“Don’t shoot the messenger.”
The Apostle Paul’s life was being threatened almost everyday, he’s been past from pillar to post by the authorities. And although he had times in his life when he thought he would never fulfil his life time ambition to go to the greatest nation in the world at that time to preach the gospel.

He never lost his grip of the truth; he understood that pain and suffering doesn’t mean that God has left you. Paul learned that God was one step ahead of the game concerning his life and when God said to him you’re going to Rome to preach, he understood that God stands by His promises.

Now before we look at the text let me tell you a story about this man who was walking along the beach one day and discovered this bottle. When he removed the lid from the bottle a genie popped out and said, “Since you have freed me from this bottle I am going to grant you three wishes, but first I need to know what your occupation is.” The man said, ‘I’m a lawyer’, so the genie said, ‘OK whatever you wish for all the other lawyers in the world will receive twice as much’. So the man said, ‘I wish for one million pounds’, the genie said, ‘your very generous that means all the other layers in the world will receive two million pounds, what’s you next wish?’

The man said, ‘I wish for a Ferrari sports car’, the genie said, ‘you are very generous that means all the other lawyers in the world will receive two Ferraris, what’s you final wish?’ The man thought for a moment and said, ‘I wish to donate a kidney’. Who said that lawyers are not smart?

We left the apostle Paul in Governor Felix’s palace under guard until the Jews arrived to present their case against him. But as we are about to read, the Jews didn’t come alone, they came fully prepared, and to such an extent they had a very smart lawyer with them.

We catch up with Luke’s report in Acts 24:1-4 “Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: “We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.”

Luke tells us after five days, the high priest, elders and a lawyer, presented themselves before the governor to bring a formal charge against Paul. Now I said this lawyer was smart and he is, notice in the text the way Tertullus begins talking to Felix.

He uses flattery with Felix or what we would say, he sweetens him up by telling him how wonderful he is. He refers to the peace that Felix had brought to the land under Roman authority. And like all smart lawyers who want people on their side, he doesn't mention a thing about the fact that the governor had been responsible for the murder of the high priest, Jonathan.

Now I don’t know about you but I can’t handle people like that because I know they are after something. And it’s usually not until after around five minutes of just praising you and telling you how wonderful you are until they finally get to the point. And I don’t know about you but I wish they would just get to the point, what do they really want?

Because just like this lawyer, you know they want you on their side for something. I need to be honest with you loved ones, I just don’t trust people like that because I find them very devious and deceitful.

Psalm 5:9 “Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit.”
“Don’t shoot the messenger.”
Tertullus is very clever in choosing in words to get Felix on side, even to the point where he tells Felix that he will state his case briefly, so he doesn’t take too much of his time.

And so he presents his case before Felix and says in Acts 24:5-9 "We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him. By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him." The Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.”

Basically he accused Paul of four things. They accused him of being a troublemaker. They accused him of stirring up rebellion among the Jews throughout the world. They accused him of being a ringleader of the Nazarene party among the Jews. And finally they accused him of trying to desecrate the temple.

And so after hearing all the accusations the lawyer urges Felix to "examine" Paul. Now what does that mean? Well I’m not too sure but one commentator suggests that examining Paul meant scourging him. In other words they wanted Felix to beat the truth out of him.

But notice also how clever this lawyer is, he doesn’t even mention anything about Paul’s Roman citizenship which meant if they scourge him at this point Felix would be guilty of breaking the Roman law. He is very selective with the truth.

And so the onslaught against Paul continues, but isn’t this just amazing how far people will go to get rid of someone they don’t like? And nothing has changed loves ones, because there are still people today who are very selective with the truth and they will do anything and say anything to discredit someone. They will go to any lengths to get someone out of the way, especially if you say something against their traditions and practices.

Especially if you say something which effects their comfort zones. These people are happy with their traditions and practices; they are comfortable in their beliefs. And now this guy named Paul from Tarsus comes along and basically starts rocking their boat a bit. Because let me tell you loved ones, the truth will always rock your boat, especially if you don’t want to hear it.

I love that story about the man who goes to the doctors and after a thorough examination he says to the doctor, ‘Ok doc tell it to me straight, I can take what’s wrong with me?’ And doctors says, ‘Ok, it’s very simple your just plain lazy’. The man said, ‘Ok tell me the technical name for it so that I can go home and tell my wife.’

My point is just like that man; these religious leaders didn’t want to hear the truth because the truth hurts them. And so while all these accusations were being presented to Felix our dear friends the high priest and elders affirmed the truthfulness of the case presented by their lawyer. But just like in any courtroom session, the judge needs to hear both sides of the story.

So Luke continues and tells us about Paul’s defence in Acts 24:10-13 “When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: "I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defence. You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me.”
“Don’t shoot the messenger.”

Now remember even today in our courtrooms no one is allowed to speak unless the judge says so. And so as Felix was the judge on this occasion Paul waited to get permission to speak from him before he began his defence.

And so Paul begun his defence by saying that it was a pleasure to be able to state his case before a person who had years of experience in judging on matters involving the Jews. Now remember that the first accusation against Paul was they accused him of being a troublemaker.

In defence of that Paul basically says, he had only been back in Judea for 12 days, with the last 5 of those being spent in custody. In other words Paul would be hard pushed to be a trouble maker in such a short space of time. He said they didn’t find him in the temple either disputing with others or stirring up the crowd.

And so against the accusation of being a rebel against Rome, Paul basically says, he wouldn’t have had time for that and not only that there is absolutely no proof of that either. Paul also said they couldn’t prove their charge of trying to desecrate the temple either. Paul was telling the truth and as we are about to read, he’s going continue to tell the truth, even though he knows his accusers won’t like it.

Acts 24:14-16 “However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.”

When they accused him of being a ringleader of the Nazarene party among the Jews. Paul didn’t hide the fact that he did worship God according to the Way, which his Jewish accusers called a sect. And so if Paul was going to plead guilty to anything, he pleaded guilty to worshipping the God of the Jewish fathers.

He pleaded guilty to believing all that was written in the Law of Moses and the prophets. He readily admitted that he based his hope in God, as his accusers also did, who would raise both the righteous and wicked from the dead. And so because of that belief, Paul said he tried to live as his conscience directed, so he would not offend God or man.

Paul was practising what Peter preached in 1 Peter 3:15-16 “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”

Paul gave them a reason for his hope, he was gentle in his approach, he showed them respect with his words, and he kept a clear conscience as these people were speaking maliciously against him. Because that’s what speaking the truth does loved ones, the truth has nothing to hide.

Truth exposes falsehood and like we said some people don’t like that. Now loved ones, one of the problems that people face who fabricate the truth like these guys are doing is their conscience.

How these people can sleep at night I will never know? How can they sleep at night knowing they have fabricated the truth?
“Don’t shoot the messenger.”

How can they sleep at night knowing they have falsely accused someone of something? We all know what it’s like to be falsely accused of something don’t we?

I remember when I was younger I was at my friends house when my father came to the door and took me home. I didn’t understand why he took me home until he hit me and accused me of being nasty to people around the corner shop. But when I tried to explain that I had been at my friend’s house all morning, he didn’t want to know because he said ‘he saw me wearing my balaclava at the shop’. Well my mum turned around in my defence and said, ‘it couldn’t have been me because my mum had just finished washing my balaclava which was now on the washing line drying.’

Now loved ones, my father had a real guilty conscience after that day but he never struck me again the rest of his days. Someone once said that, "Conscience is the clearness of eternal light and the mirror of the majesty of God."

My point is this, our conscience does two things for us, it either helps us to live a life which is pleasing to God with a clear state of mind, or it convicts us of sin and makes us feel guilty. Paul’s conscience is clear, how is yours?

Maybe you’ve said something to someone which you knew wasn’t the entire truth and now that plays on the back of your mind. Maybe you’ve done something which you knew was sinful but haven’t confessed it God or repented of it. Maybe you’ve said, ‘yes I will come along to a meeting’ but you know in your heart that you have no intention of going.

Maybe you’ve lied to someone about why you couldn’t come to worship and you feel bad for lying. Maybe there was someone who needed help and you know you could have helped but you gave some excuse and now you feel bad for letting them down in their time of need.

Loved ones the list could go on and on and so I’m asking you today to ask God to forgive you for that and move on because as Christians we need to have a clear conscience.

Hebrews 10:19-23 “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”

God sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for you and me and spill His blood for you and me so that you and I can be free from a guilty conscience. A person doesn’t feel guilty when they have done nothing wrong, it’s only when their conscience is pricked does the guilt come along. Paul did nothing wrong, that’s why he had a clear conscience.

He lived his live to please God, that’s why he had a clear conscience. He’s didn’t rely on himself for it; he relied on the blood of Christ for a clear conscience. But Paul also understood that a clear conscience didn’t make him innocent of sin.

1 Corinthians 4:4 “My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.” So loved ones, Paul was clear in his mind about who he was and what he was. And so he carries on his defence before Felix and says in Acts 24:17+18 "After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance.”
“Don’t shoot the messenger.”

After some five years in other parts of the world, Paul had returned to Jerusalem with a gift for the needy of the Jewish nation. And he says in his defence that he didn’t defile the temple, they found him there after he had completed his vow of purification which again we know as being true.

Now we have all heard the phrase ‘don’t shoot the messenger’. But did you know that the advice "Don’t shoot the messenger" was first expressed in 1598 by William Shakespeare in Henry IV, part 2? The actual term "Shooting the messenger" is a metaphoric phrase used to describe the act of lashing out at the (blameless) bearer of bad news. In ancient times, messages were delivered in person by a human envoy. Sometimes, as in war, for example, the messenger was sent from the enemy camp. An easily-provoked receiver of the message could more easily vent anger on the deliverer of the unpopular message than on its author. And so literally killing the messenger.

Now I shared that with you because some people are very good at that. Some people are very good at getting others to do their dirty work, or providing the bullets as we say for someone else to fire. And these people who provide the bullets have become experts at avoiding the conflict which they cause.

And that’s because they haven’t got the courage to speak to you face to face. Or in the religious sense, they don’t have the courage to obey the words of Jesus as we find them in Matthew 18:15, “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.”

Now the reason I think that’s important for us to understand is because of what Luke tells us next in Acts 24:19-21, "But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me. Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin- unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: 'It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.'"

Paul suggested that there were some Asian Jews who brought the original charges against him, and stirred up the mob. He says the very ones who provided the bullets in the first place; they should have been present to contest the facts which he presented. They are long gone; they simply passed on the bullets for someone else to fire. Now these people who are firing are far from innocent, but they weren’t the ones who originally begun this plot to get rid of Paul.

And so Paul exposed what the real accusation was all about, he got to the point even when they wouldn’t. He even invited those Sadducean accusers who were present to step forward and show the error in his one statement before the Sanhedrin, "Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day."

Paul knew exactly why he was there; even know they wouldn’t admit it. Matthew 21:33-39 “There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. 'But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.”

God sent the prophets with a message to His people but they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third, they shot the messengers.
"Don’t shoot the messenger."

God sent His Son with a message for His people but they killed him, they shot the messenger. They stoned Stephen to death, they shot the messenger. They put James to death with the sword, they shot the messenger.

Tradition says that Peter was crucified, upside-down on an x-shaped cross, in Rome, they shot the messenger. The Apostle Paul was tortured and then beheaded by the evil Emperor Nero at Rome in A.D. 67, they shot the messenger.

Loved ones we today are God’s messengers and we too should not be surprised if people want to shoot us too. But before we give them a chance to do that, just remind them, ‘not to shoot the messenger’, I’m only telling you what the God Himself says you need to know.

If after reading this you want to know more about being messenger of God or if this sermon has raised other questions in your thoughts then please just contact me and I will get back to you as soon as possible.

God bless and thanks for taking the time to grow in your understanding of God’s Word.