

Acts 24: 1-27; “I Cheerfully Answer for Myself”, Sermon # 85 in the Series –
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on October 16th, 2022, in the Morning Worship Service.

Today I would like to talk to you about Paul’s defense before Felix, and what we can learn from it. What we can learn from it can be stated by means of 3 observations on the way that these 3 men of our text, Tertullus, Paul, and Felix answered for themselves in relation to Paul’s preaching. Their own words will tell us much about their character. These observations will be of help to us in our learning how we should conduct ourselves before those who expect us to give an account of ourselves, in light of the gospel that we preach. They will also help us to understand how important it is for us to believe in God’s sovereignty, Christ’s leading us, and His opening the door for us to speak of Him and His word to others around us.

1st of all – Let us observe that Tertullus answer to Paul’s preaching was to flatter Felix and to lie about Paul. (verses 1-9)

We find here, that the apostle Paul had been placed in custody in Herod’s Praetorium in Caesarea. This was a judgment hall of Herod’s, and it was no doubt the chamber hall of all the judges of Caesarea. Here Paul had been detained, probably in a prison cell, or in a room where the soldiers could keep an eye on him. He was waiting for his accusers to come from Jerusalem to make their case before the governor, against him. What was he thinking about? I think that he was thinking about his defense; how he would answer before the governor. He must faithfully represent Christ and His gospel.

Ananias and the elders who came with him on this occasion, were not at all acting like righteous men in what they were doing. They wanted to save their supposedly good reputations and their place as leaders in the Jewish church. They wanted to save the Jewish church from the likes of Paul. The way that they wanted to do this was by their bringing this orator Tertullus with them to represent them before Felix. They actually wanted Tertullus to represent them through a misrepresentation of the truth. Seems like a contradiction of terms. And so it was – No lie is of the truth. These men were living a lie in the sight of God and men, and yet they themselves did not think so.

The motive for Tertullus, and Ananias, and the men that were with him, bringing these complaints and accusations to Felix was that they really wanted to see Paul punished and jailed if they could. At all costs, they wanted to stop Paul from His being able to preach Jesus, for they felt that it was his preaching of Christ which was undermining their whole religion. Their whole religion was their supposed worship of God by ceremonial observances, and going about to establish their own righteousness in relation to God’s law. Their holding to this was what accounted for the cover up, or their non-recognition of their many secret sins in their hearts. But here at this point, because of their frustration in trying to deal with Paul, they enlisted Tertullus to help them by his misrepresenting the truth concerning Paul’s goodwill towards their nation.

Let us see how Tertullus goes about to do this. His speech is called by Luke – “his accusation” of Paul. He begins with flattering Governor Felix. In verse 2 he says to Felix – “Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.” Wow, you can imagine how pleasing it was to Felix to hear himself talked about in this way? In the King James the word “foresight” is translated – “providence”. By Felix’s wise preserving and governing of that whole area, they had enjoyed great peace and prosperity. When Tertullus said this, he hoped that

he could sway Felix to believe all of the negative things that he would say in the next few moments, about Paul.

With his high commendations of the governor's service, he places Felix practically on the same level as God, as though he has God-like qualities to his leadership. In every way, he says, Felix has blessed them. Flattery is defined in Webster's 1828 Dictionary as – "False praise; commendation bestowed for the purpose of gaining favor and influence, or to accomplish some purpose." "Direct flattery consists in praising a person himself; indirect flattery consists in praising a person through his works or his connections." We see in Tertullus' words, both; flattery of Felix's person, and also his works. His words buttered Felix up, and they fed his pride. How easy it would be, now, Tertullus thought, having buttered Felix up, to speak evil of Paul in contrast.

With some people it is the sign of a great ability if you can flatter with your lips. Flatterers will try to get what they want from you in this way. But when we see it taking place, we ought to see for what it is, something that God will most certainly judge. And we ought to pray about it in the same way that David did in Psalm 12. "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceases!" "For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men." "They speak idly everyone with his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak." "May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaks proud things, who have said, 'With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?'"

And so, here, following his flattery of Felix, we find that Tertullus goes on to deprecate Paul and to destroy his character and reputation. He says in verse 4 – "Not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, (by your graciousness, it says in the margin) a few words from us." He is representing Anaias now, and the other elders who were there, when he says these things. "For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes." Notice that he will not even name Paul by name; he thinks that badly of him. Neither will he even name the name of Christ our Lord, but calls Paul a ringleader of His sect – the Nazarenes.

Guilt by association is a very great thing in some people's eyes. In these men's minds anyone associated with Christ was a deceived person. Paul, Tertullus claimed, was Christ's ringleader in this sect of deceived Jews. If Paul preached Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of the world, these men would let it be known that they believed that Christianity was a sect. Tertullus was saying that this sect was being led by a man who was greatly despised by the Jews. Yes, Paul was a Jew, but according to Tertullus he was a plague, and a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world.

He makes Paul out to be a very troublesome person. He will paint him in the worst possible colors. And all the while, he is covering up the fact that these men who are bringing the charges are guilty of lying, conspiracy to commit murder, as well as being guilty in the sight of God, of not receiving His own Son as their Messiah, the Savior, and their Lord. Wicked men are like this. They are often guilty of the same sins and crimes which they accuse others of. And they will cover up their guilt by misrepresenting the truth to others so that they can remain in positions of ecclesiastical or political power, or save their supposedly good reputation.

Would anyone who knows the true and Living God, really deliberately go about to live this way? No, they would not. Not for any length of time, because they know that in heaven, there is a God who sees. His eyes are in every place, watching the evil and the good. Psalm 12, verse 5 says – "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now I will arise, says the Lord; I will set him in the safety for which he yearns." Let us remember that God will judge all liars.

Tertullus then went on to lie about the chief captain Lysias who he said that he came upon them, the Jews, and took Paul away out of their hands, with great violence. It was they, the Jews, who were full of violence, to the point of wanting to kill Paul. Lysias was merely trying to prevent them from killing Paul. Tertullus said that if Felix talked to him, he would find the accusations which they were bringing were true. Another lie. And all the Jews that were with him were going along with this, and saying that these things were so. How we should thank God, my brethren, that we have a God who sees the truth perfectly, and will reward all men according to their works. **2nd – I want you to see that Paul was be able to cheerfully answer for himself for his conduct before the Jews and Felix because he had a clear conscience.**

Verses 10- say – “Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: ‘Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself, because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship.’ “And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city.” “Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.” “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.” “I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.”

“This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.” “Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult.” They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me. Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, ‘Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.’”

So Paul was once again was finding out the greatness of Christ’s providential leading of him into these various situations in which he could bear witness to His Lord. Christ had told him before all these things got moving – Be of good cheer, Paul. Now he himself says to Felix – I do the more cheerfully answer for myself. In his speech, he commends himself to the judgment of Felix, knowing that Felix had for many years been a judge of that nation. He does not flatter Felix, but you will notice that he was submitting himself to him as one who was governing by the appointment of God.

Paul says in Romans 13, verse 1 – “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.” “For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.” And so, since he knew that this was true, Paul knew that he did not need to resist Felix’s authority, but to trust that Felix would see, through his speech to him, that he was speaking the truth about the situation that he was in. This situation, he would explain, and he would hope to win Felix to the truth. The governor gave Paul permission to speak and present his own case. And so he does. He says to Felix – You may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship and they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city.” “Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.” Paul well proved his innocence in relation to the charges.

But then he goes on to set forth His faith in God and Christ. “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all the things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.” So Paul is actually saying that he worshiped God through Christ. And he also confessed his belief in the inerrancy of the Scriptures.

This is what you and should do too. If we are brought before the authorities because we have been preaching or sharing the truth about Christ, let us not be ashamed to tell people of our worship of God through Christ. Let us cheerfully answer them, knowing that God is leading us through this life and into the thousand situations where we will be able to bear witness to His truth. Yes, let us defend ourselves from the charge of wrongdoing, but let us not be ashamed of any Biblical doctrine or truth either. Paul says – I have a hope in God, which these Jews themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the just and the unjust.

This, my brethren, is how we can attempt to win others to Christ around us. Let us begin with the fact that God is every man's judge. Every sincerely religious man's hope is that God is a righteous Judge who will not be partial to any man. It is on that basis that some persons who do not believe in Christ, think that they shall go to heaven. They believe that they are pretty good people and they believe that God rewards the righteous. You and I must attempt to find that common ground of understanding. Because at some point, when we do, we will be able to preach the absolute necessity of faith in Christ to those who want to know the truth, and be set free from a works-righteousness religion.

Let us always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men and perhaps we may indeed be able to win them. We must be most careful not to offend God by committing any sins, either in our heart or in our actions. And we must strive to do His will according to His revealed word, at every point in our experience, letting our conscience bear witness to our right motives and intentions in regard to all that we say and do. This will mean that we will try to be careful to live in such a way that we will not give offence to man or be a stumbling block to them.

And even though we realize that in many ways we may fall short of perfection in these things, let us still believe that if we have a good conscience in relation to our decisions and our behavior, attempting to live consistent with God's will, according to His word, it will be the case that we will be able to give a good account of ourselves at the time of the resurrection of the dead and the Judgment of the world. We will hear the "well done, good and faithful servant" from the lips of our Lord.

3rd – I want you to see that Felix was unable to respond positively in real faith to Paul's preaching of Christ because of his vacillation.

Verse 22 – "But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of the Way, he adjourned the proceedings and said, 'When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case.'" "So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him. And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ." "Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, 'Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.'" "Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him." "Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him." "But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound."

Let's think about how Felix was receiving Paul's words. He was thinking about them, but he was vacillating about receiving them, because he was uncertain. Vacillation is indecision which is related to procrastination. Procrastination is putting things off until later, which should be taken care of, now, in your life. In this case it was Felix's going back and forth in his mind about the truth of the gospel which Paul preached. Vacillation is a very dangerous thing when it comes to following Christ. Felix had heard Paul and he knew something of the Way of truth now, he knew

that he eventually wanted to hear more. And so he deferred making a decision on what was to be done with Paul until Lysias the commander would come down, and then he would make a decision after he talked the matter over with him. To receive the gospel, you must receive the one who preaches the gospel. Felix was vacillating about Paul and the gospel.

It indicates something about the condition of his spiritual heart and soul. Yes, he wanted to hear more about faith in Christ. That was a good thing. And he was treating Paul well during Paul's time of imprisonment. He told the centurion not to forbid any of Paul's friends to provide for him, or visit him. That also was good. But why didn't he ask Paul to preach to him the full gospel concerning Christ, right then and there, from the start? It was because in his mind he was going back and forth trying to determine on his own if these things could possibly be true.

Could he hold on to his present life? Could he hold on to his position in government? It is the most dangerous thing that a person can ever do, when they first begin to hear the gospel; that is, to pull back. It indicates something about how that person is viewing the whole matter of salvation. Is it simply a matter of curiosity? Is it something to be pondered as a possibility? Will God really judge me for my sins? What is the truth? Well we see here that Felix vacillated, and he was indecisive about Christ at that point.

But it says in verse 24 that after some days, he came back, and this time with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. At that time he sent for Paul, and he heard him concerning the faith in Christ. What a blessed opportunity this was for Paul to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to him. But it was during that time when Paul was preaching about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, that Felix became afraid, and he told Paul to go away for now; that he would call for him when he had a convenient time. You see how vacillating he was. And it was all because he wanted to determine everything concerning Paul and the truth of the gospel that he preached, by his leaning on his own understanding.

He was not receiving the word with a view to real repentance and faith in Christ. He would think to himself about the way that he lived, the way that he viewed life, and he knew that he could not change, at least at that time. He also hoped that money would be given to him by Paul so that he would let him go free. And so he sent for Paul more often during that time to see if this might be something that Paul would think about doing. But since Paul gave him no indication of this, he still held off giving his life to Christ. There is no indication that either he or Druscilla ever became Christians.

Let me close by saying this. Do not be vacillating about coming to faith in Christ. It is the greatest question that you will ever answer: Will I take Christ to be my Savior, and receive the gift of salvation and eternal life? Will I repent of my sins and be willing to leave the world behind where I need to? May no one here today miss out on finding eternal life because you were too vacillating to be decisive, and come to the point where you would say – Without Christ I will perish. With Christ, I will find forgiveness, a righteousness better than my own, and grace to transform me into a person who will be pleasing to God. That is the most important thing.