

Paul's Trial Before Felix

Acts 24

Now we are at the point where Paul is standing before Felix to be judged. Felix has the task of figuring out his guilt or innocence. So let's dive right in since we are going to cover the entire chapter today.

24 And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.

Here we have the Jewish leadership from Jerusalem, who have come to Caesarea, to speak to the Roman governor about their issues against Paul. They bring with them a man named Tertullus. This man was a skilled lawyer that would speak on behalf of the Jewish leadership. The presence of all three (Ananias, the elders, and a skilled lawyer) at the court of Felix reminds us of how serious the Jewish leadership was about obtaining a conviction against Paul.

So now he begins to speak.

2 And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, 3 We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. 4 Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words.

He begins by telling the Romans how great they are. As you can see he is laying it on so thick you would need a shovel to clear it away. He even gives a lot of the credit for the Jewish lifestyle they enjoy to Felix by calling him "most noble Felix".

Now according to Roman history, Felix began his life as a slave. He was the first governor ever to begin life as a slave, gain his freedom, and then rise to such stature as being a governor. He was well known as being a back stabber, immoral, and brutal man. That's why when Tertullus says, "*Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence,*" , he knew it would stroke Felix's ego.

What you have to understand though is that Felix did not bring peace to Judea nor did he bring about any prosperity in the region. In reality Felix had many people killed to further his own interests. In fact, not long before this case before him now, he had thousands of Jews killed and all of their money and possessions were distributed amongst the wealthy Romans. It was said by many people of the time that he was a master of cruelty and lust who exercised the powers of a king with the spirit of a slave.

That is why Tertullus starts off by praising Felix as if to say the Jews have no hard feelings against you. In fact we love what you have done for us.

Not to get off topic but this made me think of Romans 16:18; ¹⁸ *For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*

You see that flattery like this, a lie, is an often-neglected sin, one that the Bible speaks about more often than one might think. Four different times the Book of Proverbs connects flattery with the sin of sexual immorality.

But here is what it says in Psalm 78:36; ³⁶ *Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues.* This is about people speaking to God. When you give God insincere praise, it is flattery, and it is a sin. Be careful with your flattery toward others and God.

Anyway, now the lawyer begins to present his case against Paul.

⁵ *For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes:*

⁶ *Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.*

What Tertullus is saying here is that Paul is a plague that is persistent in spreading his lies throughout the world amongst all the Jews. He is letting them know that Paul was politically dangerous to them and had profaned the temple. Ancient Judea was filled with would-be messiahs and revolutionaries against Rome. Tertullus wanted to put Paul in the same group with these kinds of terrorists.

He even calls Paul a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. The reference to Paul being a Nazarene was intended to connect him to a generally despised and lowly

place because Nazareth had a poor reputation as a city. Before you get riled up and ask how I can say that when that is where Jesus came from look at John 1:46. ⁴⁶ *And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.* You see, before Jesus, it was considered a place where nothing good came from.

Anyway, Nazarene was a term of slight scorn used for the followers of Jesus at the time. He is hoping to heave contempt against Paul in this way. But notice that so far the only actual charge he has brought against Paul is the profaning of the temple. However, did you hear him present any evidence of that charge? No. Tertullus is hoping that all of the other things that he is saying about Paul will make them believe that the charge against him is true without presenting any evidence.

Here is an interesting point though. Tertullus actually gave Paul an un-intended compliment when he described the extent of Paul's work in the Roman Empire. He did this when he said, "*among all the Jews throughout the world*". I think that Paul might have even smiled a bit when he heard this. Paul was probably thinking wow, you really think I am that successful. I am getting the message out all over the world. I must be doing pretty good.

⁷ *But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands,* ⁸ *Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.* ⁹ *And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.*

The lawyer is just trying to emphasize just how the charges against Paul must be true. Notice that they still haven't offered one shred of evidence against Paul. He tells Felix that by examining Paul yourself you will find that we are telling the truth. They are hoping that in some way that Paul will incriminate himself. So now it's Paul's turn.

¹⁰ *Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation*

Notice that there is not one word of flattery here from Paul. He does acknowledge the fact that he knows Felix has set as a judge for many years but that is it. Continuing on

, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: ¹¹ Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. ¹² And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: ³ Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.

Paul was happy to answer for himself, knowing that the facts of the case were in his favor, and he had God on his side. Acting as his own lawyer, gets right to the point and says that they can not prove anything they are accusing me of. In fact they have had twelve days, in which time they could have found some witnesses against me, they brought no-one to testify against me. They are accusing me of all of these things but where's the proof and their evidence? There simply is none.

But now Paul begins to preach and explain his ministry.

¹⁴ But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: ¹⁵ And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. ¹⁶ And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void to offence toward God, and toward men. ¹⁷ Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. ¹⁸ Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. ¹⁹ Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. ²⁰ Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, ²¹ Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.

I love how Paul begins here. He says, "according to the way which they call a heresy". You see that from early on the Christian movement was called the way. I love that because it shows that Christianity is not just a belief system but is also a way to live your life. Paul is telling them that he has not abandoned the God of Israel or the law. He goes on to say that he has hope in God, which the Jews do also, so that someday there may be a resurrection of the dead. In Paul's case however, it was connected to the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. This of course was the foundation of everything he believed. That Jesus not only died on the

cross paying the penalty for our sins but that He rose from the dead and there would be a resurrection for the just and the un-just.

Let me just say that someday there will be a resurrection not for the just but the un-just. The eternal destiny of men and women is not just heaven. I would relish the opportunity to have a discussion with anyone who doubts eternity.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 says; ¹¹ *He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.* Beginning to end, forever, eternity. So by instinct we fully understand that this world is not all that there is. This world is merely a preparation of a life to come. This world is not our home whether just or un-just.

But back to Paul's case in verse 16 where again he reminds us of his clear conscience about how he has lived and how he has treated others. He says that he has worked hard and now can bring offerings to his people. He mentions the fact that he had gone through the purification ritual to prove that he still honored the Jewish ways. Then he reminds Felix that there was not a single witness there to testify against him. He is saying that he is not ashamed of being a Christian or anything he has done in the work of God.

Christians should never be timid about or ashamed of the truth or of the evidence. If we are truly following God, the truth and evidence are our friends, not our accusers.

So, Paul has presented his case and now turns it over to Felix for a decision.

²² *And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.*

Do you see what it says there? When Felix having more perfect knowledge of the way. This means that he had, on some level, an understanding of Christianity. He also avoids making a decision in the case. He did this under the pretense of waiting for more evidence through the Roman commander in Jerusalem. Felix clearly had enough evidence to make a decision in Paul's favor but wanted to hear from the commander even though he had a letter from him saying he found no fault in Paul.

So now we have to wait for the commander to get to Caesarea from Jerusalem.

²³ And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.

So he tells the guard to take Paul back to his cell. However, knowing Paul's innocence, he granted Paul generous liberty even while he was held in custody. He says it is ok to let Paul's friends and family come and visit him and care for his needs. Felix tried to walk a middle ground. He knew Paul was innocent, yet he did not want to identify himself with Paul's gospel and the Christians. So he made no decision and kept Paul in custody.

How many people out there today have enough evidence to follow Jesus and yet avoid making a decision just like Felix does here. Why do people do that, simply because they lack the courage to do so. They remain a prisoner to their sin and are kept in custody.

²⁴ And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. ²⁵ And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

So now Felix and his wife, a Jewish woman, go into the judgement hall and had Paul brought to them. We don't really know how long it has been at this point but it was several days for sure. Felix wanted his wife to hear what Paul had to say about Christianity so that she could advise him on what to do with Paul.

Anyway, Paul breaks out into a sermon about righteousness, temperance or self-control, and judgement from God that is to come. I can't think of any tougher conversations that people today don't want to hear about. In fact, churches today rarely touch on those subjects. In this case, while speaking to the people that have your life in their hands, perhaps you would want to avoid them. However, Paul being who he is, completely fearless when it comes to God, begins to speak the truth of Jesus Christ. When Felix heard the truth he got scared, so scared that he trembled, and sent Paul back to his cell. He also said that he would send for Paul again when he had more time. Why did Felix get so scared? Well, as we know, he was a man that lacked righteousness, self-control, and didn't want to be judged by anyone.

²⁶ He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.

So here was Felix's real motive for calling for Paul in the first place. After overcoming his fear from the first visit he seemed to send for Paul more often. He even communed or dined with Paul in the hopes he would get money from him in exchange for his freedom. But when that didn't happen ..

²⁷ But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

After two years of dealing with Paul's case, and not getting any money out of him, Porcius, a Jew, goes to Felix and says we need to bound this man to appease his accusers. Felix gladly does so. Now a person that everyone knows is innocent is back in bondage.

Now I would be remiss if I didn't touch on those three topics today.

Righteousness

Not one of us has any righteousness that doesn't come from God. The Bible tells us in Romans 3:23; *²³ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;* Let's be honest here, we all have sinned and at times we still do. Even as believers we fall short. Your answer to that may be that hey, nobody is perfect.

But there was one perfect man that walked this earth. Jesus Christ fulfilled the law of God in every way possible. He was a perfectly righteous man. When he died on the cross it was out of an utter act of love. Jesus took upon Himself all of the penalty, the sin, the shame that we deserve.

Because of what Jesus did on the cross there was a great exchange. He bore our un-righteousness and we gained His righteousness.

Self-Control

There are so many people out there, maybe even us from time to time, that lack self-control. People who walk around with no satisfaction in their lives. They run around trying to fill that void in their lives by drinking, committing adultery, and so on.

2 Timothy 1:7 says; ⁷ *For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.* To have a sound mind means to have self-control does it not? It can only be found in Jesus! Through Him is the only way to gain self-control in our lives.

Judgement

People today simply don't want to think about that. But how could I leave this text without speaking to you honestly about this. You see, every one of us will stand before God one day and have to give an account to Him. Romans 14:10-12 says; ¹⁰ *But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.* ¹¹ *For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.* ¹² *So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*

Do you know that some people think that when they stand before God they will call Him into question. Asking Him, "where were you when this or that was happening". Why wasn't life easier for me and why didn't I have all these things when I was a good person and did things for you. I helped the needy, I visited the sick, I did this and that.

Let me say again, there will come a day of judgment for all of us and of you have to start pointing fingers at yourself then you are toast. You cannot stand before God on that basis. You have to be able to stand before God and point to Jesus and say He is my righteousness, He bore the judgement that I deserve. I know I deserve to be judged but He bore it on Calvary. I did nothing on my own but only through Him and for Him have I labored.

Then God will say "well done my good and faithful servant". Welcome Home!

If you haven't given your life over to God then please do it today! The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 6:2; ² *(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)*

He will give you righteousness, self-control, no judgement.