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18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834  
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## Acts 24:24-27 “The Danger in Delay”

Intro. Recently we have been learning about the events relating to Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem. I shared with you in our last message that Paul was taken away from Jerusalem for his own protection and sent to Caesarea, the main base of operations for the Romans in that Province. There he was held until his accusers could come down from Jerusalem. The governor had to determine if there was a legal basis for continuing to hold Paul in prison. So in chapter 24 we read of the account of a hearing before Felix,<sup>1</sup> the governor of Judea concerning Paul.

The Jews hired a fancy lawyer named Tertullus to bring charges against Paul. He started out by saying nice things about Felix, trying to win him over. He accused Paul of being a troublemaker and trying to desecrate the temple. Of course, these charges were false, and Paul presented a good case affirming that he was not causing trouble or stirring up a crowd. He was simply doing good, bringing an offering to the poor saints of Jerusalem, and worshipping God. He was also accused of being a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes (v.5). Tertullus called the Christian faith a sect, or heresy, trying to separate Christianity from Judaism, which was a legal religion in the Roman Empire. But in vv.14ff Paul affirmed that his faith was consistent with the teaching of the Old Testament, which is the basis of the Jewish religion.

This morning we are going to focus our attention upon the response of Felix to what was probably a private meeting with Paul. We read in v.22 that Felix was more knowledgeable concerning “the way.” He knew something of the teachings of the Christian faith. He knew that it was commonly reported that Christ had risen from the dead. He knew how the gospel was spreading throughout that part of the world. I believe that in his heart, he knew that Paul was not guilty of any crime. But he did not set him free. Like a typical politician, he didn’t want to make the Jewish leaders too upset at him. So he kept putting off a decision on this matter. In the meantime, we read in v.24 that Felix sent for Paul, supposedly because he wanted to hear more about the Christian faith. However, v.26 gives another motive for wanting a private audience with Paul that we will discuss later. But be that as it may, Paul saw this as a great opportunity to share the gospel with the governor and his wife Drusilla. Imagine what could have happened if the governor had become a Christian! Here we see that God is concerned with the conversion of all people, including the rich and powerful. May we follow Paul’s example and look for opportunities to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with all people, whether great or small.

This morning, I want us to learn from Paul’s message, and especially let us take heed from the response that Felix gave. After all, many people have heard the gospel, but too few respond to the Gospel in the right way. I hope to challenge you this morning to respond to the Gospel message correctly. When the Spirit of God takes the Word of God and convicts your heart about how you have been living, will you give heed to the Spirit? Will you allow God to change your beliefs and conduct?

Now before anyone can respond to the Gospel, someone must share it, and the recipient needs to listen. We see that illustrated in my text of Scripture. So the first point I want to make from our text is this:

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<sup>1</sup> His full name was Marcus Antonius Felix. He was governor from 52-60 A.D. He followed Ventidius Cumanus.

## I. YOU NEED TO HEAR THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

Romans 10:17 says, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” So notice in v.24 that Felix the governor “sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.” Since “faith” has the definite article, he was not talking about personal faith, but *the* Christian faith, the Gospel that we believe. So Paul took the opportunity to explain the Gospel. He explained why Jesus was the Messiah and Savior of the world. He probably told of His miracles. He no doubt spoke of His sacrificial death on the cross and His resurrection on the third day. He explained how to become a Christian by faith in Jesus Christ. But as we shall see, he also explained the requirement of repentance of sin. Felix certainly needed to repent. He was notorious for his corrupt political life, and his private life was no better. He was a scheming politician who often stooped to the very lowest of methods in order to bring about his own purpose.

Paul did not soft-peddle the gospel because he was speaking to the governor. Paul knew the kind of man he was speaking to, and he knew that Felix had the authority to release him, and yet Paul was bold in witnessing to Him. What would you or I do if we were in a similar position?

Notice his gospel approach to the governor. You see, before a person will repent and be saved, he must be convicted of his sin, and become sorrowful about his sin. A person will not believe in Christ until they sense a need to do so. So according to v.25 Paul also spoke to him about 3 things in particular. What we read here is similar to what Jesus said of the work of the Holy Spirit in John 16:8, “He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” First, you need to hear about the fact that:

A. You Need Righteousness - Paul had much to say about this in his preaching and his writings. In v.24 notice that “he reasoned about righteousness....” It seems that too many preachers today are silent about righteousness, but Paul was not. No doubt Paul spoke about:

1. God’s Righteousness - I Jn. 1:5 says, “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” Hab. 1:13 says, “You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness.....” God is absolutely and completely righteous. He is righteous, and by nature He must demand righteousness of us. This is His absolute standard. Jesus said in Mt. 5:48, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” How well are you living up to God’s standard of righteousness? Well consider next of all:

2. Man’s Righteousness Falls Short - No matter how good you are, you lack the righteousness that God demands. Rom. 3:10 says, “There is none righteous, no not one.” Romans 3:23 says, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

This was certainly true of Felix. It should not have been hard for him to see his own lack of righteousness. There was evidence of political corruption. He would violently deal with his political opponents.

You may feel like you are a pretty good person compared to other people, but next to Jesus Christ you certainly lack righteousness. So when Paul reasoned of righteousness, Felix must have become convicted of the fact that he was very lacking in the righteousness of God.

Even though we lack righteousness, our situation is not hopeless. For notice also:

3. God Gives Righteousness - Even in the Old Testament we read that we can receive the righteousness of God. In Gen. 15:6 we read, “And Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (quoted by Paul in Rom. 4:3). Isa. 1:18 says, “‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ Says the LORD, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white

as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.” It is absolutely impossible for you to cleanse yourself; to wash out the stains of sin. But God can!

I believe that Paul also talked about the fact that:

B. Sinners Lack Self-control - God has an absolute standard of conduct, and you have to exercise self-control to live a righteous life. Self-control is simply a matter of controlling the passions and desires that lead to sinful actions. For example, some people need to learn how to control their anger. Eph. 4:26 says, “Be angry, and do not sin...” If you don’t control your anger you will do or say something that is sinful. Many need to control their sexual desires. You must not satisfy that desire outside of your own marriage. Some people need self-control in the area of eating. If you fill you plate for the third time you are *not* exercising self-control. Some people need more self-control when it comes to greed, which results in over-spending, theft, or in the case of Felix, accepting bribes (v.26a). Other people need to exercise self-control over the tongue. Benjamin Franklin said, “The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing in the right place, but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.”<sup>2</sup> The tongue may be the most difficult aspect of our being to exercise self-control over, for James 3:8 says, “no man can tame the tongue.” So we need to exercise discipline over our impulses and desires, or we will surely sin. Otherwise, we will surely sin.

Self-control is a virtue that is too absent from modern discourse. You hear very little about it. Instead of teaching young people the virtue of self-control, many people want to pass out birth-control! What our society needs is a return to the virtue of self-control. It is not even taught in the home anymore. Kids act like brats and their own parents defend it by saying they are just expressing themselves!

No doubt Paul exposed Felix’s lack of self-control. Like many people in high office, he felt little need to deny himself of any lust that he had. He did not exercise much restraint upon his lust for Drusilla. She was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I. Felix first saw her when she was only 15 and the wife of the king of Emesa, a province in Syria. She is reported to have been a real beauty. When she was still only 16, Felix, with the help of an occultic magician, persuaded her to leave her husband and marry him. In his lust, he stole another man’s wife! Felix already had been married twice. Instead of living in self-control, he was controlled by evil lust.

Do you have self-control? If not, you need to look to God. Just as righteousness is provided by God, so also is self-control. Gal. 5:23 indicates that one of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control. The Holy Spirit will help you control your sinful impulses. Gal. 5:16 says, “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

Finally, the gospel includes the fact that:

C. Sinners Face the Judgment to Come - When man doesn’t conform to God’s standard, judgment will come. God would not be righteous if He did not punish sin. Well Felix had committed many crimes against God and justice. His court reeked with blood and debauchery. People in power may feel that they can do anything they like with impunity. But Acts 17:31 says that God “has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

Now there are two points I want to make about the judgment of God. First:

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<sup>2</sup> Bulletin Inserts, *Pulpit Helps* (Chattanooga: AMB Publishers) [Illus.#C-974].

1. God's Judgment Is Righteous - You will not be falsely charged. If your sin is judged, you can be sure that God is right in judging you. After all, God is omniscient. He knows everything you have done. Not one sin will escape His notice.

Freedom fighter Marquis de Lafayette reported that he was once shut up in a little room in a gloomy prison for a great while. In the door of his little cell was a very small hole cut. At that hole, a soldier was placed day and night to watch him. All he could see was the soldier's eye; but that eye was always there. Day and night, every moment when he looked up he always saw that eye. Oh, he said, it was dreadful! There was no escape, no hiding: when he lay down and when he rose up, that eye was watching him.

Well I want you to know that the eye of God is always upon you. That is a comfort for the saint, but it brings no comfort to the sinner. God knows what you have done. Every sin you have committed is recorded in the books in heaven. You can't fool Him. You can't hide your sin from God. So there will not only be a righteous judgment, but also:

2. God's Judgment Is Certain - In v.25 the words "to come" are from *mellontos*, "is about to come." It conveys the idea of expectancy regarding something that is about to take place. Paul pressed upon Felix that judgment was sure to come, and he needed to get right with God while there was still opportunity. Indeed, Heb. 9:27 says, "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." Yet without Christ, Heb. 10:31 says, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Why is that? The same biblical author says that God is "a consuming fire" (12:29).

There is a lesson here concerning how we are to share the gospel. We must share it in such a way that it convicts those who hear it. We must share the bad news along with the good news. The gospel is simply this: Tell a man what God's standard is, show him that he is not living up to it, and tell him that he will be judged if he doesn't live up to it. Then tell him that since he can't live up to it, Jesus Christ took his sin, paid his penalty of judgment, and offers him His righteousness by faith.

Now let's move on to my second point. When you hear the Gospel:

## II. YOU SHOULD BE CONVICTED OF YOUR SIN

As Felix and his wife listened, they quickly began to feel uncomfortable. A strange fear began to creep into the heart of Felix. V.25 says that he was "afraid." The Greek word (*emphobos*) is an emphatic form of the Greek word for "fear." Felix shuddered at the thought of standing before the judgment bar of God. The Holy Spirit convicted Felix so much that he began to shake and tremble. Indeed, the preaching of righteousness and judgment is intended to awaken the conscience to a sense of failure, insufficiency, and sin, and even fear of what could happen if we do nothing with our sin.

Do you remember when you felt convicted of your sin? Well the ultimate goal of such fear in our hearts is our salvation, not our harm. The awakened conscience is just like the sense of pain in the physical world; it has a work to do and a mission to perform. Thank God for pain! It warns us of sickness that we might seek a cure. It helps to prevent injury and death. Fear and conviction is not meant to last; it is of no use in itself. It is only an impelling motive that leads us to look to the Savior. And so it did for the Philippian jailer. He accepted Christ after he came to Paul with fear and trembling. The fact is, people are not going to be saved until they first become painfully aware of the fact that they *need* to be saved because God is righteous and they are sinners.

But what about Felix? For him, it was the watershed of his life that he had come to, the crisis of his fate. Everything depended on the next five minutes. Would he yield? No! For after a moment's hesitation, he says in the last of v.25, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." And so this leads to my third point:

### III. DON'T PUT OFF A DECISION FOR CHRIST

As we see in the last of v.25, Felix put off a decision about Christ. He yielded to a natural tendency to postpone a decision on a disagreeable subject. His one thought was to get rid of Paul and his disturbing message for the present. But he does not wish to shut the door altogether. He felt convicted about his sin, but he dealt with it by postponing a decision. I suppose that soothed his conscience, by persuading himself that he was do something about the gospel later.

Why didn't he accept the forgiveness offered by God? I believe there were two main reasons: First, it was simply a matter of not wanting to face his many sins and give them up. To him, the cost of following Christ was too high. He thought that he could lose his position as governor if he became a Christian. Secondly, he supposed that there was plenty of time to make a decision for Christ. Even so, people still imagine, "When I am old it will be time enough; after I have had my fling, after I have enjoyed the things of the world, then as an old man or woman I will turn to Christ." So Felix, while interested, shrank from taking the step of full allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ.

But when will that "convenient time" ever come? When will it ever be easier to repent of your sins, to confess your need, to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, than it is now? There is no good reason for delay. Don't think that you can wait to think about God when you're sick, or when the shadows of the grave begin to fall cold and damp on your path. Now is the time to get right with God. Though you might have an opportunity to be saved at a later date, it is too big of a gamble. Prov. 27:1 says, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth." Young people think they are invincible, that death is far off. Yet there have been far too many examples of the young dying as well. No small number have been taken through drug and alcohol abuse and by car wrecks. Even if you do get more opportunities, you may never again get the same sense of conviction as you have now. In fact, when someone continues to resist, it becomes harder and harder for him to change. One of Satan's most effective strategies is to get people to postpone a decision about Christ. W. Clarkson said, "If vice has slain its thousands, and pride its thousands, surely procrastination has slain its tens of thousands." So many people never come to Christ simply because they postpone a decision until another day.

Archias, a supreme magistrate of Thebes, was celebrating at a feast when a courier ran in great haste to present him with important letters. Archias said, "Tomorrow," and he laughed and stuffed the letter under his couch. That same night conspirators attacked and slaughtered everyone in the palace. Don't put off until tomorrow what is urgent business.

So don't make the mistake that Felix made. If God convicts you of your sin and need for Christ, be saved today. Don't put it off. Heb. 2:3 says, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation?" Don't neglect something as important as your eternal salvation.

Now I want to conclude this message with a warning:

#### IV. WHEN YOU POSTPONE A DECISION, CHRIST IS OFTEN REJECTED

We see evidence of this in v.26, where we read, “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.” Clearly in the days that followed, Felix did not repent. As we shall see, he’s still the same old Felix, a corrupt politician! He shows us what can happen when a person postpones a decision about Christ.

A. Your Conscience May Become Hardened - Here we see that his heart did not become softer toward God. He did send and hear from Paul at a later time, but not to become a Christian. I believe that he never again had that same sense of conviction. He did not repent of his sin. Instead, he manifested his sin. He continued to be a corrupt politician who was open to bribery. Felix had the impression that Paul was in a position to pay a handsome bribe for his release. Paul brought a large amount of money to Jerusalem from believers, and Felix figured that Paul could come up with much money to get himself out of jail. Or he assumed that Paul had many friends, and they could come up with money to buy his way out. But he did not know Paul well enough, for Paul would not have resorted to bribery to win his release. He rejected Paul’s message, and greed captivated this man all the more. He continued in sin by trying to get a bribe out of Paul. So I believe every time he spurned the voice of God, his conscience grew harder, his spirit more indifferent.

Even so, the more you reject Christ, the harder your heart becomes. I believe that Felix knew that Paul was innocent and did not deserve to be in jail. So he not only rejected the gospel, but according to the last of v.27, he allowed Paul to stay in jail for two years without being convicted of a crime! Certainly he added to his sin and guilt, and thus hardened his own heart. He was a typical politician. He did this merely to stay on the good side with the Jews, over whom he was governor. It was customary, when there was a change of governors, to release prisoners who were unconvicted. Felix, however, desiring to curry favor with the Jews, “left Paul bound.”

B. Without Yielding to Christ You Will Face a Terrible End – In v.27 we read, “But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix....” So far as we have any record, he lived and died a Christ-rejecter. He never became a Christian during that two years, as evidenced by the fact that he never released Paul, an innocent man. So that “convenient time” that he talked about never arrived. Felix passed off the pages of Holy Scripture, but he did not pass out from under the eye of God. Felix was removed from his governorship around 60 A.D. after there was a big riot in Caesarea. He put it down with such violence that the Jews were outraged and managed to obtain his recall from Rome. Thus, he was governor for only 8 years. With such a setback in his career, we would not be surprised by reports that he died from a suicide. I wonder if part of the reason was the realization that he had the opportunity to be saved, but turned from it. Perhaps his soul was plagued with guilt.

Conclusion: I’m sure that some of you have thought about receiving Jesus Christ. Perhaps you have been convicted about your own sin. You’ve thought about standing before God someday. But so far, you haven’t done anything about it. Are you going to make the mistake of postponing a decision concerning Jesus Christ? Learn from the example of Felix. Hebrews 4:7 says, “Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.” 2 Cor. 6:2 says, “Today is the day of salvation.” Oh, you are walking a spiritual tightrope when you try to delay a decision concerning Jesus Christ! Come to Christ while you still have the opportunity to receive Christ. Don’t put it off another day.

Sources: Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954); Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975); H.A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Acts* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1943); John MacArthur, Jr., *Paul on Trial: Study Notes on Acts 24-26* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1986); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Curtis Vaughan, *Acts: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977); Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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