them. Tertullus flattered Felix by saying the Jews had enjoyed peace under him. Nothing could have been further from the truth. The Jews hated Felix. He was not a wise ruler. According to one ancient record, he thought he could commit any crime with impunity, he nearly caused a civil war, and he used “the power of a king with the temper of a slave.”^v
2. *Accusation Against Paul:* Tertullus accused Paul of being a ringleader of the Nazarene sect (Jesus was a Nazarene) to convince Felix that he was an enemy of Rome. The Romans were polytheistic and allowed people groups within the Empire to worship their own gods. However, Rome was intolerant of new religions. Tertullus’ tactic was to distinguish Christianity (“the Way”) from Judaism, and thus show it to be illegal.

- ii. Paul’s Third Defense – 24:10-21: Paul made his third defense. On this occasion he very specifically addressed the Jews’ charges, explaining Christianity as the fulfillment of Judaism and a continuance of the Old Testament and denying that he had done anything wrong in the Temple (24:11-15).

- iii. Felix's Response – 24:22-27: Felix saw that the Jews' charges were religious in nature. Although he could have released Paul, he deferred his decision and Paul remained in protective custody for the next two years. Throughout that time, Felix and his Jewish wife Drusilla called regularly for Paul. Felix was apparently convicted, for when Paul spoke about the judgment to come, he was genuinely afraid. Tragically, he was more interested in receiving a bribe from Paul than in hearing truth and at the end of two years, Rome replaced him with a man named Porcius Festus.

B. Trial Before Festus – 25:1-12

- i. Another Plot Against Paul: As the new ruler, Festus was naturally eager to visit Jerusalem, the cultural and religious center of the region. The Jews used the opportunity to request that Paul be moved to Jerusalem. They planned to kill him en route. However, since Festus was soon heading back to Caesarea and Paul was already there, it was more practical for him to try Paul in Caesarea.
- ii. Paul's Fourth Defense: The Jews traveled to Caesarea for the hearing and after their many accusations, Paul gave a rather simple fourth defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar" (25:8).
- iii. Paul's Appeal to Caesar: In light of the ongoing threat against his life, Paul determined that he was unlikely to ever get a fair hearing in Palestine. When Festus asked him if he was willing to be tried in Jerusalem, Paul appealed to Caesar's higher court in Rome. As a Roman citizen, he had the right to this appeal. The year was AD 60.^{vi} Nero was Emperor (this was prior to his fanatical persecution of Jews). Festus needed to send a written explanation of the details of Paul's case. For help, he sought the advice of the visiting Herod, Marcus Julius Agrippa II.

C. Hearing Before King Herod Agrippa II - 25:13-26:32

- i. Marcus Julius Agrippa II (A.D. 27-100): As the son of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12) and the great-grandson of Herod the Great, Marcus Julius Agrippa II had a history with the Jews. He himself didn't rule over Judea, but he did have the role of "Curator of the Temple," with powers pertaining to the appointment of high priest, the temple's treasury, and the priesthood. Rome considered him an authority on Judaism.^{vii} Bernice, Agrippa's younger sister, was with him at Paul's hearing. Rumors existed that their relationship was incestuous.

- ii. Paul's Fifth Defense: Luke described Paul's fifth defense at greater length than any of the four previous hearings. Agrippa was certainly the most knowledgeable of those who heard Paul's case. Paul claimed the Jewish religious leaders charged him because of his hope in God's promises to Israel. The most important of these promises was to bless the Jews with a Messiah and through Him, to bless the entire world. The Jews had clung to the hope of God's promised Messiah but had ignored or misunderstood God's intention of blessing the entire world through Him. Their offense against Paul boiled down to his claim that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah), that God had proved this by raising Him from the dead, and that Christ had commissioned Paul to offer salvation to Gentiles (as well as Jews). Paul reminded Herod that the Old Testament predicted the Messiah would suffer, rise from the dead, and proclaim light to Jews and Gentiles alike (26:22-23). He was preaching nothing more than what the Old Testament had predicted. He then challenged Herod to consider the implications for himself.
- iii. Herod's Response: Herod privately confessed to Festus that Paul was innocent of any crime. However, he rejected Paul's personal challenge and the meeting was adjourned. Since Paul had appealed to Caesar, Festus would send him.

Summary Statement: Over a two-year period, Paul faithfully testified to Roman and Jewish authorities in Caesarea. Luke detailed Paul's speeches but other than that, said very little about how God used Paul during this time. In all likelihood, those were two very long years for Paul. He was eager to go to Rome. In the meantime, he made the most of every opportunity the Lord gave him to fulfill his calling.

Principle: *Faithfulness to God's calling requires patiently awaiting His timing and wise stewardship of every opportunity while we wait.*

Most believers have wondered at one time or another why God isn't acting more quickly. In two of Paul's prison letters (covered in the next lesson), he urged his readers to "make the most of every opportunity" (Ephesians 5:16, Colossians 4:5). During his Caesarean imprisonment, Felix had called for him often. In addition to sharing the gospel (24:14-15), Paul "talked about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come" (24:25). He could possibly have been released sooner if he had bribed Felix, but he patiently awaited God's timing and meanwhile, used every opportunity he was given. Even when his conversations with Felix did not bear fruit, he still waited and trusted God.

In some countries today, believers are imprisoned for their faith. Many have reported tremendous opportunities for evangelism and discipleship while in jail. If these brothers and sisters had become impatient with God’s timing and disgruntled, they would have missed the opportunities right in front of them.

Application: What hardship or yearning is testing your patience? Will you trust God’s timing and keep yourself attuned to opportunities that arise while you wait? You may unexpectedly have one of your greatest opportunities.

Transition: Paul faithfully testified in Jerusalem and Caesarea. Next, Luke tells about the shipwreck that threatened Paul’s arrival in Rome.

III. Paul’s Shipwreck and Arrival in Rome – Acts 27-28

A. The Shipwreck – 27:1-44

- i. The Company of Travelers: Paul sailed for Rome in the company of 275 soldiers, sailors, and other prisoners. As a gentleman and a Roman citizen, Paul would have been permitted attendants. The pronoun “we” indicates that Luke was among these (he may have gone as Paul’s physician). Another person who accompanied Paul was Aristarchus, the Thessalonian believer who had been seized in a riot in Ephesus several years earlier (Acts 19:29). Not too many months after the riot, he and several other church representatives had joined Paul in his journey to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4 [they probably each carried the offerings from their respective congregations]). Julius was the Roman centurion assigned to guard Paul.
- ii. The Storm
 1. Part of the way into the journey, Paul warned the crew that it was not wise to continue the voyage. Nevertheless, they pressed on toward Phoenix, a harbor of Crete. For fourteen days, a “northeaster” of hurricane force swept down and drove the ship along, out of control. As the second week was ending, an angel appeared to Paul and assured him that all onboard would survive and that he would stand trial before Caesar.
 2. On the fourteenth night, they found themselves approaching land. At Paul’s urging, everyone ate for the first time since the storm set in. Paul offered a prayer of thanksgiving and all were encouraged. After daylight, the ship struck a sandbar and the pounding surf began to tear it apart. The soldiers decided to kill the prisoners to prevent them from escaping, but in order to protect Paul, Julius kept them from carrying out their plan. Every person on board safely swam or floated on planks to the shore of the island of Malta.

B. Paul on Malta – 28:1-10: On land, a deadly snake bit Paul. When Paul remained unharmed, the locals assumed he was a god. Luke does not say, but Paul surely turned this into an opportunity to share the gospel. While the travelers awaited favorable weather, Paul healed the island's sick. After three months, they were able to make passage on an Alexandrian ship that had wintered on the island.

C. Paul in Rome – 28:11-30

- i. The Roman Christians: In AD 49, the emperor Claudius had thrown the Jews out of Rome (Acts 18:2). After his death (AD 54), they were allowed to return and apparently, quite a few did, including Jewish Christians. Romans 16 contains a long list of believers in Rome that were known to Paul, including Priscilla and Aquila, who had a church meeting in their house (Romans 16:3-5). Paul and his travel-mates had a 130-mile trip on foot from where they left the ship to Rome. Bands of Roman believers traveled to meet them along the way.
- ii. Paul's Ministry in Rome: Although Paul remained a prisoner, once he arrived in Rome, he was allowed to rent his own house and live alone with a soldier guarding him. Luke describes Paul's Roman ministry in much the same way as it occurred in other locations. First, he spoke to the local Jews. When they rejected him, he turned his witness to the Gentiles. Over the course of two years, he was free to have any visitors he wanted and to preach and teach without hindrance.
- iii. The Conclusion of Acts: Luke's writing ends with Paul in Rome.
 1. We can assume that Paul eventually appeared before Caesar since God told him he would. In his prison letters to Philemon (22) and the Philippians (1:19-26), he indicated an expectation of release. According to his three pastoral letters (1-2 Timothy and Titus), he was indeed released and made a fourth missionary venture of some sort. Paul's last letter (2 Timothy) reveals that within a few years, he was re-arrested and again awaiting trial. He told Timothy his life was soon coming to an end. According to tradition, Nero beheaded him outside Rome in AD 67.
 2. A variety of reasons have been suggested for Luke ending his book as he did.
 - a. Throughout Acts, Luke emphasized the relationship between Christianity and the government, as well as the details of Paul's trials in Jerusalem and Caesarea. If Theophilus (to whom Luke wrote) had political power to influence the outcome of Paul's trial before Caesar, it is logical that Luke's book would have ended with Paul in Rome awaiting trial.

- b. A second idea is that Luke simply chose to end on a note of victory. Despite Paul's imprisonment, "he proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ – with all boldness and without hindrance!" (28:31). Jesus had told His disciples to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), and Paul's arrival in the empire's capital city amounted to a fulfillment of that commission.
- c. On the other hand, the somewhat abrupt ending also reflects the fact that the story of Acts is still being written. The acts of the Apostles and of the Holy Spirit not only continued after Paul's Roman imprisonment but they will go on throughout the church age until Christ returns.

Summary Statement: The book of Acts shows that God's sovereign purposes prevail. It opens with Jesus commissioning His disciples to carry the gospel to Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth and ends with Paul and the Gospel in Rome, where it would easily be carried throughout the empire.

The last chapters show obstacles to Paul's arrival in Rome increasing in intensity. First, hostilities with the Jews in Jerusalem threatened Paul's life. After that, Felix left him sitting in prison indefinitely. Just when it seemed that Paul would finally get to Rome, a stormy sea almost claimed his life.

Principle: *Increased obstacles, threats, and personal loss may precede great victories for the kingdom.*

Throughout the ages, many believers have testified of pandemonium ("all hell breaks loose") just prior to a major breakthrough or victory in their kingdom work. As we pursue our God-ordained callings, we too should expect opposition. The later books of the New Testament warn us to expect this opposition to increase prior to Christ's return. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he wrote of our struggle against "the ruler of the kingdom of the air" and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:2, 6:12). Jesus called Satan "the prince of this world" (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11). God has given him a measure of power in this world, but the One who is in us is greater (1 John 4:4) and His purposes will prevail.

Conclusion

Are you currently discouraged and tempted to give up on one or more of God's callings on your life? Faithfulness will be costly, but God will give us grace one day at a time (Matthew 6:34, James 4:14). And if we endure all things in faith and hope, He will reward us, if not in this life, then in the next. Do not give up, dear brother or sister! You may be on the verge of seeing a great victory for Christ's kingdom.

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