

Acts 24

Paul's protectors delivered him safely into the hands of Felix along with a letter from Lysias the chief captain. Since Lysias had directed that Paul's accusers lay their charges against Paul before Felix and Felix, by inquiry of Paul had learned that he being from Cilicia (which was of his jurisdiction), Felix told Paul he would hear him fully when his accusers came down and he commanded that Paul be kept in Herod's palace (23:33-35).

So, Paul was to stand before Felix. This man was the Roman Procurator over several provinces and once had been a slave. He had, however, been brought up in Caesar's court and both he and his brother Pallas found favor with the Emperor's wife who gave them their freedom and put them in positions of power. Felix was despised by the Jews and a historian of his age spoke of his cruelty and wrote he "ruled with the heart of a slave". Two years after he met Paul he was recalled to Rome because of his subjects' complaints and from there he was banished to exile, barely escaping execution. His wife was Jewish and had formerly been the wife of a minor king but Felix had wooed her away from him and married her.

After five days Paul's accusers came to Caesarea. These included Ananias the high priest, certain of the elders and a hired orator (lawyer) named Tertullus (24:1). Tertullus began with hypocritical flattery of Felix, then moved on to the charges Jews lodged against Paul. Basically they leveled three charges; sedition, heresy and treason (24:2-9). All the Jews who came with him and Ananias joined in with their clamor that the charges were true. We would have expected nothing otherwise from them.

When the Jews rested their case against Paul, Felix beckoned to him that he could begin his own defense. One by one Paul dismissed the charges lodged against him. Paul said "...Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I cheerfully make my defense; seeing that thou canst take knowledge that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship at Jerusalem: and neither in the temple did they find me disputing with any man or stirring up a crowd, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city. Neither can they prove to thee the things whereof they now accuse me." (24:10-13).

While Paul denied their charges of heresy, he did acknowledge that "after the Way which they call a sect, so serve I the God of our fathers,

believing all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets..." (24:14-15). In substance Paul said that what he practiced and taught was simply what the law and the prophets had pointed toward, that he was not guilty of heresy but was in perfect harmony with the law.

The religious issue of heresy was outside Felix's pale of jurisdiction. Jews were allowed to worship God without restriction and religious dissension among them was nothing new. There was the age-old controversy between Pharisee and Saducee; as well as the other sects among them. It would have been very difficult to rule in matters of heresy for which was the heretic, the Saducee? The Pharisee? Regarding their charge of sedition and treason, Felix already had the appraisal of the chief captain who had written him "whom I found to be accused about questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds" (23:29). Felix knew Tertullus' charges of sedition and treason were necessary to get a Roman ruling against Paul. He also knew the charges were subterfuge, a cloak to conceal the real animosity Jews had against Paul.

So Felix deferred decision. Why? He could have ruled then and there, but he didn't. He was familiar with the fanaticism of the Jews. He knew the real foundation of their hatred against Paul was, as the chief captain wrote "questions of their law". He knew that any Roman ruler in Judaea was always sitting on a "keg of dynamite". The key to why he probably kept Paul in bonds was because of a casual statement Paul made in his defense, which statement made Felix's ears pricked up and arrested his attention: MONEY. Paul had said "after some years I came to bring alms to my nation" (24:17). Felix hoped Paul would give him money in return for his freedom.

Perhaps it was just a spur of the moment matter, "but after certain days, Felix came with Drusilla, his wife, who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned of righteousness, and self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was terrified, and answered, Go thy way for this time; and when I have a convenient season, I will call thee unto me." (24:24-25).

One must appreciate Paul for the sermon he preached to Felix. Some of Paul's sermons are given in greater detail while others are abbreviated (See Acts 13, 17 for examples). Paul's sermon before Felix is reduced to three main points: Righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come. What did Paul speak of when he spoke of these items?

When Paul reasoned of righteousness, he was speaking not only to Felix but also Drusilla, who was Jewish. Paul wrote Romans that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe, Jew or Greek. He told them that in the gospel is revealed a "righteousness from God from faith unto faith, for it is written, the righteous shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:16f). He told Romans that apart from the law a righteousness of God had been manifested, yet that righteousness had been witnessed by the law and the prophets, i.e. they had told of the coming of that righteousness, a way by which man could be right with God (Rom. 3:21). He told Romans that Jews had a zeal for God but not according to knowledge "for, being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10;2). He told the Galatians that by the works of the law no flesh could be justified (made righteous) (Gal. 2:16). He told Romans that Christ was the end of the law unto righteousness to every who believed (Rm. 10:4). He did not mean by this that Christ had brought an end to the law (although that was true, Eph. 2:15-17; Col. 2:14). What he meant was that men can find in Christ--righteousness, justification, what the law would have pronounced upon them had they kept the law perfectly, which none did. He told the Corinthians that "Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf that we might be come the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). To sum it up, when Paul reasoned of righteousness, he told Felix and Drusilla that the law had been removed and what they must do to be saved.

Next Paul reasoned of self control. He would have told this adulterous couple that men must control their tongues, their bodies, their thoughts. He would have spelled out to them, as he did to the Corinthians and Galatians that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21). When Paul reasoned of temperance (self-control), he was speaking to one of the most intemperate of men. What Felix wanted, he took. His was a life is dissipation.

Finally, Paul reasoned of the "judgment to come"; the great day in which Felix would stand at God's judgment bar accounting for the deeds he had done in his body. He told him that even though he should die, he would not escape that judgment for Christ said, "The hour cometh in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice and come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life and that that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment" (Jn. 5:28). He told him that he had a soul which would live some where eternally and that if rejected as fit for heaven, would be cast into a lake of fire. He would have reminded him of Jesus' words "What shall a man be profited if he should gain the whole

world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mt 16:26).

Felix was terrified. It is to his credit that he had not completely seared his conscience from the accusative voice which must have thundered in his ears. It is to his credit that his anger was not so stirred by Paul's words that he called for the executioner to haul him away. He could have done that.

Still, the story ends on a sad note. "Go thy way for this time", Felix said. "When I have a convenient season I will call thee unto me" (24:25). That time never came because there never is a convenient season to cease from sin.

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