

The Governor Delayed (Acts 24:24-26) Pleasant Plains 12-30-2018AM NICK ANGEL

- ***READ Acts 24:22-27*** This past Sunday night we used our time of study to trace Paul's journey from Jerusalem in **Acts 21:17** up unto the point where he stood before king Agrippa giving a defense for himself in **Acts 26**. In the course of the narrative that is recorded and detailed to us in these chapters, we find Paul again and again standing not just before his accusers but also arbitrators who very much held the fate of Paul within their hands.
- Thankfully, from the commander of the Roman guard Claudias Lysias, to Felix, to Festus, all the way through to king Agrippa...Paul seems to have been well cared for aside from a scourging that was to take place at the end of **Acts 22**. In fact, the Claudias Lysias even saved Paul from bodily harm numerous times. Additionally, we just read a moment ago, that Felix was even willing to keep Paul under what we might call "soft" custody by allowing his friends to come and minister to him while under Felix's custody. Of course being kept under the custody of authorities isn't an ideal situation, but Paul had certainly been in even more difficult spots than this.
- What's more, Paul must have certainly been thrilled to have the opportunities even in these circumstances to stand before the number of audiences he was able to and have opportunities to share share the Gospel and his testimony that he experienced. We noted last Sunday night that Paul's message to Agrippa was nearly received through faith and obedience, but sadly Agrippa's reply to Paul was only, *"In short time you will persuade me to become a Christian."* (**Acts 26:28**) Just as the song we sing states, almost Agrippa was almost persuaded to becoming a Christian, but what of Felix? As we will look at his in just a moment, Paul's message to Felix was similar to that of Agrippa, and unfortunately Felix's response to Paul left him in the same boat as Agrippa. Unfortunately in this instance, the Governor delayed a positive response to the Gospel, and there are some valuable lessons that we will consider as we conclude our time of study here in just a few minutes. Before we get there through, I would like for us to take a closer look at Paul's standing before Felix and what took place during this face to face meeting between the Apostle and the Governor of Caesarea.

I. Paul Before Felix

A. Paul's testimony and Felix's difficult position gave Paul a chance.

1. Much like what we saw with Paul's defense before Agrippa, Paul opens his defense by stating that he was happy to be able to make his defense before a Felix because he was a person who had for many years been a judge to the nation of Israel and the Jewish people. This was key to Paul's defense before Felix because, as we see in **v.22**, Felix was a man who had *"a more exact knowledge about the Way."*
2. By the time Acts 24 is taking place Felix, a former slave, would've been governing Judea for around 6 years. Having been in this area for such a length of time, he more than likely had become familiar with Judaism and the rise of Christianity. Additionally, Felix's wife Drusilla was a Jewish woman who certainly would've been familiar with the Jewish law and its foretelling of the coming Messiah. Through Paul sharing his testimony and Felix's knowledge of the law, Felix at the very least must have been intrigued enough to be willing to give Paul more opportunities to speak with him about the faith. This seems to be what we see taking place in **v.25**.
3. However, we must also make note of the extremely difficult position in which Felix found himself. History tells us that his rule over Judea had been anything but smooth and problem free. Thus what we have is Felix truly between a rock and a hard place in regards to what he is going to do in this case. Notice how the Jews in the beginning of the chapter sought to butter of Felix through flattery and straight-up lies. *"Since we have through you attain much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation, we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness."* (**Acts 24:2,3**)

4. The Jews were anything but thankful for the Roman rule over their nation. They simply wanted a ruling in their favor, and Felix had to strongly consider this in his thoughts because the last thing he wanted was another uprising over any sort of ruling in Paul's favor. He very much knew this was a religious disagreement and debate, and he wanted nothing to do with causing more problems among his subjects. Further, Paul was a Roman citizen with certain rights that dare not be violated or else. Felix had to balance between keeping the Jews happy and not being called to the carpet for mistreatment of a Roman citizen. Thus what we seem him doing is simply keeping Paul around, and in doing so Paul was given many opportunities to do what he was best at doing...teaching about Jesus and the kingdom.

B. Paul gave Felix all necessary information in order to believe.

1. The point has been made before concerning individuals like Aquila and Priscilla, Silas, Timothy, and others that if you spent much time at all around the Apostle Paul then you would no doubt have every opportunity to have a strong foundation of faith through the teachings you would've heard from him. Likewise, if Felix was going to continually have Paul stand before him, then you best believe that Paul was going to be busy telling him exactly what he needed to hear in order to have a saving faith established in Jesus as the Christ.
2. This is precisely what I believe we see here in **Acts 24:24,25**. Paul was brought into the presence of Felix and his wife Drusilla, again a Jewish woman, and he was given opportunity to speak to them about faith in Jesus Christ. I find it quite interesting that Paul's delivery of the Gospel is described as him speaking primarily about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come. While not described in this way in any other New Testament text, this explanation of the Gospel of Jesus aligns very well with our past discussions on the Gospel and faith.
3. Consider the need for Jesus and the Gospel. The whole reason Jesus had to leave heaven and come to earth was because men failed to be righteous and self-controlled before God. As Paul states in **Romans 3:9,10**, "*What then? Are we (Jews) better than they (Gentiles)? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE."* There was a great need for redemption through Jesus because there is going to come a day when judgment would be rendered and those who are found in sin would be eternally condemned. Paul was sure to present Felix with the problem and the solution, and it was then in Felix's hands as to what he would do with this needed information.

C. Unfortunately, Felix delayed any commitment to God.

1. This isn't to say that Felix had no reaction to what was told to him by Paul. In fact, the text is abundantly clear that Felix was well aware of the implications of what Paul was saying. Notice that **Acts 24:25** states that upon hearing the teachings of Paul, "*Felix became frightened.*" Now, why would Felix become frightened? I am convinced that this fearful response of Felix was a direct result of Felix's prior knowledge of the Way and the additional information and teaching that was presented to him by Paul. Felix must have been fearful of the coming judgement based upon his own failures in regard to righteousness and self-control.
2. And yet...we don't see Felix acting upon this fear in a beneficial way. Instead, we see him sending Paul away at that time and then continually calling him back to converse. Unfortunately, we don't see Luke ever recording that Felix ever acted upon his fear in obedience to the Gospel message. What we do know is that Felix also had another reason for keeping Paul around, and that had to do with his hope that Paul would pay him some money in order to buy his freedom. (**Acts 24:26**) This would've been the perfect situation for Felix, but that money never came, and after Paul had spent two years under the care of Felix, the governor was replaced by Porcius Festus. Where we might see outgoing Presidents issuing pardons for those imprisoned, we see the opposite in this case where Felix keeps Paul in prison as a favor to the Jews which is why Paul eventually finds himself before Agrippa.

II. Important Lessons

A. Some people will take longer to teach than others.

1. What we have in this text is an example of sharing the Gospel that is quite different than what we see throughout the majority of the rest of the New Testament narrative. What I mean by this is that we don't see often this type of continued consideration and conversation about the Gospel message. I would argue that most of the delivering of the Gospel message throughout the book of Acts was a one time try with the hearer or hearers either receiving in obedience or rejecting the message. Consider these examples:
 - a) In **Acts 2** we see the Apostle Peter standing before the gathered crowd of Jews on the day of Pentecost. In response to this single presentation of the Gospel we find 3,000 Jews repenting and being baptized into Christ. (**Acts 2:41**)
 - b) Peter's second message that was preached at the end of **Acts 3** leads to another large number of people believing and be added to the number of the disciples. (**Acts 4:4**)
 - c) Philip preached Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch only once while traveling down the road with him, and the eunuch responds by being baptized on his journey. (**Acts 8:26-39**)
 - d) Peter's first visit to the household of Cornelius results in his entire household being baptized into Christ upon their hearing of the Gospel. (**Acts 10:34-48**)
 - e) At the synagogue on the Sabbath in Pisidian Antioch we find Paul standing up and delivering the truth of the Gospel just once to those gathered, and it resulted in "*many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes*" following after Paul in the grace of God. (**Acts 13:13-42**)
2. These examples, and many more, all show a one time sharing of the Gospel, but what we have here in **Acts 24** is Paul having continued opportunities to reason with Felix concerning the truth of the Gospel. What we need to take away is the fact that we shouldn't give up on people just because they don't accept the Gospel from the first sharing of it. It might be that they are simply having issues reconciling what they already believed with what they have now heard. Maybe they have some aspects of their lives that will need to be decided upon before they make a commitment to God.
3. Felix not only had to wrestle with this newfound truth and its affect upon him, but he also had to weight what his decision to obey the Gospel would mean to him and the position he was in. Remember, he was in a position of leadership within the Roman empire, and his obedience would presumably mean Paul would be set free. This would likely spell major trouble for him in regards to the Jews reaction. While we don't see him making the choice to obey, what we do see is a real example of someone counting the cost of discipleship (**Luke 14:28-33**) and seemingly not seeing the cost as worth it in his life.

B. An emotional response is good, but not all that is needed for faith to be established.

1. Additionally, it is good to point out from this text that Felix's initial response of fear to the message presented wasn't enough for a full measure of faith to be established within himself. Felix seems to have had a legitimate emotional response to the information concerning faith in Christ that was given to him. However, this emotional response wasn't enough for Felix to become a disciple of Christ. What this tells us is that a transformative and saving faith demands more than just an emotional response.
2. Of course, this should be something that sounds extremely familiar to us. Considering the writings of James, we read in **James 2:19,20**, "*You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudders But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?*" James's point is well seen: knowledge producing an emotional response is only worth something if it is further built upon with proper action.

3. In the case of Felix, he had been given knowledge that prompted a strong emotional response of fear (much like the demons), but he failed to build upon that emotional response by repenting and committing his life to Jesus as a disciple. Knowledge=check. Emotional response=check. However, he failed to act upon those two aspects of faith and it led him to his continued delaying of obedience to the Gospel. If we are not careful, Felix's failure to achieve true faith can be our own failures if we are not willing to humble ourselves to act upon acquired knowledge and any emotional response it might lead us to. Whether this be at the initial point of obedience to the Gospel or in our lives as disciples...our failure to show actions of faith will only hurt us as it seems to have hurt Felix in his spiritual journey.

C. We play a dangerous game when we take the future for granted.

1. While it might be that someone initially rejects obedience to the Gospel...the reality is that there have been many people who later on made the good decision to become obedient. While it is very true that the Lord is patient towards us and doesn't want any to perish (**II Peter 3:9**), the reality is that those who have opportunity to obey the Gospel and yet deny are playing a dangerous game because the only guaranteed chance to do the right thing is the opportunities we have in that present moment. In Felix's mind, he might have thought that he would later on make the decision to obey the Gospel, but we don't ever see that happening.
2. Additionally, we must recognize that we are not every guaranteed future opportunities in life to do anything let alone make the most important decision in life of becoming obedient to Christ. If we are presented with the opportunity to do the right thing in being obedient to the Gospel or being obedient to God in another way then we would do well to take care of that thing right then because we have no guarantee of future opportunity or opportunities. This principle is well noted in Scripture particularly in the parable of the rich fool from **Luke 12:16-21** and what is written by James in **James 4:13-17**.
 - a) In **Luke 12:16-21**, we read of a man who had many great possessions and envisioned his future of abounding even more in those many possessions. He believed that he would simply build greater barns, continue to prosper, and then in the future take it easy and relax. However, he was called a fool by God because he took the future for granted.
 - b) In **James 4:13-17**, we read the admonition of James that we always remember the fragile nature of life that we could be here today and gone tomorrow. *"You are jut a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away."* Our mindset ought to be that where we remember God's control over all things and not our own. If we believe we are guaranteed anything then that type of arrogance and boasting is of the devil and evil. Instead, we ought to be willing to do the right thing here and now instead of waiting for a future opportunity that very well might never happen.

Felix had two full years to make the decision that I believe he knew that he needed to make. He was truly without any excuse. Any and every question he might possibly need answered was but a call away in the Apostle Paul. His heart was soft enough to be emotionally touched by what he had heard. And yet...he continually delayed to the point that we will never know this side of eternity whether or not he made the good confession of Jesus. While we might shake our heads at Felix's decision, we need to recognize that we can be just as guilty of delaying in doing what we know we ought to do in regards to our faith. Whether it is putting on Christ or being more conformed to His character, may we not delay in doing what we know we ought to do. Yes, God is patient, but we are only playing with fire when we delay. May God bless us to always be ready to act upon any truth that we find within God's Word, and may our obedience give great honor and glory to His name.