

Tonight Acts 24. So let's find that. We'll have to do this one to keep on schedule. So this is our communion night. It's also the last Wednesday night of the year. We have been in this book since October of 2017. So God bless you that have made it all the way through. I know some of you have and hope you'll see it out to the end. I know we've learned a lot about God's will for the church and His people, the birth of the church, the work of the Holy Spirit.

Tonight we join Paul, in chapter 24, in Caesarea where Paul is under arrest. This part of the narrative began back in chapter 21:18 where Paul was returning from his third of three missionary journeys that took the better part of a decade. And he was headed for Jerusalem with many pastors in tow from various Gentile churches throughout Europe and Asia, and they were carrying money from these churches for the poor in Jerusalem. It was Paul's way of reaching out to the Jewish believers who were a little uptight about Gentiles and grace. So, a little uptight might be an understatement. Paul, all along the way, had been warned that there was trouble waiting for him there in Jerusalem. He was determined to go no matter what anyone said - prophet or not. He really wanted to share the gospel of Jesus with the Jews, with his people that he loved. He had longed to do that for years, though God had sent him to the Gentiles.

And we looked at his arrival there, for several weeks, beginning in chapter 21, where he met with the body in Jerusalem who were glad to see him. He met with James and the elders, who were cordial, not so excited. Paul told them all that the Lord had done with the Gentile churches that he had been out ministering for so many years. The reception was, "Well, praise the Lord," and then they said, "Paul, you've got a bad reputation here. You're a guy that is known for turning people away from the law, the practices of the law and talking more about grace than law. So we're zealous here for the Lord as well." But he literally didn't say the Lord; he said, "We're zealous for the law." They suggested to Paul that he sponsor four young men who were making a commitment of a Nazirite vow during the Pentecost celebration. Paul took the cost on, the offerings on, their wages on. He compromised, I think, to give a token to the church that he still loved the law, although he loved Jesus and was free from the law; but he wanted to just make peace. It seemed to work out pretty good for seven days.

But at the end of the seventh day, there were some men in town from Ephesus - where Paul had spent the last three years - and they accused Paul of bringing a Gentile into the inner courts of the Temple, which was taboo. A mini-riot broke out. These guys were able to stir up the zealots in town for the feast day. They grabbed Paul. They dragged him to what would seem, in chapter 21, to be certain death had not the Roman authorities stepped in to save him. They got him out from the crowds, put him on the steps of the Antonia Fortress (it was on the corner of the Temple Mount area), where the Roman soldiers were stationed in case there was trouble; and there was always trouble there. And Paul asked could he address the crowd, and the commander (the centurion) said, "Okay, you can speak if you like" (the captain did). And Paul got his wish to finally be able to speak; this was his dream - preach to Jerusalem. And he started off by recounting his conversion, God's calling. He went through the things that the Lord had done for him. Everyone was interested and listening, and then he got to the part where his commission was. So Paul said, "The Lord told me to go far away from here to the Gentiles." And, man, that's the only word that they didn't want to hear. And when the word "Gentiles" came out, the riot renewed, if you will.

Paul was taken into protective custody and telling the Roman authorities he was a Roman citizen because this guy was about to scourge him to get to the bottom of the problem. The next day, Claudius Lysias, who was the captain, called Paul in along with the Sanhedrin, these religious leaders for the Jews; put them together, wanted to find out what was going on. And Paul realized that this wasn't going to go well. But he also, having been a part of this group, understood half of those people were Sadducees - they didn't believe in resurrection at all. Half were Pharisees, and they did - believed in heaven and angels. And so he said, "I guess I'm on trial for being a Pharisee," and half the room was already his now. And there was another big stink, and they had to again pull Paul away from that, and they kept him locked up. They really didn't know what to do with him.

So, while Paul was in protective custody, his little nephew found out that there was a plan underway by forty men to lie in wait to get Paul back out to a meeting somewhere, and they would kill him. In fact, they swore they wouldn't eat until he was dead. The little boy finds out about it. I love the way the Lord protects. He comes and tells Paul. Paul sends him to the captain. The captain, real kind to the boy, finds out what's going on and decides, "I don't want to keep Paul here. He's in danger. I'm going to send him to Caesarea, the Roman capital of the province, send him to Felix." (He's the guy that is in charge there.) "And just have him know

exactly what is going on." And so he writes him a letter (towards the end of chapter 23), explains what he knows, and then he kind of just hands off the ball, hands off Paul to this bigger leader, more powerful man, governor. And he's now to appear before Felix, which is the story (and that's why we're doing the whole chapter - it's just one story) in chapter 24.

So tonight Paul before Felix, and I guess we should probably say this is Felix before Paul because by the time this is all said and done, it is Paul in charge - like he is most of the time, wherever he's at. Sinking ship, he's in charge, givin' orders. In prison, he's preachin' to kings. Felix might hold the honor in the New Testament of being the guy who wasted more of the opportunity than anyone else to hear from the Lord. His name in history is Antonius Felix. He was the governor of Judea from 52-60 A.D. He was following in the infamous line of the Pilates. He got his job through his brother Pallas' good friendship with Caesar Augustus. He had the distinction, Felix did, of being the only slave in the Roman Empire that rose to the level of being a king. And so you would think that would have humbled him; it did just the opposite. He went around trying to get even for how he was treated as a kid. He was ruthless, he was cruel, he was wicked. In 60 A.D. the Sicarii, in that part of the country, were rebelling and rioting, and Felix brought the army in and just slaughtered lots of folks (he was just horrible) to quell the riot. Because of his violence and his brutality, they called him to Rome, and he disappeared; he was done. The same year, by the way, his wife went to Pompeii, shopping, and died in the eruption of Vesuvius. So this is the family, now, that is going to be responsible for Paul; Paul, who has been moved around and kept in different places, and now he finds himself here. So tonight we go with Paul to jail. He's loving Jesus, he's trying to serve the Lord. He's going to go stand before a man who is indecisive and who procrastinates, who's a coward and who refuses what God offers to him. I think that gets us up to date.

Verse 31 of the previous chapter says this, "Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks. When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. And when the governor had read it, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that he was from Cilicia, he said, 'I will hear you when your accusers also have come.' And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium," 65 miles or so away from Jerusalem.

"Now after five days," verse 1 of chapter 24, "Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator named Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul. And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: 'Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us.' " So Paul gets delivered. He is five days in hold while the accusers travel the 65 miles from Jerusalem to continue their pressing of their case against Paul; they just hate him because of his lifestyle, because of his commitment. Ananias is the same Ananias that you know from the gospels. He is probably 80 years old at this time. I think as an 80-year-old guy to make a 65-mile trip, you have to have a lot of hatred in your heart. He brings his elders with him. He brings a high-priced attorney. They descend upon the court in Caesarea like a flock of vultures. This attorney, Tertullus, was apparently very good at navigating the Roman court system for the Sanhedrin. History tells us he spoke fluent Latin. He was known for being ruthless. He represented the interests of these very wicked religious men for a high price. I want you to notice, beginning in verse 2, what this lawyer does. He begins by trying to capture the goodwill of the judge by compliments of flattery. If you look at history, there's nothing good you could say about Felix. So the best thing you can do is generalize broadly. Right? So he kind of butters him up. He said, "We've had great peace and prosperity by your foresight." In actuality, Felix had done nothing. There was no peace, except by force. There were no reforms. He pursued every perversion he could get his hands on, according to Tacitus who was a 1st century historian. He'd fit right into our political scene today. Not a good guy. But history tells us that even Felix would eventually kill the high priest, Jonathan, who he hated with a vengeance. Josephus tells us that. For now, he stands before him as this 1st century dream team. He's giving lawyers a bad name. And I suspect - I don't know about you, I always like to put myself in the middle of what I'm reading - that all of the Sanhedrin members had to look at their shoes while they listened to this guy talk, or they would have started laughing; it was as insincere as possible. And to throw it on even thicker, he says, in verse 4, "Just give us a few minutes of your time. We don't want to be tedious to you. What a courtesy you've extended to us. Thank you for your courtesy. Thank you for your willingness."

And then they turn to just fry an innocent man because that's why they're there. The charges are no more truthful than they were before. They weren't any more

truthful than his lying opening statement. He accuses him on three different grounds: personal, political and religious grounds.

Verse 5, " 'For we have found this man' " (speaking of Paul) " 'a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law. But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took him out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him.' And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so." The word "plague" means nuisance, bother, pest. Their accusation of Paul: "Paul, everywhere he goes, he causes riots amongst the Jews around the world; he's an insurrectionist everywhere he goes." Now you should understand that, at least from a 1st century Roman standpoint, if you're an insurrectionist, you're one step really close to dead because the Romans would put up with a lot, but they wouldn't put up about that at all. If you were causing trouble in the government or standing against Caesar's rulership, there was nothing they disliked more than rebels or troublemakers, especially among captive Jewish people. For that reason, they dealt with sedition very quickly and very decisively. So Tertullus charged that Paul was actively working to overthrow the government of Rome. He's very vague, he's very inflammatory. What he says is untrue, without support. But those are frightening accusations. Don't think for a minute, as you read this, that Paul goes, "Well, that's not true." No, no. It would chill you to the bone. This is serious business. "All over the world?" In reality, it seems to me that what we've read in the book of Acts, riots did often follow Paul's preaching, but they weren't started by Paul. They were almost always started by religious folks who hated what Paul was teaching, who were against Jesus Christ and the gospel. These zealots, for years, followed Paul from town to town with only one interest - let's make sure that we stir up violence and get him moving. And most of Paul's moving, at least the first couple years - first couple of trips, was because there were crowds wanting to kill him. It wasn't his doing. If you preach and people go nuts, it's really not your fault, and it certainly wasn't Paul's. So Tertullus isn't here, though, to seek justice or truth; he's here to win a court case at any cost. Right? So he continues lying through his teeth as he had done when he had made his opening statement, if you like. He said, "He is a ringleader among those of the Nazarene sect." The word "Nazarene" means to separate or to be separate. The term for "ringleader of the sect," the word "sect" is the word for heresy. So he is a leader of the heresy of those who have separated themselves, a contemptible early title for Christians

used by Tertullus here. And it seems like he used it in such a way that it must have been well enough understood that he didn't explain it to Felix. Like Felix went, "Yeah, I know who they are," or, "I've heard about them." It didn't seem like this was some kind of a hidden deal. It came out of this whole idea that Jesus was from Nazareth, which was kind of a hick town. And so, remember Nathanael (in John 1:46), "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" They took that and used it against the church, if you will.

So Paul is standing before this Roman governor with this high-priced hireling on the other side. "He's a dissenter among all the Jews, and he's a ringleader of the heresy of those who have separated themselves." They accused Paul of being a political activist and a religious heretic who is now in charge of a new religious movement to overthrow Rome. Eventually, this persuasion led to the widespread persecution of the saints, by the Romans, for centuries. It won't be long that we will read of one of the Caesars throwing all of the Jews out of Rome, going against religious folks, period, forbidding that they could even live in town. But, for now, the religious factioning and bitterness was still the case against Paul. By the way, it's still the number one reason for terrorism in the world - is religious persuasion.

Finally he said, in verse 6, "Okay, he's a political activist, he's a sect leader of a worldwide, weird religion, a heretic religion, and thirdly" (what they had started with) "yeah, he tried to profane our temple, and we caught him. And we were just going to deal with him, but your commander, with great violence, took him from us." Not exactly the story I remember reading. It's an untrue rumor, first of all. Second of all, they didn't take him to judge him; they took him to kill him. And this guy, with great violence, came to save his life. Right? Rome had given the nation of Israel, if you read history, a lot of leeway to be able to practice their self-imposed religious ways and even letting them deal with religious lawbreakers on their own. But this story just doesn't hold water. "He took him from us violently." Verse 8, the only thing that's true, "he commanded his accusers to come here." So, "We're asking you to check this out, and I think you're going to see that we're tellin' the truth, and he's not," and his little party of head shakers stood there head-shaking, and these arrogant liars, standing in darkness, were trying to accuse an innocent man.

I don't know if it's smart to start to go after a Roman leader like the fellow, Lysias, in Jerusalem in front of the governor. I don't know if that's a smart move or not. Lying and telling this story isn't smart because you remember (from chapter 23)

that he's got a letter from the ruler there to tell him what actually happened. So he has the truth from his own guy, and now he's got this lawyer who's not exactly telling the truth. Meanwhile, behind Tertullus stand all these bobbing heads. Right? The elders and Ananias, who came to perjure themselves in the name of serving their God. Religious people can certainly be some of the most unethical people in the world. Zeal without knowledge (Romans 10:2). Just read about what supposed Christians did during the time of the Crusades or what Hitler did in the call for the extermination of the Jews, claiming at the same time to be a believer. By the way, believers in Israel will not call themselves Christians because of the identification with their treatment that they got from Hitler. So these are pretty horrible guys. They are demon-driven charlatans. They stand to defend one cubic inch of their religion. But they don't have much to say; they make stuff up, they point their fingers, and they've got a bunch of guys doing this (Pastor Jack bobs his head up and down like someone acknowledging agreement), but they've got no evidence, they've got no testimony, they have no witnesses, have no proof. They're just mad, and they've been mad for a long time.

Now Felix is a wicked guy, but Felix is not a stupid guy, and he's seen right through this bunch. It's maybe "it takes one to know one," and he did. But he wasn't going to be taken in by these guys. So that's their case that's now been presented before Felix.

In verse 10 we read, "Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: 'Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself.' " Paul has no high-priced lawyer. Paul has no legion of supporters. I think I mentioned to you the animosity was enough in Israel you would think the church might have come down from Jerusalem and stood on his side of the courtroom, wearing "Free Paul" shirts or something. There was nobody there. He was alone. He'd have to answer for himself. But the good news is, as a godly man, he had far better representation than these phonies because Paul would be represented by the Holy Spirit, the "*parakaleo*," the One that comes in that hour to tell you what you should say (Luke 12:12), the One he could rely on. Paul also begins with a muted kind of compliment, although he's not trying to butter Felix up. What he does say to Felix is that he's glad it's him, "You've been around the Jews for a lot of years. You understand how things work. You need experience to deal with this nation. You know what the religious zealots are all about, in their ways. And so I'm glad it's you." Felix had ruled in Judea for five years. He had been an assistant, if you will, to the ruler in

Samaria for four more. He was really good at Jewish culture, which was complicated and still is. I think it requires experience to understand it. And Paul saw it as a blessing that it was this guy and nobody else. That's all he's saying. Right? "I'm glad it's you and nobody else."

"So let me tell you what happened," verse 11, where he says this, " 'Because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship.' " "As far as being a political organizer, who's had the time? I'm a visitor here in town. I got here twelve days ago. Seven days I spent with four guys at the suggestion of James and the Jerusalem church" (chapter 21 of Acts) "in a vow of commitment. For the last five days, I've been here in prison. That certainly doesn't give me much time to organize a new movement. And if you want to check into me, for the last fifteen years I've been living in Cilicia and Pamphylia and in Asia and in Macedonia and Achaia and in Greece and Ephesus. I've been all over the place but nowhere near this place - hundreds of miles away. So this is nonsense." And he doesn't carry on much. He said, "I haven't been here but twelve days ago, and you can certainly find that out."

Verse 12, " 'And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.' " "If you will, as to the other charges, I just flatly deny them. No riot, no workin' up the crowd, no problem in the synagogue, no problem in the temple, no problem in the city. They're making charges without proof. Where are their witnesses?" And Rome was good in that regard - as far as their judicial system, they tended to run them fairly straightforward. Like I said, I wonder where James and the church were, that no one would speak up for Paul and tell them, "Hey, this is what he said, and here's what he did, and he's a faithful guy, and he hasn't broken any laws."

Second of all, as far as being a ringleader of the heresy group, verse 14, " 'But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call' " (heresy) " 'a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.' " "Look, I'm hardly in a cult." That's what he says. "I confess that I am a Way follower." It was a title that you find a few times in the Bible for the believers who would follow Jesus, who was the Way. But Paul tied that belief system intricately with that and the Old Testament beliefs of the Jews - that there's one God, and He

promised a Savior; and there's no disconnect between the Old Testament and the New Testament experience. So, to Paul, Christianity wasn't contrary to the Law; it was the fulfillment of the Law. It wasn't contrary to the Prophets; it was the fulfillment of the Prophets. It was the extension of what God had begun. They called it a sect, they called it heresy. Paul said, "I believe everything that's written in the Scriptures," and he almost looked at the guy and said, "I think they believe that, too. And here I am on trial for believing God's Word and in the hope that I have of the resurrection from the dead." That, again, puts half of them on his side. "I believe in the Law, I believe in the Prophets, I believe in the writings of Moses regarding the Messiah. I believe that He was supposed to be born in Bethlehem. I believe He was born to a virgin. I believe He was going to suffer and die. The third day, I believe He was going to ascend. And He's coming again. I believe it all."

Now you should understand that the scribes and the Pharisees, of which most of these people were a part, interpreted the Bible any way they wanted. They didn't go to it for truth. They used it to sell their truth. Have you ever.....you've probably heard a lot of people saying, "Just live your truth." It's like a catchphrase today. It's an idiotic idea because there's only one truth. It's God's truth. So live His truth. If your truth ain't His truth, you ain't got truth. That's my new slogan. I'm puttin' it on a shirt. (Laughing) I don't know if it'll fit, but I like it already. "Search the Scriptures," Jesus says (John 5:39). "You think in them you have life, but those are they which testify of Me." Jesus shows up in Luke 24 with the man and his wife on the way to Emmaus, disappointed, and you read in Luke 24:27, when He pulled up next to them, "He began at Moses and He went through the Prophets, and He expounded to them everything in the Scriptures concerning Himself." That's all that he was interested in, that they know Him. To deny Jesus is to deny the Scriptures.

So Paul believed it all. "I am far from being a cultist," he says. "I'm a believer in this Bible that we believe in together." And he says, in verse 15, "I have a hope in God that there's a resurrection of the just and of the unjust. There's a judgment coming, and I want to be ready for it." Job wrote in chapter 19:26, "And after my skin is destroyed," (a real graphic way of putting it) "this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God." Abraham believed the same thing, that God could raise even the dead. So Paul said, "I'm hardly a cultist. We're not out there on our own, makin' stuff up. We are standing fast on the things we've always known as Jews. This is our faith, this is our hope, this is what God has given to us." And I doubt that

anyone that was a Sadducee there at that point would have said a word about the resurrection and all that Paul was mentioning.

He says, in verse 16, " 'This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.' " Paul, knowing that one day he had to give an account to the Lord, lived with the realization every day that there was a higher court, that one day he'd have to appear in front of the Lord. And so he lived with an eye on eternity. He wanted to serve God and men honestly. He wasn't like these religious liars over here, makin' stuff up as he goes. He literally calls on his conscience to say, "Look, I'm trying to live the life that would please the Lord. Herein is what I'm striving for."

Finally, as far as profaning the temple, verse 17, " 'Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me.' " ("They should be here, where are they?!") " 'Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, "Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day." ' " "As far as profaning the temple, I just didn't do it. I came here to bring money, gifts, offerings to the poor in Jerusalem. I sponsored four guys who had made a vow. By the way, where are those accusers from Ephesus? They should be here." It was a great offense in Roman law to accuse and then withdraw your testimony or to not have support for what you have accused someone of. Look at Jesus' trial. They spent all night trying to bring forth false witnesses. They couldn't even get two of them to agree, and so they set that aside, and they began to try other things to get him found to be guilty. It's an offense to the Roman court system. Paul said, "I want to face my accusers. Where are they? So, as far as me profaning the temple, I didn't do it. How 'bout we ask these guys that have come with the high-priced attorney? Maybe they would stand up and swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help them Caesar." Because you put yourself on the record, and you find out you're a liar (Pastor Jack makes the sound of a knife across the throat), not good. It doesn't take much. "I've done nothing as they claim," and Paul just goes, "Yeah, that's my defense. That's it. I'm done."

Verse 22, "But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of the Way, he adjourned the proceedings and said, 'When Lysias the commander

comes down, I will make a decision on your case.' So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him." Felix is now on the horns of a dilemma. He can't convict Paul because there's nothing to act upon. He sees trouble ahead from these guys if they don't and aren't satisfied because they've already made a 130-mile round trip with an 80-year-old guy to just bring some wild accusations that they can't prove. He knows the nature of the people that he's dealing with, so he punts. By punting, I mean he puts off his decision under the guise of, "I'll have to talk to the captain. I'll have to bring him down here. I'll need to ask him a couple of questions, and then I can decide." By the way, there is no record (in the biblical account) that he ever made that call, that he ever sent for the guy, that he ever asked for the guy. In fact, for the next two years, there is no movement on Paul's case. This is his trial (it was all of twenty verses), and then it's over. And for the next two years, Paul sits - waiting. Granted he's kept like a Roman citizen that hasn't been charged with anything. He's under house arrest, if you will. He's wearing a monitor. I don't know. He's got a guy at his house, watchin' him. (Laughing) But he's still not free to go as he wants or to do as he pleases, and he is frozen in time because Felix is interested in perverting justice for self-interest. God does tell us by His Spirit something very interesting here (and you don't want to miss it), and that is that Felix had a very good understanding of Christians. He was knowledgeable of the Way. Those accusing Paul, he understood where they were coming from. He concluded that Paul was innocent (in fact, that's all you'll read through this report), but that doesn't mean Paul gets off the hook. Felix knew Christians followed Jesus, that they didn't lie, they wouldn't cause riots, they were a challenge to the religious in their place of worship, that they were confronted at every place. He's a pretty smart guy because he's been in that position of overseer for a lot of years, for a decade of time. The church had a good reputation at this time with local government officials, certainly with the centurions. There wasn't much tension, really, at the time. So Felix had carefully looked into these Christians. He knew their message. He knew their lifestyle. And because of that, I think he decided about Paul just by what he had heard; he knew the difference between who he was dealing with and Paul standing before him. He had a good testimony. Probably a good testimony.

Now we read, in verse 24, "And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla," (remind you of a Disneyland movie?) "who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and

answered, 'Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.' " Paul is left under house arrest with all of the privileges of a Roman without charge. We don't read of James or his buddies coming from Jerusalem to visit. Not once. No care packages, no missionary group, no visiting of Paul, no kind words. I'm not saying it didn't happen; just telling you it's not recorded. "Sometime later" - we don't know (verse 24) what "sometime later" means - Felix and his wife now officially call Paul out with only one interest in mind, "Tell us about faith in Christ. We want to hear it from you. What does that mean? What does faith in Jesus mean?" Drusilla was a Jew. She was the youngest of four kids of Herod Agrippa. Berenice, Mariamne, Herod II (being the others), and her. Her dad had killed James in prison, had planned to kill Peter as soon as the holidays were over (before that divine jailbreak). And Herod Agrippa I, her dad, had been eaten with worms (Acts 12:21-23). Do you remember that? Because he had showed up in Caesarea, and he was dressed like Elton John, and he wanted everybody to praise him. He was glistening in the sunshine, and they called him a god, and he went, "Thank you very much. That's kind of what I am." And then he died of a stomach disease that the Bible implies the Lord had had enough of this guy. At fifteen years old (I'm just telling you history now, I'm not makin' this up as we go), Drusilla was given to the Crown Prince of Asia Minor to be a wife. However, he decided he didn't want to become circumcised and, she being Jewish, the wedding was called off. A year later, her family shipped her off to marry the inferior Prince of Syria, whom she was with when Felix (older guy, a little bit) met her at some state function. And then he sent a magician to her to tell her God wanted her to leave the Prince of Syria and come to be his wife instead. And, at 19 years old (she'd been married three years or so), she left this Prince of Syria, and she married Felix. It was what amounts to her third marriage, and she was 19. It was Felix's third marriage as well. So that's, kind of, the people we're dealing with.

So, at some point, they (he and this woman) have now come to talk to Paul about one thing - faith in Jesus. "What does that mean?" You have to believe Paul must have just gone, "Yes! This is awesome!" Because he kind of lived for this. Right? And people get saved. That's what mattered to him. I don't know what the sermon looked like. I don't know how often they met. I don't know who said what. We're not told. I wish that we had the.....I'm going to watch the video when we get to heaven. But I have no idea right now. I just can see it in my mind, you know? You just have to believe Paul was in his element here, don't you think? So he begins to "reason" with him, it says. He gives reasons for why you should believe in Christ. And to this wicked couple, who've been in and out of marriage relationships - six of

them between the two of them, and they're both in their 20's, maybe, it's an amazing thought. And notice that Felix can't seem to get enough, and everything he hears scares him. I mean, there's a pressure on him, isn't there, spiritually to act. He realizes that there's something to what Paul is saying. Paul spoke to him about, it says, "righteousness." The word "righteousness" in the Bible, by definition, just means stuff that is right with God, stuff God would approve of, that God would say "Amen" to, God's standards, His absolute, His divine ideal of sinlessness and holiness and how we fall short and how we need help. Righteousness. How can we be right before God?

He talked to him about "self-control," we are told, which is nothing more than the ability to control your fleshly desires, which is, like, impossible. God help me. God's righteousness, man's response, God's demands. I read, years ago I think, a quote that said, "Man is able to control everything in his life except himself." I think Paul was just hammering it home. Don't you think? He won the battle in court, and now he's winning the heart. So sitting and listening was a young Jewish girl without the Law and a Roman man who was very perverted, and they both saw themselves in the message. And Paul, I think, would have pointed it out time and again that you need Jesus to be clean. God can save you. That's why he's in prison. So Paul, rather than, "Oh, woe is me, I'm gettin' a bad deal here," he's just preachin'; rather than complainin', which could have easily been his outlook.

Notice he spoke to them, we are told, about "judgment," verse 25, the "judgment to come." What awaits those who don't live up to God's standards and who haven't come to Jesus for forgiveness? What does God require? What about your failure? How are you going to make all those things work out? And His provision for your judgment. He's just preachin' Jesus. And I love reading that Felix was afraid. It doesn't say Drusilla was afraid. But it does tell me something about Felix. It was getting too hot in there. And at some point, he said this to him, "Can we talk about this later? I've got a meeting. It's gettin' close to dinner. I'd like to hear some more, but not now." Really no excuse when God is speaking to your heart, man. I would just say if the Holy Spirit is heavily upon your heart, then you respond. I mean, here's a guy that's physically shaken and yet he hangs in the balance, his eternity; he hears, he knows, but he doesn't do anything about what he hears. "Felix, do you want to come to Jesus right now? Felix, you want to pray with me? Felix, would you just come over here, and let's pray together, and the Lord can save you. Let's do that right....." "Yeah, I'm pretty late....pretty late." He pushes it off. He pushes it away. He trembles, and then he cancels the

meeting. Trembling can't save you. Tears won't save you. Sorrow doesn't save you. Vowing to do better won't save you. Even a willingness to hear the gospel again sometime later won't save you. It's all delay mechanisms, isn't it? It's all just pushing it away. Faith in Jesus - confessed with the mouth, believed in the heart - that brings eternal life (Romans 10:9-10). Today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). That's where you go. It's not hard, but it needs to be now.

So Felix procrastinates. He puts off deciding for himself. And one of Satan's (I think, in the Bible) greatest ploys is keeping people from Jesus by having them sleep on it. "Ah, think about it. Just do it later." I'm amazed sometimes at seeing people come and get saved here, and I'll say, "How long have you been going to church?" and they'll go, "I've been here three years." And I always think to myself, "What am I doin' wrong? Three years? How can you sit for three years?!" "I was thinkin' about it." I always feel better, I think, "Well, it's Felix. He did that, too." Except now, three years later, at least you're coming around, and you're giving yourself to the Lord. So the Bible talks about immediately responding when God speaks; in fact, every place that you go when you read, "Today is the day" (2 Corinthians 6:2), "Don't harden your heart" (Hebrews 3:8), "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6). You'll read in Acts 3:19, "Repent, be converted, so your sins can be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of God." It's kind of like when God is acting, you respond; when God is speaking, you respond, you listen; when God is moving, you should move. Because you can get to a point where you go, "Ah, it used to get me upset, but I'm no longer upset." He was afraid now. He could have been less than afraid a year later, and he seems to have been. It is so easy to just reject, right? When God warns of the dangers of deferring a decision about Him, you should listen. You never know if you get another opportunity to be saved. I always think about those two thieves on the cross when I read stuff like this. Because here's two people that are both guilty, they're both equidistant from Jesus, they're both dying. They both hear the exact same thing. And one of them responds to that work of God's Spirit; and the other one had that, too, but didn't listen. Right? It's like two people sitting in the same row, same pew. And one comes forward and gets saved, and the other one walks out and goes, "That's the dumbest thing I ever heard in my life." Same message, same Spirit. It all comes down to what are you going to do when God speaks? The tragic time, in verse 25, is, "I want to talk to you when the time is more convenient." From our Bible record, that never happened. I would think if it happened, we probably were told. I've said to you before - narrative is where you learn by the pictures God paints. It's not

doctrinal - that's the epistles - but it is a narrative. It is a portrait of all that happened so that you might go, "Oh, I learned from that." Whatever Felix thought he could get away with, it just seems like he ended up disappearing. In his violence, in his anger, his wife killed at Vesuvius. Both of them in the same year, and they disappeared. There was no convenient time. I think if God's got you trembling, then surrender, man. He's got you cornered. Do that. While you can hear Him. Because there's a way that you can live where you won't hear anymore, and then it'll be too late.

So we read, in verse 26, "Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him. But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound." For the next two years Felix tried working Paul for cash. He was hoping someone would come to bring a bribe, a payment; he could capitalize financially because Paul was well-loved and liked. And so I'm assuming (not always a good thing biblically) that there were enough people that Paul could have gotten as much money as he needed. I really think Paul was not going to take this way out. He was going to stand his ground and do "right is right." "Right is right." It cost Paul to do "right is right." But for the next two years, he didn't bring Felix any money. He met with Felix constantly. I guess Felix probably went from wanting to hear about Jesus to trying to tell Paul how inexpensive it would be to get out, and maybe he should call some of his buddies. And Paul was not gonna do it; wouldn't follow that road. So Paul could have gotten out, but he didn't get out like this.

Paul faithfully waits two years. Why did God leave him there for two years? I don't know. And we're not told, so I can't tell you. God will have His way. But I know that by the time you get to verse 1 of chapter 25 - you've sat here for forty minutes - two years have passed. And we don't know why God does what He does, but I tell you this: the lesson for chapter 24, to me, is always if you're trembling in your heart, learn from Felix and his wife to act while God is speaking because you may not hear His voice again. And I think that's a biblical message. You've got to hear it and go for it now. So if that's you tonight, if you're here because God's been speaking to you - it's the end of the year, you wonder what next year's gonna bring, the Lord set you up to be here tonight, and He sent His Son before you and tells you He'll forgive your sins, and you're afraid of it, and you're frightened by it, and it moves you - then go to Him. Go to Him. Do it tonight. And He can give you life like He's given to most of us.

So next week, Lord be willing, we will pick up in chapter 25. Read ahead. You can kind of cheat ahead now. There're only three more chapters. We're going to spend, I think, six weeks in those three chapters, learning, and get to the end of God's report of the first thirty years of the church. And I hope you'll finish well.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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