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ACTS 24:1-25:12

Last week, we saw that Paul was rescued from a mob of more than forty Jews who had devised a plot to take his life. We saw how Paul left Jerusalem escorted by 470 Roman soldiers. These Roman soldiers took Paul to Caesarea. **Chapter 23** closes with Paul's being told that he would be given a hearing before the governor as soon as his accusers arrived from Jerusalem.

Chapter 24 opens with Paul's accusers arriving in Caesarea. In fact, Ananais, the high priest arrived with some elders...members of the Sanhedrin. Also, **verse 1** tells us a man named Tertullus came. Tertullus was the attorney who came prepared to present the charges against Paul.

Before we get into these charges, let me just tell you a little about Felix, the governor, before whom these charges will be brought. Felix was a very brutal and cruel man. Josephus tells us he repeatedly crucified folks who dared to rise up against his authority. He would not put up with any kind of rebellion. Felix was married to a young woman named Drusilla. Drusilla was only twenty years and Felix was her third husband. Drusilla was a very beautiful girl and Felix had stolen her away from her second husband.

So we have a little "snapshot" of Felix and Drusilla. Neither were Christians, of course. Felix was actually raised a slave, had been freed, and the only "religious" training he had was that of Roman paganism. Drusilla was raised a Jewess and if she ever practiced her Judaism, she certainly had no faith or allegiance to Jehovah when Paul met her.

Many times God's people seem to be at the mercy of the world. **Many times we see saints like the Apostle Paul having to defend themselves before godless, cruel and unbelieving men and women who care nothing about the things of Almighty God.** And this is exactly what we see here...

Verses 2-9...

These verses tell us how Tertullus, the attorney who came from Jerusalem, addressed the governor.

Even though Felix was a cruel and corrupt governor over the Jewish people, and was hated by the Jewish people, Tertullus flattered Felix and told Felix what a wonderful person he was. Tertullus desperately wanted Felix to be kindly disposed to seeing things his way. He desperately wanted the governor to kill Paul!! **We got a taste of this over the past several weeks.** If you watched any of the confirmation hearings for Senator Ashcroft, you saw how the senators complimented each other, but in the hearts of the Democrats was the deep desire to stop the confirmation of Ashcroft by the assassination of his character.

So...Tertullus "battered Felix up" and then got right to the charges he had come to bring against Paul...and there were several...

1) Paul is a troublemaker...**verse 5... "a real pest"**

For us "**pest**" means "**nuisance**", but in those days, this word meant "**plague**" or "**pestilence**."

What Tertullus was saying was that Paul was **a plague of huge proportions**. Paul was an "**infectious disease**." Tertullus was suggesting that if Paul were set free, he would spread **disorder** and **turmoil** and **rebellion** throughout the Roman Empire. **What Tertullus was accusing Paul of was sedition, and he did this because he knew the impact it would have on Felix.**

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See, Tertullus knew the Romans weren't really interested in religious matters. But, Tertullus knew the Romans were extremely concerned about anything or anyone who would stir up trouble...so, he called Paul a real troublemaker.

2) Paul is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect...**verse 5**

Let's just think what Tertullus meant by this. Tertullus didn't call Paul "a leader of Christianity." Tertullus didn't even call Paul "a follower of Jesus." He called him a **"ringleader of the Nazarene sect."**

And he did this for several reasons...

Remember, Tertullus was representing the Jewish religious leaders. At that time, the Jews didn't call the followers of Jesus "Christians." The word "Christ" meant Messiah and the Jews weren't about to give the Lord Jesus that title. They referred to Him then as just "the Nazarene."

Also, the word "sect" has overtones of heresy. Finally, Paul called Paul a "ringleader"...not "leader." **Tertullus said "ringleader" because this word had the same connotation for them as it has for us today.**

Isn't it interesting that "name calling" doesn't end in childhood? We've all been called names as children and probably did our share of name calling. Now that we're all grown up we don't do that anymore, do we? ☺... However, if you're a conservative Christian, you're labeled "a far right radical extremist."

3) Paul tried to desecrate the Temple...**verse 6**

Of course, Paul had not done that...and would never do that. This was the accusation of the mob of Jews who were bent on taking Paul's life...**Acts 21:28...**

Maybe Tertullus thought he could score points with this last accusation because Roman law gave special status to the Jewish Temple and even prescribed the death penalty for those who violated it.

Well, at this point, Tertullus was through bringing his charges against Paul. And Paul stands to make his defense. **And, he answered the accusations brought against him...point by point....**

1) "I am not a troublemaker"...**Verses 11-13...**

Paul is saying, "I can prove **my** assertion and **they** cannot prove theirs.

First, Paul told Felix that it had been only twelve days since he had arrived in Jerusalem, and he'd been in Caesarea five of those twelve days. He'd been in prison one day so six of the twelve days are accounted for. What Paul is saying is, **"How much trouble can one person stir up in less than a week?"**

Then, Paul said, "I went to Jerusalem to worship, not to **stir up**

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trouble, not to **debate**, not to **lecture**. I do that in other places...that's my line of work, but in Jerusalem I wasn't stirring up any controversy...In fact, the only reason I went to the Temple is because I was trying to worship God...the same God these men who are accusing me also say they worship, since I too am a Jew."

2) "I am a follower of the Way"...Verse 14-16

Tertullus accused Paul of being "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes." Paul simply said, "I am a follower of 'the Way.'" He doesn't even say, "Yes, I'm a leader of the Way," even though that would have been a true statement.

What Paul was doing was showing Felix that he must judge him on the fact that he followed Jesus and if Roman law was upheld by Felix, Paul couldn't be condemned for choosing to worship the Lord Jesus Christ. (In order to keep the peace the famous "Pax Romana" that the Romans were so proud of, they gave the people freedom of worship.)

3) "I did not desecrate the Temple"...Verses 16-21...

Paul emphatically denied this charge. He hadn't come to Jerusalem to desecrate the Temple...Paul would never do that! **He had come to Jerusalem on an errand of mercy... He had brought alms to the Jerusalem church.**

He said "when they found me in the Temple, I was ceremonially clean and I was submitting to the laws of our religion..."

(In a few years the Romans would desecrate the Temple. The Jews would kill one another in the city while under siege by Rome and the Romans would then destroy the Temple.)

And then, Paul adds one other point...

Verses 18-20... "The Jews from Asia, not the Sanhedrin, should be present to testify against me or let these men themselves say what charge they found against me in Jerusalem," Paul is saying.

Did you notice this week in the final vote for Ashcroft that Mrs. Carnahan, the senator from his home state of Missouri who had been appointed to the Senate when her deceased husband won the election, voted against him? Why? Because she can run for re-election in two years and she didn't want the Democrats back home to be mad at her. That just may backfire on her...

Well, Felix heard Tertullus and Felix heard Paul. What did Felix do?

He did what many men caught in similar situations have tried to do. He knew Paul was innocent. Caught between what he knew was right and pressured by folks who were demanding that he do wrong...**Felix simply refused to do anything, didn't he? He simply refused to make a decision, didn't he?**

Felix didn't want to incur the wrath of the many in order to do the right thing for the one, did he?

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Verses 22 and 23 indicate that Felix knew something about Christianity. Felix knew what Paul was saying rang true. He knew Ananais and his bunch, but he didn't want to risk having the powerful Sanhedrin turn against him...

So, he ordered that Paul be kept in custody, but allowed some freedom. Paul was to be allowed the freedom of having his friends come and minister to him.

Verses 24-27...

What an interesting and revealing passage of Scripture!

Apparently, Felix and Drusilla left Caesarea after Paul's hearing and then came back. And when they came back they sent for Paul.

Don't you wonder why? You know, they didn't have television in those days...**maybe Paul provided them with some entertainment.** Maybe they had never heard anyone who was so certain of his convictions...so certain of what he believed and why he believed it. Maybe they had never heard a real preacher before...

Paul was certainly straightforward in his witness to them, wasn't he?

He spoke of **faith in Jesus**...in other words, Paul preached the Gospel to Felix and Drusilla. I believe Paul probably told them that the Lord Jesus died for them...that while He was on the cross, He took their sins and covered them with His blood and they could be forgiven and be reconciled to God by His atoning death, if they would only have faith in all that He had done.

Paul also spoke of **righteousness**. Don't you believe Paul told Felix and Drusilla that there is none righteous except the Lord Jesus...that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God?

Paul also spoke of **self-control**. I believe Paul told Felix that true "self-control" can only be accomplished when our "self" is controlled by the dear Holy Spirit.

Finally, Dr. Luke tells us that Paul spoke to Felix and Drusilla of "**judgment to come.**" Paul must have warned them that one day they would stand before God and God would judge not only what they did but why they did it. **Paul probably told them it wouldn't matter the position of power they enjoyed on earth...one day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.**

I don't believe for a minute that Paul "soft-pedaled" the message of salvation, do you? I don't believe for a minute that just because Paul happened to find himself in Roman custody that he failed to deliver to Felix and Drusilla "the whole counsel of God."

Before you can get a person saved, you must show him he's lost. And I believe that's exactly what Paul was doing!!

We don't know what Drusilla's reaction was, but we do know what Felix's was...He was afraid...He was **literally terrified!**

Real conviction brings fear, doesn't it? I mean, real conviction shows us how black our sin is and how holy God is and how far short we fall of His holiness and His glory!! I believe real conviction brought terror to the heart of Felix. But Felix failed to repent and ask the Lord Jesus to save him!!

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Verse 25b...

In a very real sense, Felix's soul died at that very moment.

Several tragedies are possible for every human soul. **The first one is the tragedy of never trembling of never coming face to face with the fact that we are sinners before a holy God.** And some folks have hearts so hard that they will die and go to hell never having accepted the fact that they are sinners in need of a Savior.

The second tragedy is **disregarding** the trembling and fear that the conviction of the Holy Spirit brings upon us.

Felix didn't say he never wanted to hear Paul and the saving message of the Lord Jesus Christ again. He just made the error of putting off his decision to follow Christ.

Let me give you two reasons is a very dangerous thing to do...

1) **We might hear the same truth again, but it might not bring conviction again.** Repetition dulls truth's power. Some folks can become "gospel hardened."

2)

They sit in church Sunday after Sunday. They hear the Gospel presented in word and in music, in the lives of those Christians around them...every way it can be presented. They sing "Just As I Am" over and over...and the call of the Holy Spirit becomes "ho hum". It becomes routine.

And one day they hear the Gospel and it goes in one ear and out the other and doesn't even make any impression upon them at all. (Jesus spoke about this when He gave the parable about the sower.)

Let me give you another reason putting off making the decision to follow the Lord Jesus Christ is a very dangerous thing to do.

3) Truths not acted upon can harden us so that we cannot understand them.
Do you remember when Jesus began to speak to the disciples in parables?

When the disciples asked Him why He was speaking to them in parables, this is what Jesus said to them...

"This is why I speak to them in parables: though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand..."

This is exactly what happened to the Pharisees and those like them. Time after time, Jesus had spoken plainly to them and finally He said, "They're not going to accept what I'm telling the, so I'll begin to speak in a way they surely won't understand."

And He began teaching in parables.

I believe this is teaching us that when the Holy Spirit convicts us of something, we must take immediate action. **Now, we're looking at this in the context of an unbeliever, but may I say to you that this is also true in the life of a believer.** When God calls you to a task...when He lays upon your heart something that He wants YOU to do...you best do it and you best do it quickly!! He may ask again, and He may not. **God will get SOMEONE to do His work...but if you haven't listened and obeyed Him, you won't lose your salvation, but you will be the loser...you'll miss the blessing that He intended you to have.**

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There's one last danger in putting off the decision the Holy Spirit convicts us of...

4) The more we know the more we are accountable for...

There are degrees of punishment in hell, you know. And if Felix and Drusilla went to hell (and we have every reason to believe they did), they will dwell in a hotter part of hell because they heard the Gospel in such a clear way time and again from the greatest preacher (with the exception of the Lord Jesus Christ) who ever lived.

I've used this illustration several times before...But the legend is told that Satan called three of his head demons in before him and told them that each must come up with a plan to divert men's attention from salvation.

The first demon told Satan that he would go and tell men that there is **no heaven**. Satan said, "Oh, they'll never believe that. Man longs for there to be a better place...they desire to believe in heaven."

The second demon told Satan that he would go and tell men that there is **no hell**. Satan said, "Oh, that won't work, either. Man knows there is a hell for sin."

The third demon came to Satan and said, "I have the perfect plan. I'll tell men there is **no hurry**."

Satan said, "Go! And you will ruin men by the thousands. Mankind won't believe there is no heaven and they won't believe there is no hell, but they will believe there is no hurry!"

Someone once said, "You cannot repent too soon, for you know not how soon it may be too late."

Verse 26... Felix must have perked up his ears when Paul, in verse 127 said had had brought gifts and offerings. He truly expected a bribe from Paul. He didn't get the bribe, but he did hear about Jesus from Paul. I don't believe for a minute Paul would waste his time with Felix talking about anyone or anything except the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 27 tells us that Paul was kept imprisoned for two years.

Acts 25:1-12 give us a very interesting turn of events. These events would help determine how and where Paul would spend the remainder of his life.

Felix was succeeded as governor by a man named Festus. Festus made a trip to Jerusalem and he was met there by chief priests and leaders of the Jews and they urged Festus to bring Paul back to Jerusalem. **Verse 3** tells us they were plotting yet again to kill Paul.

Festus didn't return Paul to Jerusalem, but he invited those who would bring charges against Paul to come to Caesarea. They did come to Caesarea and when they came they brought...**verse 7**... many and serious charges against Paul which they couldn't prove.

Paul told Festus he had not committed any offense

- 1) against the Jewish Law nor
- 2) against the Temple nor
- 3) against Caesar

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Festus, being new at his job and hoping to garner the favor and approval of the Jews asked Paul if he would be willing to go back to Jerusalem and stand trial there.

Verses 10-11...

Paul didn't want to go back to Jerusalem and I believe there were several reasons why...

- 1) I believe Paul knew going back to Jerusalem wouldn't do any good and it could do much harm to the church at Jerusalem. With Paul in Caesarea, the Jews were concentrating their persecution efforts in Caesarea rather than the group of believers in Jerusalem.

(By the way, the Jews believed killing Paul would put an end to Christianity. They had no idea that this would expand the Christian movement. Keep in mind that what men meant for evil, our God means for good. God used the scattering of the Christians from Jerusalem to simply further the Gospel, and God used the martyrdom of His servants to further the Gospel, as well.)

- 2) I believe Paul really thought he had a better chance at getting a fair trial from the Romans than from the Jews.
- 3) I believe the main reason Paul wanted to go to Rome was that Paul kept remembering that Jesus had come to him and told him he must go to Rome.
- 4) If Paul should win an acquittal, it would show that Christianity was truly distinct from Judaism.

One day soon, Paul will find himself on the way to Rome. But before we see that, we'll see and hear Paul share his salvation testimony once again...

...this time before a king...a king named Agrippa.

When God chose the Apostle Paul, He knew what sort of man He was choosing, didn't He?

Remember when Paul was converted and God told a man named Ananais to go to him and Ananais hesitated. Actually Ananais was afraid of Paul. And when he expressed this fear to God, God said to him,

"Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine to bear
My name before the Gentiles and kings and
the sons of Israel; for I will show him how
much he must suffer for My name's sake."

Paul was called to suffer for the cause of Christ. Suffering was no stranger to Paul. Paul considered his suffering to be the best way that he could identify with the Lord Jesus. And he considered the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

May we look at Paul and the example he gave us when we are called on to suffer for the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ!!