

Don't Put It Off!

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I want you to take your Bibles with me this evening and turn to the Acts of the Apostles chapter 24 and read from verse 24 until verse 27. I want to talk to you in the closing moments of our service tonight on the subject "Don't Put It Off!" Don't put it off. For some of you listening to my voice tonight, have put off the matter of salvation for many a day, many a week, many a month, many a year, and tonight the word of God is gonna come to your heart afresh. Don't putt off the matter of salvation because there's a danger and the danger is this, that when you keep putting off the matter of salvation, you keep putting off the freedom of God's conviction so that when the Gospel is preached, it runs off you like water of a duck and you greet the Gospel with a yawn, with indifference, and with total unconcern. Don't put it off.

Acts 24:24,

24 And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul [I want you to see that Felix is taking the initiative], and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. 25 And as he [Paul] reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this season; 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.

There are some things that men do better than women. That sounds rather chauvinistic, doesn't it? But don't stop listening for one of the things that men tend to do better than women is this, they procrastinate. Men tend to think anything worth doing is worth doing tomorrow, but the truth is that putting things off brings disastrous results.

A farm boy accidentally overturned his wagon of corn on the main road. The farmer who lived nearby came to investigate and bring a word of encouragement. He said, "Hey, Willis, forget about your troubles for a spell and come in and have dinner with us and then I'll help you get the wagon up the right way." "That's mighty nice of you," answered

Willis, "but I don't think Pa would like we to do that." "Come on in, son, and have dinner with us," the farmer insisted. "Well, okay," the boy finally agreed and after a hearty dinner, Willis thanked his host, he said, "I feel a lot better now but I just know Pa is going to be really upset." "Don't be foolish," exclaimed the neighbor, the farmer friend. He said, "By the way, where is your father?" "Under the wagon," said Willis.

I wonder tonight do you have problems with procrastination? Are you forever putting things off? Are you just the same in relation to the matter of salvation? Yes, you intend to get saved sometime but at the present time you're simply putting off the matter of salvation? You see, not everyone who listens to this message tonight will be saved. Now the Lord is not willing that any should perish. God has a great heart of compassion, a great heart of love. God is not willing that any should perish but some will not be saved because they're just out-and-out sinners, they don't really believe what I preach, they don't want to believe. They hate God. They hate Christ. They hate the Bible. They hate the Gospel. They don't intend to get saved. Some will not be saved because they're out-and-out sinners. Some will not be saved because they're self-righteous sinners. They think that the Gospel tonight that we preach is for the pervert, it's for the murderer. The Gospel that we preach, they say, is for the down-and-out but not for them. They live respectably. They live religiously. They live morally. They really don't see their need to be saved. But the largest category of people tonight will not be saved because they put it off and that's what you're doing, my friend, tonight, you're putting it off and convenient seasons seldom come.

That's exactly what Felix did. Here is the Apostle Paul, he's a prisoner in Caesarea. Those of you who have been to Israel have come up out of Tel Aviv and then you just go on up the coast and you eventually arrive at Caesarea, and when they take you to Caesarea, the Jewish guide will bring you down to the massive amphitheater and you'll have a chance of preaching down there and singing down there, and this is where they had taken the Apostle Paul. They had taken him to Caesarea and the Roman governor is a guy named Felix and Felix has got some religious inclination. It's not as though the Apostle Paul pounced on Felix, Felix actually sent for Paul and he said, "Paul, I want you to tell me about this person, Jesus Christ." And Paul did. He preached a Christ-centered, pertinent message to this man and the conviction of the Holy Ghost was so strong that Felix trembled like a leaf in a storm. He was right at the threshold of salvation, he was right at the door of salvation but then he did something, my friend, that you have continually done, he said, "Go thy way for this season. Go thy way for this time. When I have a more convenient season, I will call for thee." And so the devil trapped him and Felix is in hell tonight. He's in the caverns of the damned because he put it off.

I want you to come with me tonight into the presence of Felix, who with his wife Drusilla, listens to Paul concerning the faith in Christ and as we eavesdrop on this situation, I want you to notice, first of all, the argument that the preacher brought, and then secondly, I want you to see the movement that the Spirit wrought, and then thirdly, I want you to see the deferment that the devil sought. Like any good Baptist preacher, the Apostle Paul had three points. What was his topic? What was his subject? I believe that

Paul simply gave Felix, the governor, three reasons why he should trust the Lord Jesus as Savior.

Here's the first one, he said, "Felix, your past is unclean. You need Christ's righteousness upon you." No doubt he would remind Felix how high the standard of God was and how low he had fallen short of God's standard. You see, Antonius Felix was the first slave in the history of the Roman Empire to become the governor of a Roman province. That was something very prestigious and that was quite a distinction had he earned it, but that was not the case. You see, as a child, Felix with his brother Pallas had been freed by Antonia, the mother of Prince Claudius, a future Caesar, and as he grew up Pallas became a close friend of Claudius, so much so that when Claudius became the Roman Emperor, Pallas persuaded him to make Felix a government official in Palestine under the name of a guy called Cumanus, and when Cumanus was disposed, Felix obtained his office through shameful intrigue. Here's a man who's steeped in the blood of private murder, here's a man whose hands are stained with the blood of private murder, a man whose hands are stained with the blood of public massacre, he's an unjust man, he's an unrighteous man. Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that Felix repeatedly crucified believers of various uprisings. The Roman historian Caricus described him as a master of cruelty, a master of lust who exercised the power of a king with the spirit of a slave. And no doubt as Paul preached on righteousness, Felix glanced back on a past that was stained with cruelty, that was stained with injustice. How could such a man like he stand in the right before a holy God? My friends, did Paul not speak to him concerning the faith in Christ? "Felix, it's only through the cross that God can take something from you and that Christ can give something to you. God can take from you your sin. Christ can give to you his righteousness."

Can I ask you tonight how do you stand before God? Like Felix, is your past stained? Is it guilty? Maybe there's a skeleton in your cupboard tonight that haunts you. Maybe there's some sin that you've committed, some deed that you've done, some person that you've wronged tonight, there's something in your past tonight, something murky in your past, and from time to time that thing comes out of the skeleton, out of the cupboard and that skeleton haunts you, it unsettles you, it annoys you. One thing, my friend, tonight is absolutely certain: with Christ, you're a sinner. You've fallen short of the standard of God. You've broken his law. You've offended his mercy. If Paul was here tonight, he would be saying to you, "Your past is unclean. You need Christ's righteousness upon you."

The second thing he said to Felix was this, he said, "Your present is unchaste. You need Christ's Spirit within you." Therefore you receive the second point that the preacher brought before this person. He talked about self-control, he talked about temperance, and this was a thing that this guilty person knew nothing about. You see, Drusilla was his third wife and Felix was her second husband. Drusilla was the youngest daughter of Herod I, it's mentioned in the book of Acts 12, and she had originally married a guy by the name of Azizus, and he was king of Emesa, a small kingdom in Syria, but you know like so many wives today, she didn't find Azizus very exciting and so she won the affections of Felix through a magician and eventually she became Felix' elicited lover. And

this girl was beautiful. She was unusually beautiful. She was just barely about 20 years of age and as they sat before the great preacher, the Apostle Paul reminded the pair of them that they were living in sin. They were in bondage to sin and they were in bondage to Satan.

I wonder tonight does this story reflect your story? Have you violated your marriage vows? Have you been unfaithful? Is your marriage on the rocks tonight because of unbridled lust? Because of unchecked passion? Maybe you're here tonight and you're presently engaged in premarital sex or you're engaged in extra-marital sex. I don't know but God knows. One thing I know tonight is this, my friend: if you're without Christ, Satan has bound you. You're a captive to sin and a captive to Satan but Jesus Christ has been anointed to preach deliverance to the captives. Maybe you're saying, "Well, you know, preacher, I've tried to reform." Sure you have, but you know like many of us in our unsaved days, we tried to reform time and time again but, you see, we couldn't. We couldn't break the habit in our life. We couldn't break the practice of sin in our life, for it's only when God's Spirit comes to live within you that you've got the power, that you've got the resources to overcome daily sin in your life.

And as Paul stood before them, he reminded Felix of his past, his past was unclean. He needed the righteousness of Christ upon him. His present was unchaste. He needed Christ's Spirit within him. And then he looked into the eyes of Felix and he said, "Felix, your future is uncertain. You need Christ's promise to you." For he not only preached of righteousness and temperance, he preached, my dear friends, of judgment to come. He preached of that coming day of judgment. I mean, what were a few, short, fleeting years of sin and self-indulgence and self-gratification compared with an eternity of woe that awaited the unrepentant? And Felix and Drusilla, they may have been able to flout and manipulate, they may have been able to scorn or evade the judgment of men, but God was reminding them through his servant that they would never evade the judgment of God.

My friend, tonight may I remind you the Great White Throne Judgment lies ahead for you and I want to tell you tonight the Lord Jesus must be faced and faced he will be. And my friend, you'll face him either as Savior or as Judge and there's no escape tonight except by the way of the cross. You see, Felix may have his day and Drusilla may have her day, but your day is coming. The Bible says God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained. The Bible says God shall bring every work into judgment. The Bible says it is appointed unto men once to die but after this the judgment, and as death leaves men, so judgment will find them.

Wonder will that day be a day of reckoning for you? You thought, sir, with all your religious acts, with all your church-going, that that would be enough to commend you to God, that that would be enough to get you into God's heaven, and God will strip away all that self-righteousness and you'll stand before a holy God naked and you'll cry to the rocks and the mountains to hide you from the face of him who sits upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. It'll be a day of revelation for you because like a filthy rag, a rotten rag in the sight of a holy God.

Can you see the argument that the preacher brought? He's reasoning. He's basing statements on solid fact. He looked into the eyes of the great governor and he said, "Felix, Felix, your past is unclean. You need the righteousness of Christ upon you. Your present is unchaste. You need Christ's Spirit in you. And Felix, your future is uncertain. You need Christ's promise to you, the promise of the Lord Jesus when he said, 'I give unto my sheep eternal life and they shall never perish.'" Listen, if you've got Christ tonight, you've got life with a capital "A," you've got abundant life. You've got eternal life. You'll enter God's heaven and, my friend, you'll miss God's hell.

But you see what happened when Paul preached? There was not only the argument that the preacher brought but there was the movement that the Spirit wrought for as Paul preached, Felix trembled. The word means terrified. He saw fear in the governor's eyes. As he looked into the eyes of Felix, he saw fear and trepidation and apprehension, and the position is reversed now when Felix the judge becomes Felix the accused and Paul the prisoner becomes Paul the judge. He trembled.

You know, he was moved under the preaching of the word of God. You'll notice three very simple things about this movement. It's identified. It's identified, Felix trembled. I never read of Paul trembling before the preacher but I read of the governor trembling before the preacher. I never read of Paul trembling before this great governor but, oh, the power of God's word was striking home. You see, God's word to Felix was just like arrows striking home. He was convicted of his sin and proved guilty before a holy God. Felix was made to feel that the word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. Felix was made to feel that the word of God was like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces, and God took his word and he smote this man and he struck terror into this man so much so that he was like a leaf in the storm, he was trembling. As Paul preached on righteousness, Felix glanced back over a life that was stained with injustice and cruelty, and as Paul preached on self-control, Felix looked beside him at this beautiful young girl with whom he was living in sin and she reminded him of his unbridled lust, and as Paul preached on the judgment to come, Felix acknowledged the existence of a great God to whom he was accountable. Felix trembled.

Are you like him tonight? Wonder as you've sat under the sound of the word of God for years, for months, for weeks, have you ever trembled? Well, if you have, thank God for it. I wonder, my dear friend, tonight is there a tiny measure of concern in your soul about your sin? About your relationship with God? About where you're going to spend eternity?

This movement is identified and then this movement is qualified for only Felix trembled. She's beside him, she's sitting there, she's beautiful, she's equally as guilty, but only Felix trembled.

We had an old preacher in the Baptist college when I was there and he was very good at the outlines. He was a pastor from Dublin and he used to give us many wise words and he said, gave us this outline one day. He said, "Felix trembled. Only Felix trembled." And then he said, "Felix only trembled." You see, it's been well said there are no crowds in

God's eyes. God deals with single souls. Where has the Lord been just singling you out? When has the Lord been dealing with you personally, specifically? I wonder has God's finger been let on the plague spot of your life and maybe tonight you're concerned? Well, I'm here to encourage you, don't let Drusilla put you off. Don't let Drusilla put you off. I've seen men and women get anxious about getting saved and just a little pat on their hand by their husband, by their wife, either friend, puts them off. I tell you generally speaking, had Drusilla not been there, it might have been so different.

Is that what's putting you off tonight? Are you a man at all? Are you afraid of what Drusilla might say? Are you afraid of what the wife would say? Are you afraid of what the husband, how he would respond? Are you afraid about the boys in the office tomorrow morning? Listen, if God's dealing with you tonight, if God's Spirit is striving with you tonight, let no one, let nothing keep you from Christ.

And this movement is identified, this movement is qualified, and then this movement is specified for only Felix trembled. He was moved but he wasn't mastered. He trembled before the Lord but he never trusted the Lord. Do you know two tragedies tonight are possible for every soul in this gathering in Lurgan Baptist Church tonight. The possibility, the first tragedy is the possibility of never trembling, of never coming face-to-face with one's personal sin before God. The second tragedy is this, the tragedy of disregarding such Spirit-produced trembling for the one whom God has brought to fear for his soul must never turn away.

I wonder where you are tonight in the chain of events. Like Felix have you heard the Gospel? Like Felix have you been moved? Maybe you're here tonight and you've been thinking about your sinful lifestyle, I wonder have you thought about the day of judgment? I wonder if you've thought about the day when you'll stand before the Great White Throne Judgment and the books will be opened and whosoever was not found in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire? I wonder if you've ever thought about the day of judgment? I wonder have you ever thought about the love of God? I wonder have you ever thought about the Christ of Calvary, the cross where the Lord Jesus Christ laid down his life a ransom for many? I wonder tonight if you're thinking about these things?

My friend, I plead with you, I beg with you tonight, don't put it off for I notice here not only the argument that the preacher brought and the movement that the Spirit wrought, but look at the deferment that the devil sought. For Felix it was a moment of decision, eternity hung in the balance but he let the moment pass. "Some other time, preacher. Some other time."

Let me say two simple things to you in closing. They're very simple. Tomorrow is always the device of the devil. Today is always the advice of the Lord. Tomorrow is always the device of the devil, "Go thy way for this time." I wonder is that what you've said? I wonder is that what you're saying?

It happened in the year 1962. It was a hotel in Seattle, the United States of America. A famous evangelist was in bed, he was fast asleep, and all of a sudden he awoke and his

mind was in a terrible state. He was thinking about the famous star, Marilyn Monroe. He was terribly burdened about that girl's soul. She was living so much in sin and all the pressures of show business and fame were upon her. And first thing in the morning, he got up and he said to his advisors, he said, "Listen, God has burdened my soul about this girl. We've got to contact her. I've got to speak to this woman about her soul and about Christ." And so his advisors, they got on the phone and they got in touch with her publicity officers and they got in touch with some of her advisors and they said, "Well, we're sorry. We know who this preacher is. We know that he's known throughout the world but we're sorry. The first time that Marilyn Monroe can speak to him is in two weeks. That's the earliest date that we can give to you." In two weeks' time, the headline hit the world, "Marilyn Monroe commits suicide." Two weeks was too long.

For some of you here in this Gospel service tonight, two days might be too long. Two hours might be too long. Two minutes might be too long. "When I have a convenient season, I'll call for you." You've heard it, haven't you? I've heard it countless times, "Don't call us, we'll call you." My friend, do you know realize tonight that procrastination is the thief of time, it's the grave of opportunity, it's the recruiting sergeant for hell? Tomorrow. Tomorrow. Tomorrow. It's always the device of the devil.

A pastor was determined to preach on the subject on the urgency of God's salvation and he went into the study and he began to think and as he was in the study, he began to think and he began to dream and he dreamed that he was carried into hell and sat down in the midst of a conclave of lost spirits, and there they were all gathered together and they were gathered together for one purpose, to devise means to damn the souls of men. And one of those lost spirits stood up and said, "I'll go to earth and I'll tell men that the Bible is just full of myths, it's just a fable, it's just something fictitious." And they said, "Sit down, they'll never believe you." And another lost spirit stood up and said, "Well, I'll tell men that there is no God, there's no heaven, there's no hell, there's no Christ, there's no Savior, there's no Calvary." They said, "Sit down, they'll never believe you." One lost spirit stood to his feet and he said, "Let me go and I'll tell men and women that there is a God and that there is a Christ and that there is a cross, and I'll tell them there's a heaven, yes, and I'll tell them that there's a hell, but I will tell them that there's no hurry. Tomorrow will do, it will be even as today." And they sent him.

Dear unsaved friend tonight, will you listen to me for a moment? There are multitudes in hell this evening and they're there because like Felix they put it off. And some of you have heard the Gospel for years and months and weeks, and you're still putting it off. Are you going to put it off again tonight? Are you going to let the devil deceive you? Destroy you? Damn you? Tomorrow. Tomorrow Franz Schubert would finish his symphony, but Schubert's symphony never came and he left undone his unfinished symphony. "Tomorrow we shall," wrote Sir Walter Scott in his diary, but this last sentence of one of Scotland's greatest writers was never completed and lovers of literature have wondered in their mind what Scott intended to do on the morrow. My friends, of all things uncertain, undependable, none is more uncertain or more undependable than tomorrow.

Denis Lyle might not be here tomorrow, but neither might Steven Curry and neither might you because death could come to your door tonight and you would be in eternity and, my friend, if without Christ, you would be in the flames of hell forever. Tomorrow, it's always a device of the devil. Today, it's always the advice of the Lord. The Bible says today, unsaved friend, if you hear his voice, harden not your heart. The Bible says now is the accepted time and now is the day of salvation. Do you know, my dear friend, why you must come to the Lord Jesus now? Because the more you put this matter of salvation off, the harder your heart becomes until the best of Gospel preaching runs off you like water off a duck and you're damned while you live.

You know, that's what happened to Felix. He put off the matter of salvation and he put out the flame of conviction. Oh, he spoke to Paul, he spoke to Paul for the next two years, but he was more concerned about receiving a bribe from Paul than eternal life from the Savior and there was no more trembling and there was no more concern and there was no more conviction.

D. L. Moody, the great American evangelist, spoke about a young lad in his Sunday school class and he spoke to this young fellow about trusting Christ, and the young man said, "I'm heading West. I'm going where the jobs are, where the prospects are, where the careers are. But when I get there and settled into a business, I'll trust Christ then." Some time later, Moody met him in town and he tapped him on the shoulder and he said, "Sir, have you trusted Christ yet?" He said, "No, but I'm ready to go. I've packed my bags. I'm getting the train in the morning. I'm heading West and when I get settled down in the West, I'll do it then." Moody heard a few weeks later that this young man had taken seriously ill. He went to his bedside and he was under the fever and he knelt down and he said, "Son, will you trust Christ now?" And a different tone of voice came from the young man as he said, "Leave me alone, Mr. Moody. I don't want to hear the Gospel again." And Moody said that when he said that, he felt that as if something snapped in his soul like the breaking of a string and he knew that something had happened. Sometime later, Moody was in bed and there was a knock at his door and they couldn't awaken him and they began to throw pebbles up at Moody's window, and he opened the window and he looked down and there was a young woman and she was crying and she said, "Mr. Moody, Mr. Moody, he's sick! He's sick! He's dying!" And Moody looked down and he said, "I'm sorry, my dear. Your husband has made his final decision." "But Mr. Moody, you'll have to come and speak to him about his soul! Come and pray with him again! Mr. Moody, give him another chance!" So D. L. Moody dressed himself and he went to that young man's house and he walked up those stairs and as he walked across the landing to the open door of his bedroom, all he could hear was the cry of a whining man and a dying man. Too late. Too late. Too late.

My friend, tonight if I could carry you over I would. I'm looking down into some of your faces tonight and there's not a day goes by that I don't bring you before the throne of grace but you're putting it off tonight again and one day that'll be too late and you'll be out into hell for all eternity. God's saying to you something very simple tonight, "Don't put it off. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near."

Let's pray. Let's just take that moment or two of quietness. I wonder is God speaking to you tonight? Maybe you're a young person, young man, young woman. Maybe you're middle-aged tonight. Maybe, friend, tonight you're near the end of life's journey. You've just a few more days and then you'll be in the great eternity. Don't put it off. Turn to Christ tonight. I wonder will you do that? I wonder will you say, "Preacher, I've been putting it off too long. Tonight's the night. I want to get saved." I wonder in the quietness of these moments, ere we leave this building, will you pray a simple prayer, the sinner's prayer? Will you pray with me tonight just in the quietness of your own heart, "Lord Jesus, I am a sinner but I thank you tonight that you love me and shed your blood for me at Calvary. Tonight, now, I turn from my sin and trust you as my Savior." Will you make that prayer yours tonight? Just will you say it? Will you come to the Savior now?

If you prayed that prayer tonight, I'd love to know. I'll be standing at the door as you leave. Just say, "Denis, I prayed the prayer." My friend, we'll be able to give you something that will help you, encourage you, and we'll pray for you. Maybe you would like to take that step tonight. Maybe you felt that you've sinned away your day of grace and God has spoken it to you tonight again and you felt the tug in your soul. Well, my friend, don't put it off. I would stay to any hour of the night if only we could help you find the Savior.

Father, I pray tonight that you would give deciding grace to those who know not the Lord Jesus. Grant tonight they might call upon you for mercy. For Christ's sake. Amen.