

## I. Introduction

Good morning! Last week we talked about God's sovereign and loving control over all things. **Proverbs 16:9** instructs us, **"In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps."** We are all in God's hands, and we give thanks for His loving care.

In Acts 23, 40 zealous Jews plotted to kill Paul, but the Roman commander sent him away to Caesarea with a heavy guard to keep him safe. At that time, Caesarea was the Roman capital of Judea, so Paul was brought to Governor Felix. Felix said he would hear Paul's case after his accusers came, and Paul was then placed under guard at Herod's Palace. But in all of this, Paul was in the hands of God.



Let's read Acts 24:1-23 and see what happens at Paul's trial before Felix.

## II. Scripture Reading (Acts 24:1-23, NIV 1984)

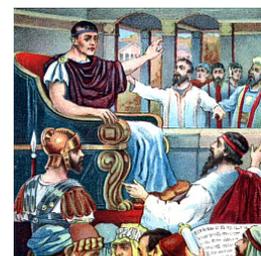
1 Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. 2 When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: "We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. 3 Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. 4 But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly. 5 "We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect 6 and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him, 7 *and wanted to judge him according to our law. But the commander, Lysias, came and with the use of much force snatched him from our hands and ordered his accusers to come before you.* 8 By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him." 9 The Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.

10 When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: "I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense. 11 You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. 12 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. 13 And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. 14 However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, 15 and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. 16 So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

17 After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. 18 I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. 19 But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me. 20 Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin-- 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.'"

22 Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. "When Lysias the commander comes," he said, "I will decide your case." 23 He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.

## III. Teaching



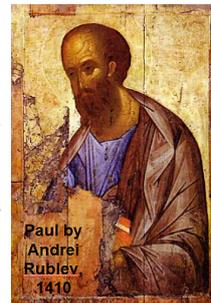
The accusers of Paul came to Caesarea and appeared before Governor Felix. The importance of this case to the Jews is clear. Along with the elders, the high priest himself also came, and they even brought a professional lawyer. The lawyer begins to present his case in **Acts 24:2a**, **“When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix.”** The first half of Tertullus’ presentation consisted of flattery. Tertullus said the Jews were very thankful for Governor Felix’s rule because it had brought peace and reform.

However, if we judge by historical records instead of listening to the flattery of this lawyer, we get a very different picture of Felix. Felix gained his office through the influence of his brother who was friends with the emperor, but Felix was later removed from office for wrongdoing. Felix did not have a good reputation, not among the Jews, nor among the Romans. The Roman historian Tacitus, for example, called Felix, *“a master of cruelty and lust,”* (*Historiae* 5.9).

Flattery is never pretty and it certainly has no place in a courtroom. When a lawyer resorts to flattering the judge, it is very likely that the lawyer does so because evidence is lacking. In this case, after flattering Felix, what evidence against Paul did Tertullus present? None. In **Acts 24:5-6**, he said, **“We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him.”** But this is not evidence; it is just an accusation. Tertullus did not have any evidence against Paul - not a single document, nor even one witness to testify against Paul.

But Tertullus did have a strategy. In **Acts 24:8** he said to Governor Felix, **“By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him.”** Tertullus basically tells Felix to make Paul confess to the charges. By saying this, Tertullus shows that he has no evidence; he just hopes that Paul will say something incriminating under questioning. The Jews who had come along joined in the accusation, but none of them claimed that they had actually seen Paul do anything wrong.

When Felix gave Paul a chance to speak, Paul did not flatter Felix, instead he stuck to the facts. He had come to Jerusalem only 12 days ago and he had not done anything wrong. In **Acts 24:13**, Paul pointed out the lack of evidence against him, **“And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me.”** The fact that Paul had arrived so recently is important because it means that investigation of the events should have been easy. If Paul had done anything wrong, witnesses of the crime should have been readily available. But the Jews had not brought along any witnesses. For example, no one who had been at the riot at the temple when Paul was first arrested came to Caesarea. Probably none of them were willing to come, because they knew that they would have been forced to admit they had attacked Paul for no good reason.



In **Acts 24:17**, Paul mentioned a practical purpose for his coming to Jerusalem, **“After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings.”** This was not mentioned earlier in Acts, but it is mentioned in Paul’s letters. For example, in **Romans 15:25-26**, Paul wrote, **“Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.”**

Paul was on trial, but he did not miss the chance to speak of his faith in Jesus. **Acts 24:14-15**, **“However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.”** Once again Paul emphasizes the resurrection. Paul also makes it clear that the Christian faith, called the Way, was not really a new sect or religion. Under Roman law, it was illegal to preach a new religion without government permission. But preaching the death and resurrection of Jesus was not starting a new religion; it was announcing the completion of the Jewish faith. Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Law and the Prophets, that is, the Old Testament. Christianity separated from the Jewish faith only because the Jewish leaders refused to recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

**Acts 24:22**, **“Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. ‘When Lysias the commander comes,’ he said, ‘I will decide your case.’”** As we saw last week, Governor

Felix already had a letter from Lysias, in which he clearly said that Paul was innocent. So there was no good reason for Felix to delay judgment. But rather than convict Paul unjustly with no evidence, or release Paul and anger the Jewish leaders, Felix chose delay. As we will see in the rest of this chapter, Felix put off making a decision about Paul for two years, and then he left the issue to the next governor.

#### IV. Scripture Reading (Acts 24:24-27, NIV 1984)

24 Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. 25 As Paul discoursed on 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." 26 At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him. 27 When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

#### V. Teaching

It is interesting that Governor Felix talked with Paul often. One reason is that Felix was hoping that Paul would offer a bribe. But that does not explain why Felix would have his wife, Drusilla, join him in listening to Paul. Perhaps, somewhere down inside, Felix wanted to believe in Jesus. But, as far as the Bible records, he never made a decision. Just as Felix delayed making a decision about what to do with Paul, Felix also put off making any decision about Jesus.



The presence of Drusilla might have made it even harder for Felix to repent of his sins. Felix had recently divorced his first wife to marry Drusilla. This Drusilla was a princess of the notorious Herod family. She had been married to the King of Emesa in Syria, but after Felix met her and saw her beauty, he enticed her to leave her husband and come to him. Although she was only about 20 years old, she had already been exposed to every kind of palace plot and intrigue and she herself was far from innocent.

**Acts 24:25, "As Paul discoursed on 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.'" The verse before this says that Paul spoke about faith in Jesus Christ. This verse expands on that to show that Paul emphasized righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come. Paul was an effective preacher and Felix surely understood that he was a sinner in need of salvation. Felix became afraid, but instead of repenting of his sins and turning to Jesus to receive forgiveness, Felix just kept putting off the day of decision. For a man who loves the pleasures of sin, there is never a convenient time for repentance.**



The details of Paul's messages to Felix and Drusilla are not known, but we can imagine some of the things Paul likely said. Concerning righteousness, Paul might have drawn on the words of **Isaiah 64:6, "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away."**

Concerning self-control, Paul might have spoken as he did in **Galatians 5:22-23a, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."**

Concerning the judgment to come, Paul might have quoted the words of Jesus from **Matthew 25:31-33:**

**"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left."**



Felix knew that he was not righteous and that he lacked self-control. The presence of young Drusilla at his side would have been a constant reminder of his own sinfulness and his inability to control his own lusts. Felix would have known that he was a goat and that the judgment pronounced by Jesus against the goats was his own. **Matthew 25:46, "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."**



Paul preached on these and similar themes. But I am sure that Paul did not leave his hearers without hope. Paul always emphasized the salvation that is freely available to all who trust in Jesus.

**Romans 3:21-24, "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."**

## VI. Conclusion

On the cross, Jesus gave His life as a ransom for all who trust in Him. The blood of Jesus washes away our sin and we receive the free gift of eternal life when we believe. We can be sure that Paul provided a clear explanation of the Good News of Jesus to Felix and Drusilla and that he urged them to repent of their sins and trust in Jesus. We can be confident that Paul provided ample evidence of the truth of the things he preached. We know that they had two years of meetings with Paul, plenty of time to make a decision.

We don't know for sure how Drusilla reacted to Paul's message. But we know that Felix was afraid of the coming judgment. Felix knew he needed to have his sins forgiven, but it seems that he never said, "Yes," to Jesus. Sadly, the only decision Felix made was the decision to delay and wait for a more convenient day. Felix was a procrastinator and his endless delays robbed him of the joy of salvation. We would do well to avoid following Felix's bad example. Let us pay attention to this warning from Augustine of Hippo (art by Antonio Rodríguez), the famous 4<sup>th</sup> century theologian, "*God has promised forgiveness to your repentance, but He has not promised tomorrow to your procrastination.*"



Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow is uncertain. We have only today. **2 Corinthians 6:2, "For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."**

Today is the day of salvation. The way of salvation is not complicated; it is not too hard. It is, in fact, very simple. Paul explains it like this in **Romans 10:9 and 10:13, "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."** "for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"

Let's pray.

## VII. Prayer