

The Gospel Demands Courage Acts 24:1-27, Hebrews 11:24-26

Slide 1

It's 57AD, a little more than two decades since Jesus died and rose again. The entire region of Judea has become quite volatile and just about anything could cause the Jews to boil over in revolt.

Now, part of the reason for this volatility lay in the man we meet today, Antonius Felix, the governor of Judaea for the past five years. As the governor, Felix was especially brutal to the Jewish people.

It's in this atmosphere of oppression that Paul was brought before Felix to be tried. Paul had been thrown into jail in Jerusalem and held in custody as a common criminal on trumped up charges.

In today's passage, Paul's in Caesarea waiting for his accusers to arrive. But why did the Jewish leaders make up lies to get Paul arrested in the first place?

It's because they were losing their Jewish congregation to Christianity. They wanted to send a signal to all the other disciples that they had better stop spreading Christ's teachings or they would experience the same fate as Paul!

Now, as a Jew being brought before Felix, Paul should've been shaking in his boots, but Paul turned the table on this evil governor as he talked about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment.

Even though this incident was just a small part of Paul's life, Luke's concentration on the details of these events suggests that Luke believed what happened here was very important.

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If you want to know the unabridged version of how Paul got himself into this situation, you need to read Acts 21-23.

Today I'm going to give you the abridged version though the Bible's version is a lot better.

As Paul was on his third missionary journey, the Holy Spirit came upon him and compelled Paul to travel to Jerusalem.

After he arrived in Jerusalem, he went to the Temple to clarify a misunderstanding, where some Jews from Asia saw him, called their friends, and seized him.

They did this since they had seen him, when he first arrived in the city, traveling with Gentiles.

They accused him of bringing a Gentile into the Temple since they knew he was traveling with them. Acts 21:30 tells us that "*The whole city was aroused.*"

They began to beat Paul until a Roman cohort arrived. It's here we meet Claudius Lysias, the leader of the Roman cohort. His title in Greek identifies him as a commander of 1,000 troops.

When Claudius learned that Paul was a Roman citizen, he ordered the Chief Priests and members of the Sanhedrin to come and question him, at which time Paul put up a very good defense by giving his testimony.

Now, the Sanhedrin had already heard from Paul's accusers in what could be described as a pretrial hearing. But after Paul gave his sermonette, it riled up some of the people and they conspired to kill him.

Paul's nephew heard of the plot (the only time we hear anything of Paul's family in the pages of the Bible) and tells Claudius Lysias.

Knowing the current situation was precarious, Claudius wrote a letter to Felix explaining the need for him to examine Paul.

Since the governor's residence was located in Caesarea, Lysias knows it would be a dangerous journey for Paul and just a couple of soldiers, he provides a horse for Paul, a 470 Roman detachment to protect him, and doesn't leave until after 9pm to ensure Paul's safety.

That's a synopsis of chapters 21-23, now let's get into chapter 24.

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Acts 24:1, "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."

Tertullus, a Roman lawyer, represented the interests of the Jewish leaders and was hired to present the prosecution's opening remarks.

You could think of Tertullus as the "legal gun" for the Jewish people which included the high priest, Ananias.

Notice this, those who were doing the devil's work were going first class. They knew the importance of having the right man in the right place.

This is something many Christians have never been able to comprehend. For example, we find that today the devil's crowd has filled about every important position they can fill.

They're almost in complete control of the air waves. There are a few Christian radio and television stations, and programs, but many times you hear more garbage and scandals on them than you do on some of the secular stations.

The devil's crowd has almost complete control of newspapers and news broadcasting programs across our nation. Every day they report what they consider to be newsworthy, whether it is or not.

The movie and theater actors are exalted like gods across this country, but their lifestyles depict everything Satan wants all of society to follow.

Then, as we look at the politicians in Washington, and elsewhere, you'll be hard-pressed to find a born-again believer among them or one who'll say they are. (Jimmy Carter)

The point I want you to get is this, the devil's crowd knows the importance of placing their best people in key positions, and how to use their best to get the job done.

In this case, the Jewish leaders needed a great orator and Tertullus was it. In verses two through six, Luke gives us a summary of Tertullus' speech.

After the perfunctory flatteries, Tertullus cites three charges against Paul:

- 1) Paul sought to stir up riots among the people.
- 2) He is a ringleader of the Nazarenes.
- 3) He sought to profane the Temple.

Tertullus referred to followers of Christ as Nazarenes because Jesus was from Nazareth. He did this to paint a picture that this was a dangerous sect wishing to disrupt the social order.

By calling Paul a member of the Nazarenes, he was saying that Paul was a threat to the Roman government.

These were serious political charges. If Paul was found guilty, it would've led to his death. In verse 5, some translations use the word "*troublemaker*," but in the Greek, Tertullus called Paul "*a plague*."

Today, we'd say that such a person was a cancer that needed to be cut out. Tertullus demanded a vigorous response if this "disease" was going to be stopped.

So, after listing the facts, as this lawyer viewed them, Tertullus made a plea for Felix to act.

Now, as an aside, Ananias, the chief priest who hired Tertullus to oppose God's man, had God's Word.

He had the Old Testament texts of the day. He should've been the last person to bring false accusations against anyone.

Lying is among the things God states He despises. Listen to Proverb 6:16-19, "*There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.*"

To illustrate how much God hates lying, especially from one of His ministers, Ananias was brutally assassinated just a few years later, but the punishment didn't stop there.

Ananias' son, Jonathan, who took his place as high priest, was assassinated by Felix, the very man Ananias now stood before attempting to persuade him to kill Paul.

Ananias paid dearly for all his lying schemes and will continue to pay for all eternity for his opposition to God's work.

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Felix was known for his ferocious temper which caused a great deal of trouble for everyone. Yet Paul stood unshaken before Felix regardless of all the grandstanding,

By human standards, Paul was a *"butterfly before a steamroller"* since both Jerusalem and Rome were the two power blocs of his day.

The rule of Rome, represented in Felix, was some three million square miles around the Mediterranean Sea. Jerusalem's faith went back nearly two thousand years to Abraham. The combined might of these two was overwhelming.

Paul, a solitary rebel of the fledgling Christian faith stood alone in front of them. As Paul defended both himself and the Christian religion, Christians were outnumbered by thirty thousand to one.

Again, by human calculations, Paul was no more than a *"fly in the ointment."* So, after the governor gave his assent, Paul presented his defense.

In so many words, Paul said the prosecution's words were a bald-faced lie. Acts 24:12-13, *"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."*

While his accusers brought several charges against him, they couldn't substantiate anything. Paul's response was simple. They can't prove any of the charges. In short, he was innocent of all charges.

The original charge against Paul wasn't that he sought to desecrate the Temple but that he tried to bring a Gentile into the Temple. Again, the truth is the opposite of what Tertullus had just said.

Had Roman authorities not stepped in, Paul's life would've ended there on the Temple steps. Paul continued his defense by assuring Felix that he didn't violate either Roman law or God's law.

He was in Jerusalem to unite the Jewish people and deliver funds collected from Gentile churches during his missionary journey.

These tithes were for their needy Jewish brothers in the church at Jerusalem.

Then, after denying what he hadn't done, Paul told Felix he did have a confession to make. Perhaps Felix's ears perked up when he heard this as then he could rid himself of this pesky trial.

So, Paul confessed to four deeds:

- 1) He worshiped *"the God of our ancestors."*
- 2) He followed everything *"in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets."*
- 3) He possessed *"the same hope in God"* as his accusers.
- 4) He strove to keep his *"conscience clear before God and man."*

If he was guilty of anything, it was a clean conscience.

After hearing all the presentations, Felix adjourned the court so he could hear from Claudius Lysias. Felix reserved judgment until he could gather more information.

Luke tells us two things as we leave Felix's courtroom: 1) Felix kept Paul in prison because Felix was doing this as a favor to the Jews.

Rather than pursue justice, Felix would rather do a favor for Jewish authorities.

2) Paul is kept in jail for two years, as Felix sought a bribe from his followers. Although Roman law directly forbade bribes, Felix nevertheless, sought a bribe hoping Paul would tire and request funds from the believers in the area.

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Like any good legal drama, much of the action took place outside the courtroom.

Acts 24:24, "Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus."

It's this conversation, outside the courtroom, that interests me. It's here that we get a glimpse in Felix's personal life as he takes off his judge's robe.

Felix was but one of a string of mediocre Roman governors during the chaotic years before Jerusalem's fall in AD 70.

He was a politician in every sense of the word, having risen from a subservient person to the position of Governor of Judaea.

A Roman historian tells us that because Felix's brother, Pallas, was influential in Rome, Felix believed he had *carte blanche* authority to do what he wanted.

His brutality in suppressing the Jews and revolutionary groups simply added fuel to the fire which made this time in Jerusalem's history so volatile.

He was so brutal that even the Roman emperor Nero replaced him. And when Nero thought you were evil, you were at a whole other level!

Paul's private conversation with Felix and Drusilla hinged upon something about the governing couple that you may not know.

Felix had by his side, Drusilla, the daughter of King Herod Agrippa I. The ancient historian, Josephus, notes that Drusilla was a beautiful woman.

Felix had managed to steal this teenage bride away from her husband before she was even twenty, making this Princess, Felix's third wife.

In fact, he had married two other Princesses, elevating his career each time. The first princess was the granddaughter of Antony and Cleopatra. To say the least, Felix was not known for being of good character.

One Roman historian described Felix as having "*a mercenary soul*," another, Tacitus, said of Felix, "*Felix, indulging in every kind of barbarity and lust, exercised the power of a king in the Spirit of a slave.*"

We get the picture of a man who had the job but wasn't qualified for the job.

So, living together in sin and shame, it was these two that sat together on the throne awaiting the words of the prisoner, Paul.

Now, these two were curious about Christianity. Therefore, for two years, as Paul awaited the verdict, he had the opportunity to talk with both Felix and Drusilla about Christianity.

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Acts 24:25, *“As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, “That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.”*”

Now Paul could have stayed with the more palatable aspects of the Gospel. So, why did he choose righteousness, self-control, and judgment?

Well, all three terms have an ethical dimension to them. Paul did what any preacher ought to do: he selected a topic appropriate to his audience. Paul made sure that Felix and Drusilla knew that Christianity had ethical implications.

While Paul communicated respect for Felix's position, he didn't attempt to tell him what he wanted to hear. Paul talked to Felix about self-control and the conversation had decidedly taken a personal turn in their lives.

Do you think Paul knew everything about Felix that I've told you today? Do you think he could have chosen to speak about something other than *“righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment?”* He knew Felix needed to hear about self-control.

Felix was living with a girl he stole while she was still a teenager. He didn't exactly have his passions under control. I like this about Paul – he didn't trim the Gospel's message.

Paul didn't shave the hard edges of the Gospel in order to make it more marketable. The Gospel isn't just facts to believe; it demands a changed life. The Gospel is not *“Whatever!”*

Today, we live in a world that has overstimulated us. We live in a desensitized culture where Hollywood has assaulted the imagination and we're on information overload.

Today we pursue knowledge without knowing who we are or why we exist. With YouTube, iTunes, and instant information access on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or TikTok, no wonder so many of us respond with a yawn and say, *“Whatever.”*

Yet, in this *“Whatever”* world we live, the Gospel stimulates a heart-emotional response. Acts 24:25 says, *“Felix was afraid.”*

This word translated *“afraid”* means more than what the casual reading suggests. It has means *“terrified.”* In fact, circle that word *“afraid”* and place beside it, in the margin, Revelation 11:13.

Revelation 11:13, *“At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.”*

The same word used in Revelation 11:13 to describe the feelings you would have after a supernatural earthquake kills 7,000 people is this word used by Luke to describe how Felix felt.

Felix was terrified of Paul’s words because Paul spoke of the resurrection of the unjust *“...there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.”* (Acts 25:15).

Now in private conversation with him, Paul speaks of *“the judgment to come.”* (Acts 24:25).

We’re told that Felix *“was well acquainted with the Way,”* or Christianity. So, when Paul spoke with Felix, he made him see God’s White Throne of Judgment.

Though Paul’s hands were in chains, it was Felix that saw the books opened and himself arraigned before the Judge of the Universe. Paul nailed him to his seat that day and Felix was petrified.

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Conclusion

The power of the Gospel is most evident when you see its hold on a person. The Gospel isn't just something you hold onto... the Gospel has its hold on you.

When the Gospel entered Paul, he was subjected to trouble, persecution, and sorrow. Yet, despite all this, none of these things could drive the Gospel out of him.

Paul knew that it was the resurrection of Christ that caused him to be in prison. Acts 24:21, *"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.'"*

Like a ship weighed down with too much cargo that the captain thinks is too precious to jettison. Paul would rather languish in prison for years than throw the Gospel over the side.

Paul reminds me of Moses. Hebrews 11:24-26, *"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward."*

John Bunyan was placed into prison for preaching the Gospel. Yet the Gospel was so important to him he said, *"If you let me out of prison today, I will preach the gospel again tomorrow..."*