

a pestilent fellow and a mover of sedition

Acts 24:1 – 27

~ As we have followed Paul on his three missionary journeys in the previous several reports from our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Word of God, we have witnessed him return to Jerusalem after their completion, be arrested and imprisoned, a riot took place, and an appearance before the Sanhedrin revealed a murder plot against him was being hatched – by the religious rulers. Paul was miraculously rescued from the hands of those who would have put him to death. Although we know for sure Paul was in the direct will of God, he had, quite frankly, failed at garnering any sympathy from his brethren in the Gospel ministry. I am sure there was more than one episode of mental depression and deep discouragement. I happen to know that a man of lesser medal and baser courage would have simply folded after succumbing to the brutal circumstances that had befallen Paul. If you woke up in a Caesarean prison in the first century; you would completely agree.

The Lord gave his faithful servant Paul a token of encouragement in the last chapter at verse eleven. God stood by him; and He will stand by us today, too. The Lord isn't telling Paul he won't have problems or difficulties; and He isn't telling Paul he won't suffer. In fact, God has already told Paul on the road to Damascus that Paul would suffer great things for His Names sake. There are myriad hardships and trying experiences immediately before him at this time. From this point forward in Paul's history, until his martyrdom, he will be in constant danger. Actually, he has only been one step ahead of peril since he had to be lowered over the wall in a basket that night so long ago in Damascus.

The defense Paul asserts before the Sanhedrin as we move along becomes highly repetitive as it is repeated in quick succession from here to the end of Acts. The enemies of Paul from Jerusalem have a plan to assassinate him. Remember, Paul learned of the plot through his nephew, and they told the

captain of the prison guard, who in turn, decided it was time to communicate with the governor. So, Paul was sent with a letter to Felix in Caesarea; and we saw Paul secretly moved in the middle of the night to Herod's judgment hall. At least Paul has been afforded good treatment so far. Well, that's where we are when his accusers arrive.....

1 And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.

~ Tertullus was what we would call the prosecuting attorney; he was a clever and well-prepared man; you may be sure. The case he brings is very well thought out and rehearsed. His presentation of the charges are brief, terse and to the point. He is a typical politician; and he flatters Felix by telling him how great a man he is. Of course, flattery is always a good plan when your facts are fabricated. Tertullus obviously knows this is a losing case as he speaks of being tedious. Accusing Paul of being a mover of sedition couldn't be proven by any means. Tertullus also makes a very subtle insinuation that if his case is a loser, then it was the result of dereliction of duty by Lysias, the captain of the guard. Tertullus has his bases covered very tightly. He is very smart....

2 And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence,

3 We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.

4 Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words.

5 For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes:

6 Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.

7 But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands,

8 Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.

9 And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.

10 Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself:

11 Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.

12 And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city:

13 Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.

14 But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets:

15 And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

~ So, apparently, the teaching of Paul was labeled heresy by the religious rulers in Jerusalem. The religious rulers taught the Mosaic System of Levitical Law as the only proper sacrifice; and Paul taught the death, burial

and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only acceptable atonement from sins. That was a head-on collision. Once again, the resurrection is the centerpiece of Paul's witness for Christ. The resurrection just happens to have been the Gospel message since the beginning of the church, friends. It hasn't changed. What think ye of Christ? In your mind's eye, did He die for your sins and was He raised from the dead for your justification? That's the only message we have today, friends. Paul says very clearly what he had done was done for conscience sake. Remember, Paul had gone to Jerusalem to bring the church gifts he had collected on his third missionary journey. I can only imagine it was a substantial gift, too. Paul had decimated the early church, so he wanted to bring reparations to them by his own hands, as we learned in our previous several reports....

17 Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings.

18 Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult.

19 Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me.

20 Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council,

21 Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.

~ It appears there were no witnesses against Paul present at this proceeding. What happens next in light of that fact is astounding, to say the least. Here is a Roman citizen accused of merely breaking a religious law with no witnesses against him being incarcerated indefinitely. The reason witnesses weren't brought in to testify is because none of them could get the story straight. Well, even during his defense against obviously bogus charges, the conversation is steered back to the resurrection of Christ by Paul. Christ died for our sins; and that is the heart of what we call the

“Gospel.” The fact that Jesus died on the cross, was buried, and rose again the third day is the absolute keystone of the Christian faith. Nothing else is the Gospel; and anything added to those facts perverts the cause of Christ and becomes, by de facto, an apostate religious philosophy....

22 And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.

23 And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.

24 And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

25 And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

26 He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.

27 But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

~ The contradictory testimony caused Felix to feel the need to defer judgment at this time. Tertullus was saying one thing, and Paul was saying another. In fairness, Felix does give Paul a great deal of liberty for a prisoner; but, of course, he should have freed Paul. Well, Felix is a polished politician also, and he has some sincere questions for Paul about righteousness, temperance and judgment. See, Felix knew something about “the way” – the Gospel of Christ. He just didn’t understand it; and we all tend to criticize that which we don’t understand. Even so, Paul isn’t

defending himself in any way – Paul is only trying to witness to Felix that salvation might be wrought.

Scripture actually presents Felix in a pretty good light for a lost pagan. Secular history isn't so kind to Felix. Felix was a freed slave who seized power through cruelty and extreme violence. This man was given to pleasure and licentiousness – and torture and murder were a big part of said pleasures; the name "Felix" literally means "pleasure." Publius Cornelius Tacitus says this concerning Felix: "... through cruelty and licentiousness Felix exercised the authority of a king with the spirit of a slave." That's what we're talking about, my beloved. His wife, Drusilla, was right there by his side; and let's turn the spotlight of history on her for a moment: she was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I – who had killed James, you remember. Her great uncle was the one who had slain John the Baptist. Her great grandfather made the attempt to kill the Lord Jesus Christ when He was born and slaughtered every child in that part of Israel trying to do so.

These two men hold exalted positions; the likes of which you and I know nothing about, my dear readers. If they were alive today they would not attend a Gospel preaching church and hear sound doctrine – because they simply aren't going to accept Him. Many have already made up their minds today that, under no circumstances, are they going to believe. They sure aren't going to listen to Paul the apostle. Even so, they are given a marvelous opportunity to accept Christ at this time in which we are studying. They are getting a private sermon from the greatest witness the world has ever seen. Only the wonder of God's grace could have provided these two characters the opportunity to turn to Christ. The hour of decision struck for them, and they made their choice. The door to the Kingdom of God was opened, but they refused to enter.

Psalm 2:10 Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. 11 Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling ~

Felix and Drusilla should have listened a little more closely to Paul. I'm sure they heard him with interest, and I feel as if Felix would have made a decision to accept Christ – but he was restrained by pride. Paul reasoned

with them of righteousness, temperance and the judgment of God – and that makes a pretty good sermon. Righteousness means righteousness of law in this passage. Man cannot meet God’s standard, friends. The law reveals we are all sinners and man can in no way present a legal basis for transgression of the law that would be anywhere near acceptable to God. A man cannot stand before God, so God provides that standing in Christ. The robe of righteousness only comes down over those who believe in the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Romans 3:22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: 23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; 24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ~

Temperance in this passage means self control. Felix is a man who was mastered by passion and cruelty. I’m sure the need to hurt swept over his emotions like an addiction to heroin. He and Drusilla, living in abject sin, were base degenerates who – even in their rule over the land - had no idea what freedom was. Well, Paul told them of judgment to come. That judgment is the Great White Throne. Today, our sins are either on us or they are on Christ. If your sin is on you, then you are yet to come up for judgment. People don’t like to hear about judgment to come, and this couple didn’t like it, at all! This is, of course, where many preachers soft peddle the Gospel. Very few will take on this subject. It doesn’t and shouldn’t be handled from a crude, hellfire and damnation perspective, though. That’s not our message as Christians. It ALWAYS must be offered in a salvation-styled, proper message.

I believe we should revert to calling genuine Christianity “the way” again - because “Christianity” has some very bad connotations associated with it today. Everyone thinks we live in a Christian nation in America; but nothing could be further from the truth. We have a whole lot of church members who claim to be “born again” – but they aren’t saved. And again, the label “Christian” is wholly suspicious amongst the unsaved crowd in this lost and dying world. If you feel the need to constantly tell others that you are born again, then it likely indicates you are just a common criminal.

Genuine children of God – or those we should be referring to when we say “Christians” – are likely around in the ratio we saw when Israel came out of Egypt in the Exodus. God says many are called, few are chosen. If we knew how few, it would scare the living daylights out of us, friends. See, you will recall that out of an estimated two and a half million Jews that did come out of Egypt only TWO – Joshua and Caleb – entered the Promised Land. That means that if we have three hundred eighteen million Americans living in this country today, then the ratio is about one hundred twenty-eight people are truly saved. That sounds about right to me. It is truly shameful. After Felix was shaken up, he sent Paul away because the sinner will never have a convenient season to hear the Gospel. That’s how the safari ends this report, and we will go with Paul before Festus in our next report ~
