



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

Paul in Route to Rome, Part 8

Paul Appeals to Caesar

Acts 24:22-25:12

June 8, 2008

- I. Felix Keeps Paul in Custody
- II. Paul Proclaims the Gospel before Felix and Drusilla
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- ❑ 2008 is shaping up to be one of the most intense election years in recent history.
- ❑ In fact, after yesterday, the race for the White House is now down to two.
- ❑ In her speech last night, where she endorsed Senator Barack Obama for President, Hillary Clinton stated:

“The way to continue our fight now to accomplish the goals for which we stand is to take our energy, our passion, our strength and do all we can to help elect Barack Obama, the next president of the United States. I endorse him and throw my full support behind him and I ask of you to join me in working as hard for Barack Obama as you have for me.”

- ❑ Yet, just over two months ago, Senator Clinton had reportedly said [rather passionately] to Governor Bill Richardson of New Mexico, “He [Obama] cannot win, Bill, he cannot win.”
- ❑ However, many rightfully ask, “What has changed?” The answer is clear: “Nothing. That’s politics.”
- ❑ In other words, in the game of politics, **perception** is everything!
- ❑ If a politician can make people think that he cares for them, it really does not matter if he doesn’t [at least from the politician’s perspective].

- ❑ A shrewd politician will often act in such a way in order to win over a certain group of people whose satisfaction will often determine the individual's success.
- ❑ Yet, this type of political maneuvering is nothing new. In fact in the trials of Jesus Christ, Pontius Pilate acted in a way that sought to appease the Jews [a group he actually hated] while giving the appearance of Roman justice.
- ❑ The same occurs here, in Acts 23-26, with the Roman Governors Felix and Festus. It appears that they know that Paul is innocent; however, they continually act in a way that is driven by political motives rather than a commitment to the truth.

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I. Felix Keeps Paul in Custody

- ❑ After hearing Tertullus, Ananias, and the Jewish entourage bring charges against Paul; the Apostle gives his powerful *defense*, his *apologetic*.
- ❑ Immediately following this, Luke writes, in **Verses 22-23**, “But Felix, having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off, saying, ‘When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case.’ Then he gave orders to the centurion for him to be kept in custody and yet have some freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from ministering to him.”
 - Luke does not inform the reader *why* Felix had certain knowledge about the Christian movement; however, it is quite possible that it was through his wife Drusilla.
 - Drusilla was a Jewess and a member of the Herod family. Therefore, she may have heard through them of the Way, then past on these stories to her husband. Yet, we simply do not know.
 - It is interesting, though, that Felix states that he will wait for Lysias, the commander, to arrive and give his report.
 - Yet, Lysias had already issued a letter stating that this entire issue was a matter of Jewish law.
 - In fact, in the letter, Lysias had explicitly stated that Paul had done nothing deserving of death.
 - The **truth** seems to be that Felix was not waiting for Lysias' report.
 - In fact, we have no evidence, biblically or historically, that Lysias ever came to Felix or that the governor ever called for him.

- The truth seems to be simply that, like Pilate before him [during the trials of Jesus Christ], Felix found no fault in Paul. It appears that Felix must have known that the charges of political insurrection and sedition were without basis. Not only this, he, “having a more exact knowledge of the Way” seems to have known that the “Nazarene sect” posed no problem to Roman peace and order. That is, the Christians were not revolutionaries.
- In short, Felix was in a classic “Catch-22”: either he (1.) “did the right thing” and acquitted Paul of all the charges against him, and therefore, uphold Roman justice; or (2.) Appease the Jews and convict Paul of stirring up insurrections and committing seditious acts. This would inevitably lead to his execution.
 - However, if Felix “did the right thing” he would, no doubt, infuriate the Jews and likely have a riot on his hands.
 - Yet, if he convict Paul, although he would appease the Jews, he would convict an innocent man and therefore violate his own conscience [so it appears] as well as the long-standing tradition of Roman legal justice.
- Felix was, needless to say, in a political quandary. What should he do?
 - Luke tells us that Felix “gave orders to the centurion for him to be kept in custody and yet have some freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from ministering to him.”
 - In other words, Felix “drug his heels” and put the whole matter off.
 - Yet, he did not simply throw Paul into prison. [Had he truly thought Paul was guilty of the charges against him, Felix would have likely done this.] Rather, he kept the Apostle in custody, yet gave him many privileges. This probably was done by Felix in order to alleviate his own guilt for holding not only an innocent man – but a Roman citizen who had yet to be convicted of any crime!

II. Paul Proclaims the Gospel Before Felix and Drusilla

- While Paul was in custody, it appears that Felix was somewhat intrigued by the Apostle. Possibly desiring to improve his “knowledge of the Way”, Luke writes, in **Verses 24-26**, “But some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.”
 - One of the ancient biblical texts states that it was Drusilla who was especially interested in meeting with Paul. Yet, we do not know.

- The point, here is that both the Roman procurator Felix and his Jewish wife Drusilla, both go to speak with Paul.
- Concerning Drusilla, F.F. Bruce writes:

“Drusilla was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I, and at this time was not yet twenty years old. As a small girl she had been betrothed to the crown prince of Commagene, in eastern Asia Minor, but the marriage did not take place because the prospective bridegroom refused to become a proselyte to Judaism. Then her brother Agrippa II gave her in marriage to the king of Emesa (modern Homs), a petty state in Syria. But when she was still only sixteen, Felix, with the help (it is said) of a Cypriot magician called Atomos, persuaded her to leave her husband and come to be his wife, promising her (with a play on his name) every “felicity” if she did so. Accordingly, she joined Felix as his third wife, and bore him a son named Agrippa, who met his death in the eruption of Vesuvius [in Pompeii] in A.D. 79.”

- Then, in Verses 24-25, Luke states that Paul spoke of (1.) **faith in Jesus Christ**; (2.) **righteousness**; (3.) **self-control**; and (4.) **the judgment to come**.
 - Paul could have used this “hearing” before the governor and his wife to discuss the injustices that had been done to him; however, he did not.
 - **He proclaimed the gospel to them.**
 - In fact, since Drusilla was a Jewess, Paul likely followed the pattern of preaching to the Jews whereby he demonstrated that the birth, life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus were all in accordance with the Old Testament – consequently proving that Jesus was the Christ – the long-awaited Messiah.
 - Therefore, since Jesus was the Christ – the Messiah – salvation was by grace through faith in Him alone! Thus, the Messiah was [and is] the Savior of all men – not just the Jews but the Gentiles as well! So, Paul’s call to faith in Jesus Christ was just as relevant to Felix [a Gentile] as it was to Drusilla [a Jew].
 - John Stott makes a powerful point, stating that “Paul never proclaimed the good news in a vacuum, however, but always in a context, the personal context of his hearers.”
 - Therefore, the points that Paul mentions: (1.) righteousness; (2.) self-control; and (3.) judgment, all pertain specifically to his hearers, Felix and Drusilla.

▪ **RIGHTEOUSNESS**

- Many scholars believe that Paul's explanation of *righteousness* was intended primarily for Felix.
- The reason for this was because he had so brutally and cruelly oppressed the Jewish people in a manner that in no way resembled righteousness or justice.
- However, in typical "Paul" fashion, he most assuredly emphasized the unchangeable righteous standard of God. That is, God's standard is clear: **PERFECT, ACTIVE, OBEDIENCE TO THE WILL OF GOD!**
 - NOTE: It is **impossible** to truly understand the nature of the Gospel apart from an understanding of God's immovable, righteous standard.
 - In fact, if we do not demand, as Paul did, that God's standard is **ABSOLUTE RIGHTEOUSNESS**, then faith in Jesus Christ is no longer necessary!
- In other words, as Paul stood before Felix, as a "prisoner" of Rome, Paul demonstrated to the Governor that *he* was guilty before God – for he was in **no way** righteous!
- Yet, it is most certain that Paul also related God's righteous standard to Jesus Christ; and more specifically, faith in Jesus Christ.
- For through faith in Christ alone, are we **justified**, that is declared righteousness, through a *foreign righteousness*, that is the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

▪ **SELF-CONTROL**

- Yet, Paul does not end there. He continues, emphasizing self-control.
- Most commentators see that Paul's mentioning of this point was intended to specifically address the lust-driven relationship between Felix and Drusilla. Paul likely knew of the situation surrounding the marriage of the older Felix with his already-married teenage bride.
- Not only this, Paul demonstrates here that **there are ethical requirements inherent to the Gospel.**

- This in NO WAY means that we are saved BY good works. Rather, we are saved UNTO good works. Tragically, many Christians today are, in actuality “antinomian”, that is “anti-law.”
 - An antinomian spirit leads to thoughts that sound like, “I am already saved, I do not have to worry about the law.”
 - Even statements like, “Well, it’s not a salvation issue,” often reflect an antinomian spirit.
 - The reason for this is that if we are truly saved, we will *want* to obey God’s Law, because it is a reflection of his nature and character.
- Thus, with respect to Paul’s mentioning of “self-control”, those who have been “born again” of the Spirit of God will exhibit the “fruit of the Spirit.” Of the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5, “self-control” is one of them.
- This is because, inherent to the very nature of God is order, purpose and control. Unbridled lust and passion runs contrary to God’s very nature. It demonstrates an abuse of God’s created order.

▪ **THE JUDGMENT TO COME**

- Finally, Paul mentions the “judgment to come.”
 - This was, no doubt, the apex of his proclamation.
 - One can imagine what it must have been like in that room...the tension must have been unbearable.
 - Yet, Paul’s message was clear:
 - God demands absolute righteousness, and only Jesus Christ is righteous. Therefore, man is declared righteous before God only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who do not express faith in Jesus Christ will face the Judgment – that is, they will bear the infinite wrath of Almighty God for their sins!
- Despite Paul’s clear presentation of the Gospel, Felix’s reaction was all-too-typical, in **Verse 25**: “Felix became frightened and said, ‘Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you.’”

- This is so often the reaction of man when the Gospel is faithfully preached.
- He is fearful, wondering to himself, “What if what the preacher says is true?” The person is gripped with fear, for self-centered reasons alone. He is not born-again by the Spirit; he is simply afraid of the possibility of judgment.
 - Yet, contrary to this reaction, the genuine reaction of the converted sinner involves not simply fear of judgment, but **repentance** [of sin] and **faith** [in Jesus Christ].
 - This is certainly the deficiency of certain forms of preaching [such as “hell, fire, and brimstone” preaching]. It may emphasize judgment in the hopes of “scaring” someone into heaven [as if such a thing were possible].
 - However, Christ-centered preaching focuses, not only on judgment [for this is, indeed true], but also on the righteousness found in Christ alone.
- Moreover, in this case, Felix was so fearful that all he could do was to send Paul away, saying, “Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you.”
 - It is rather interesting that Felix exclaims, “Go away!” when he was the one who summoned Paul!
 - John Calvin commented on this passage as well, stating, “Paul, in his bonds [‘chains’], speaks of the judgment of God; he [that is Felix] which had power to put him to death, or to save his life, is afraid and quakes as if he stood before his own judge; neither doth he find any other comfort, but to send him away out of his sight.”
 - In situations as this, when we feel terrified at something, the human reaction is often similar, we try to eliminate it from our minds, hoping it will simply go away.
- Then, in **Verse 26**, Luke continues, “At the same time too, he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse with him.”
 - In the ancient Roman Empire, bribe were explicitly forbidden. In fact the *Lex Iulia derepetundis* demanded that any official who accepted a bribe be removed from office and exiled.
 - However, despite the fact that bribes were illegal, they were rampant throughout the Empire during this period of time. In fact, Josephus describes the likes of Pilate and Felix’s predecessor Cumanus as accepting bribes.
 - Why Felix sought a bribe from Paul is unknown. However, many have suggested [and may be correct], that Felix assumed that, given the fact that Paul had brought

substantial “alms and offerings” to Jerusalem, that he had access to certain sources of wealth throughout the Empire.

- Some have suggested that Felix was not interested only in a bribe from Paul, but that he was still interested in what Paul had to say concerning Jesus. It is unknown whether this is true or not. However, the story of Felix presents a familiar, yet tragic story, of one who is not only presented with the Gospel, but moved by it, only to refuse fully embracing it [likely because it would “cost too much” in terms of earthly loss].

III. Festus Succeeds Felix and Visits Jerusalem

- Luke writes, in **Verse 27**, “But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned.”
 - John Stott references Josephus who claimed that “Felix was recalled to Rome in order to explain his savage suppression of a dispute between Jews and Syrians over their respective civil rights in Caesarea, and would have been severely punished but for his brother Pallas’ appeal to Nero.”
 - However, like so many people, even today, Felix cared more about the opinion of man [“wishing to do the Jews a favor”] than he did acting in accordance with the truth.
 - Therefore, Felix left Paul in prison, even, it appears, longer than the two-year period which was “the maximum duration of preventative custody.”
- Much less is known about Porcius Festus than his predecessor, Felix. Only Luke, in Acts 25-26, and Josephus [just two times] mention Festus. His administration was brief, going only from A.D. 58/59 – A.D. 62, when he suddenly died of an illness. According to Josephus, he was a governor of greater integrity than Felix, and was able to bring under control the revolutionary groups which were quite active in this time.
- Luke seems to agree, somewhat, portraying Festus as one genuinely concerned with justice and truth [at least in a Roman legal sense].
- Yet, like Pontius Pilate, a few decades earlier, even Festus lacked the “backbone” necessary to declare Paul innocent and release him. Consequently, even he bowed under the massive political pressures of his day, compromising the very law he was appointed to uphold.
- In **25:1-5**, Luke continues, writing, “Festus then, having arrived in the province, three days later went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul, and they were urging him, requesting a concession against Paul, that he might have him brought to Jerusalem (at the same time, setting an ambush to kill him on the way). Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly.

- ‘Therefore,’ he said, ‘let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him.’”
- Festus wasted no time, as the newly appointed governor of Judea. He knew he had to quickly meet with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. If he could win them over, his life as governor would be much easier.
 - After only three days in office, he went up to Jerusalem and met with them.
 - There seemed to be only one issue on the Jews’ [likely the Sanhedrin] minds: killing Paul.
 - Yet, upon requesting that Paul be transferred to Jerusalem [in order to ambush and kill him en route], Festus, essentially said no.
 - It was likely a decision born out of pragmatism. A Roman hearing would need to take place, and what better place for that than in Caesarea, the Roman seat in Judea.
 - In fact, Festus said, rightly, “let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him.”
 - From this, it seems that Festus was open to a fair and honest hearing of Paul. It seems that he was neutral.
- Luke continues, in **Verses 6-7**, “After he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them, he went down to Caesarea, and on the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. After Paul arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove...”
- From this passage, we see that the Jews took Festus up on his offer.
 - Upon arriving in Caesarea, after spending just over a week in Jerusalem, Festus “took his seat on the tribunal,” that is, the “judgment seat,” or **Bema** [Βῆμα].
 - Then, the Jews arrived, surrounded Paul, and began “bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove...”
 - Yet, it is here that Festus reveals his weakness. The reason is that in both Jewish and Roman law, witnesses were required to establish the truth of a testimony.
 - Festus should have simply released Paul at this point, but he did not.

IV. Paul Appeals to Caesar

- Luke continues his narrative, in **Verses 8-10**, “while Paul said in his own defense, ‘I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar.’ But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, ‘Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?’ But Paul said, ‘I am standing before Caesar’s tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know. If, then, I am a wrong-doer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. **I appeal to Caesar.**”
 - Paul could not have delivered a more straightforward defense. He clearly was “in the right.” He stood accused of crimes for which there was no proof or witnesses, and he clearly illustrated this point.
 - Not only this, but he even stated that if he was guilty of a capital crime, then he would not even protest.
 - All of this put Festus in an even greater bind.
 - He had just been appointed Roman governor...of Judea. Yet, Judea was the home of the Jews. They were known for their riotous nature and it was the governor’s job to keep them under control.
 - Festus, therefore, knew that it would not be a good way to begin his governorship by releasing the prisoner most hated by the Jews [albeit innocent]. Yet, Festus surely knew Paul was innocent.
 - So, in an act of tremendous weakness and compromise, Festus proposed a solution to Paul: “how about we conduct a hearing in Jerusalem, where I will be the judge.”
 - Yet, again, Paul knew his rights as a Roman citizen, and he knew what was going on. Therefore, Paul appealed to Roman law: saying, “I am standing before Caesar’s tribunal where I ought to be tried.”
 - Despite Festus’ attempt to “get around the system” Paul knew what he was doing. He knew Festus’ proposal was not only unwise, but unlawful.
 - Paul knew that, as the governor of Judea Festus was Caesar’s representative. Therefore, Paul said, “YOU make the decision NOW...it is yours to make HERE, in Caesarea, the Roman seat of authority!”
- This section concludes with Luke stating, in **Verse 12**, “Then when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, ‘You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go..’”

- Here, Paul finally evokes one of the most significant rights of a Roman citizen – the right to appeal to the Emperor, that is the *prouocatio*.
 - This was also one of the most ancient rights of a Roman, dating all the way back to the formation of the Roman Republic, in 509, B.C.
 - It was typical when a convicted Roman appealed the finding of a magistrate; yet, it also occurred in cases like Paul’s where a verdict had yet to be rendered. In cases such as this one in Acts 24, the accused could appeal, stating “that the investigation be carried out in Rome and judgment passed by the emperor himself.”
 - The reason for Paul’s appeal was clear: first of all, Jesus Himself had promised that Paul would bear witness to Him in Rome. Yet, also, the situation in Judea was growing worse by the minute for Paul.
 - Certainly Paul’s assumption must have also been that in the great capital city of Rome, justice would be most impartial for his particular case.
 - It is rather ironic that during this period of time, **Nero was the emperor**. For those with even a basic knowledge of his legacy, this may come as a shock.
 - However, the first five years of his reign (54-59 A.D.) were viewed by many as a “little golden age.” Yet, in early 60’s all things changed. By 64-65 A.D., Emperor quickly became known as the most cruel, ruthless, and even psychopathic Roman ruler [possibly of all time].
 - Finally, when Paul made the appeal to Caesar, Festus had no choice but to carry it out.
 - Yet, given the circumstances, one can surmise that Festus was most likely relieved. He now had an excuse to withhold a ruling on Paul. He could, at least for the time being, satisfy the Jews in Jerusalem.
- However, in the midst of this highly political situation, the providential hand of God was clearly at work. In **Acts 23:11**, Jesus had promised Paul that he would go to Rome and bear witness to His cause there. Now, this promise is being fulfilled!