

Acts 24:22-27

**The Best Last Chance
10/30/16**

²² But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, “When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case.” ²³ Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.

²⁴ After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.²⁵ And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, “Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.” ²⁶ At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him. ²⁷ When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

(Pastor prays)

Often, the Bible is so clear it illustrates itself and, in those cases, using an illustration would be like pointing a flashlight at the sun...The sun always outshines it.

This story is here to warn us of how easy it is to miss the opportunities that God gives us in life, especially those opportunities to turn to Christ, much like the opportunity that you will be given today.

In the passage, we dial in on a man named Felix. He's the governor of a place called Caesarea. He has the Apostle Paul in custody and he's supposed to make a decision as to what to do with Paul, and this little portion of the story screams out as a cautionary tale: “Don't be like Felix!” because, in this story, Felix will stand before the greatest Christian who ever lived and hear the clearest explanation of the Gospel ever given and, in v. 25, he even senses the rightness of it, but he procrastinates and ignores it and is now forever enshrined as a tragic example of a man who gained the whole world but lost his soul.

Let's take a look at it and as I read it, please don't be Felix. Let's read v. 22-27: *But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, “When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case.” ²³ Then he gave orders to the*

centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs. ²⁴ After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.²⁵ And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, “Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.” ²⁶ At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him. ²⁷ When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

The last phrase of the chapter is, “Felix left Paul in prison” and we never hear from him again. (That's) a tragic end to a wasted life. It didn't have to be like that and neither does yours. So, for all you students flirting with Christianity and never committing, for all you busy people doing good things but missing the best thing, hear the call of God, respond by faith in Jesus and trust the cross of Christ. Learn from Felix.

The Gospel Ignored is Eternity Lost

Let's look at this with a simple outline:

The Gospel Deals With Yesterday's Sin

Let me show you what I mean. V. 24 of the story tells us that Felix came to see Paul and brought Drusilla with him, and Paul explained faith in Christ--literally “The Faith”-- and although he certainly talked about doctrinal concepts, v. 25 tells us he discussed three areas.

Look at the first part of v. 25: He reasoned about righteousness. Righteousness is the absolute moral standard demanded by God's holy nature. It is His divine law and perfect character. Righteousness has to do with practical holiness. It's your belief system turned into a lifestyle. It's more than your claimed personal relationship with Jesus. Righteousness involves the public playing out of that relationship. It's why the Gospel can seem legalistic if not explained completely.

Think about who Paul is talking to. Felix wormed his way into power. He was a brutal, lustful, scheming politician who repeatedly crucified people. Drusilla, his third so-called wife, was 16 when she caught his eye. She was beautiful, manipulative and cunning. Verse 24 tells us she was Jewish, but she was just barely Jewish. She came from the line of Herod.

Her great-grandfather was the Herod in Matthew 2 who killed all the babies in Bethlehem in an attempt to kill Jesus. Her great-uncle was the Herod who killed John the Baptist, and her father was the one who had the apostle James killed in Acts 12.

She was calculating, seductive and ambitious. And there they stood listening to Paul tell them they were condemned, that their lives were marked by sin and, because of that, they were separated from God. (That's) because the very nature of God demands a holiness that none of us can ever attain. If you could stand up right now and look back at all your yesterdays, you would see even the nicest and best and kindest of all of us can't live up to the righteousness of God. And as bad of news as that is, the Gospel of Christ deals with all your yesterdays...all the lust, porn, adultery, homosexuality, greed, pride, hate, racism, laziness; all the wrong in our hearts and manner of living. It's why Paul talked about righteousness, because we don't have a righteousness of our own. We need someone *else's* righteousness. That's why I point you to Christ. Christ fulfilled all of God's laws that you broke with all your yesterdays, and at the cross He redeems all of your tomorrows for His glory. The holiness of God's demands are met in the righteousness of Christ and applied to your life when you believe. And when you do, the guilt and shame and embarrassment of sin are taken away. The Gospel deals with yesterday's sin at the cross.

Let me show you what else the Gospel does.

The Gospel Deals With Tomorrow's Temptations

Notice again the topic of Paul's message. He dealt with righteousness. The next topic is self-control.

Self-control is not something Felix or Drusilla would be very acquainted with. Both of them are driven by their own desires and justifying their actions by personal autonomy, basically saying, "It's ok doing what I want to do as long as it doesn't hurt anybody."

But the truth is, they both serve as a pretty good illustration of our modern-day society in which most people, many here, are not in possession of their desires. Rather, those desires are in possession of *you*.

So, we spend until we are covered in debt and let our personal desires drive everything. Warren Wiersbe said, "Man can control almost everything but himself." Self-control is the required response to bring man into conformity with God's law. And here is Felix, living with a woman he lured away from her husband when she was a teenager. Paul speaks about self-control to show Felix (and us) that we have no power to deal with tomorrow's temptations without the preserving power of the Holy Spirit. The cross of Christ not only forgives our yesterdays but it redeems our tomorrows, giving us a reason to live and a joy in the future.

In the passage, Paul addresses one more topic for Felix. V. 25: *And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you."* The judgement of God is a topic that is sure to throw a damper on any conversation. (Just try it at a dinner.) It certainly did here. No matter how beautiful and gracious and tender and full of love and mercy the news of Christ is, there is another side to it, a side that is meant to awaken our conscience. It did Felix's. The text said he was alarmed or afraid. Felix was afraid because he lacked the first two virtues and shuddered to think about the last. He didn't have righteousness or self-control and he knew that meant judgment.

Judgment is the rightful act of a Holy God who, by His own grace, has poured out His wrath and judgment on Jesus Christ at the cross and thereby purchased people from every tribe and tongue and walk of life. When Felix heard this message, his one thought was to get rid of Paul and all his talk of judgment, and although Felix talked to Paul a lot over the next two years, he never trembled again at the Gospel.

Some people believe that truth not acted on can harden us so that we never do respond. Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart, because the Gospel ignored is eternity lost. Without Christ, judgment is terrifying. With Christ, judgment is confirmation that Christ is the righteous Lord of all.

(Pastor prays)