

Day 132, Acts 24

by David Servant

David Servant explores Paul's interactions with Governor Felix, emphasizing themes of judgment, righteousness, and the importance of maintaining a blameless conscience.

Scripture: Proverbs 9:10, John 16:8, Philippians 4:4

Topics: "Fear Of God", "Repentance"

Description

David Servant delves into the story of Governor Felix, highlighting his combination of good and evil traits, his unjust exploitation of authority, and his eventual humbling by God. Paul, knowing his innocence, used the opportunity to preach the gospel to Felix, focusing on themes of future resurrection, righteousness, self-control, and judgment. Despite Felix's fear and conviction, he did not repent due to his love of money. Paul's approach challenges the modern idea of solely preaching God's love, emphasizing the fear of the Lord as a motivator for repentance.

Transcript

Like most earthly rulers who don't realize that their authority is delegated to them by God, governor Felix was a combination of good and evil. He was good enough to grant Paul a fair trial by gathering all the pertinent witnesses, and he was good enough to listen to Paul's views about God, but he also unjustly exploited his authority, hoping for a bribe, and showing partiality to the Jews who so hated Paul. Perhaps this is why we read at the end of today's reading that Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus (24:27). That is, perhaps God humbled Felix and exalted Porcius.

Knowing a little background about Felix reveals the extent of the flattery of the Sanhedrin's attorney, Tertullus, as he began his very exaggerated accusations against Paul. History informs us that Felix had a reputation for cruelty and immorality. His rule was marked by internal feuds and disturbances, and he dealt with them severely. He was eventually accused in Rome of using a dispute between the Jews and Syrians of Caesarea as a pretext to slay and plunder them. That resulted in his losing his governorship. Incidentally, Felix's second of three wives, Drusilla (whom we read about in 24:24), whom he had persuaded to divorce her first husband in order to marry him, suffered a terrifying death about 24 years after she heard the gospel from Paul's lips, at about age 46, when Mount Vesuvius erupted in Italy. Ten to twenty-five thousand people perished with her that day, August 24, A.D. 79.

Knowing his own innocence, Paul wasted very little time defending himself before Felix, and seized the opportunity to preach the gospel. I'm sure you noticed that his message was laced with convicting themes.

He spoke of his certainty of the future resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, implying the fact that all will one day stand before God to reap what they have sown. It was for this reason, Paul said, that he always did his best to maintain a "blameless conscience both before God and before men" (24:16).

In subsequent private conversations with Felix and Drusilla, Paul spoke about "faith in Christ Jesus" as well as "righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come" (24:24-25). That is an interesting list, since Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would "convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). Paul's message doesn't sound very much like the modern message that "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." Rather, Paul focused on biblical truth that motivated Felix to examine his life and think about eternity. And it worked to some degree, as we read that "Felix became frightened" (24:25). Yet he didn't repent, and Luke mentions that he continued to be motivated by his love of money (24:26).

I can't help but mention that this example of Paul's method of sharing the gospel debunks the modern idea that it is inappropriate to motivate people by fear to turn to God, and that is better that we win them by speaking of God's love. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10), and there is not a single instance recorded in the book of Acts of anyone mentioning the love of God while preaching the gospel.

Paul remained in Caesarea for two years due to Felix's whims, but we read that he was granted "some freedom," and that Felix did not prevent "any of his friends from ministering to him" (24:23). As I previously mentioned, Herod's Praetorium, where Paul stayed, was a palace complex directly on the Mediterranean coast, the ruins of which I have had the privilege of visiting on several occasions. It is a lovely setting, but I suspect that Paul would have preferred to have the freedom to travel and preach. Yet he kept on rejoicing. It was either during this time or later during his imprisonment in Rome when he would write a letter in which he used the word rejoice eight times. Here is a well-known sample: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4)---a good motto for anyone who is tempted to be discouraged or downcast!

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