

## Acts Series #20 - "Felix Before Paul" Acts 24:24-27

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. *Procrastination*

1. A family moved into a small, new community
2. They were promptly visited by two elders and the pastor of a nearby church who cordially invited them to attend the services the next Sunday
3. The man assured them that he would come just as soon as he got things straightened out
4. Several months passed, and he still hadn't put in an appearance, so the minister called again and repeated his invitation
5. But he received the same reply--The fellow hadn't yet gotten everything straightened out, but he'd be there just as soon as he did
6. A few weeks later he died, and his widow asked to have the funeral services in the church
7. The preacher graciously agreed but when a member of the congregation asked the pastor if the man was a Christian, he answered,
8. "He never attended services, and no one can recall ever hearing him give a testimony of his faith in Christ, so I can't say. I only know he was a man of his word.
9. He promised to come to church just as soon as he got straightened out -- and he did!"

#### B. *A Common Problem*

1. Procrastination is something nearly everyone has a problem with
2. While some people put things off in only one or two areas, others are procrastinators by nature
3. We're going to be seeing a classic case of procrastination in our study today

### II. TEXT

#### A. *Set The Scene*

1. Paul was arrested by the Romans troops stationed in Jerusalem when some false witnesses raised a riot over Paul's presence in the temple
2. Paul was about to be beaten to death when the troops managed to rescue him and haul him off to the safety of their barracks in the Antonia Fortress
3. Then, the commander of the fortress discovered that the Jewish leaders had set a trap of ambush for Paul and intended to assassinate him— so he secreted Paul away to the coastal city of Caesarea
4. As the Roman capital, Caesarea was the home of the governor, a man named Felix
5. Now, before we begin reading, you need to understand a little about this guy Felix

6. Remember the cartoon, Felix the Cat? This was Felix the Rat
7. Felix was so corrupt that his name was a hated byword
8. He and his brother Pallas had been born, slaves in the household of the emperor
  - a. Pallas became the childhood friend of Claudius and was his favorite
  - b. when they became adults, Claudius gave both Pallas and Felix their freedom
  - c. Pallas stayed a close friend and confidant of Claudius and managed to persuade him to appoint Felix to the position of governor
  - d. Felix was the first person in Roman history to rise from slavery to become a ruler of a province
9. Now, literature is filled with romantic stories of men and women who were born into poverty or slavery but who rose in position and power and showed great wisdom and virtue
10. Spartacus and Ben Hur are two examples
11. We seem to delight in the heroic idea that someone of humble and meager beginnings can rise to position and outshine the elite and privileged
12. And while we might hope this was the case with Felix, sadly, the opposite is true
13. Felix never learned nobility as a slave, and he never picked any up as a governor either!
14. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote of him, "He exercised the powers of a king with the spirit of a slave."
  - a. he was brutal, small-minded, and corrupt
  - b. he hired street thugs to intimidate and assassinate his closest supporters when he deemed they were in a position to hurt him
  - c. he was married 3 times
    - 1) his first wife we know nothing about
    - 2) but his 2<sup>nd</sup> wife was the grand daughter of Antony & Cleopatra
    - 3) on a visit to the king of Syria he became enthralled with his wife, Drusilla, the 19 yr. daughter of Herod Agrippa I
    - 4) so he dumped his wife and seduced Drusilla,
    - 5) there was some interesting intrigue involved but the upshot is, Drusilla left her husband and married Felix the Rat
15. By the time Paul was brought in chains to Caesarea, Felix had been governing for 7 yrs., so he knew the area pretty well and all that had been going on among the Jews
16. Well, the high priest and a small group arrived in Caesarea to make formal charges against Paul
  - a. Felix listened to them,
  - b. then to Paul
  - c. and when he realized the issue was over religion and nothing Rome was interested in, he delayed judgment by saying he would wait for the Roman commander to come and verify or deny the charges the Jews were making against Paul
17. So the high priest and his group returned to Jerusalem and Paul was placed

under house arrest there in Caesarea

## **B. Vs. 24-27**

**{24} 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.**

**{25} 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."**

1. When Felix put Paul under house arrest, he commanded that his friends be allowed to visit him and provide for him
2. In v. 22 we learn that the governor knew a few things about Christianity
3. More than likely, he knew that Paul was a leader of the movement and had a lot of supporters who would come and bring him support
4. It seems Felix was hoping They would bring lots of money and tha Paul would approach him with a bribe
5. In v. 26 we read . . .

**{26} 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.**

**{27} But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.**

6. Think of it – for 2 years Felix would send for Paul and the apostle would speak to him about the way of life
7. But every time the conviction got too strong, every time the screw was turned too tight; Felix would bale = “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you again.”
8. Then Felix would dive into some distraction till the pain of conviction softened and the voice of conscience and reason was silenced
9. You see, Paul knew Felix
  - a. he knew his background and reputation
  - b. so Luke tells us that he reasoned with him of righteousness, self-control, and judgment
  - c. Paul wasn't afraid to speak the truth to this man, though Felix had the power to convict and sentence him to death -
10. Paul trusted his life into the Lord's hands
11. He had been in jail before, he had been beaten before, he had even been stoned to death
12. He didn't fear Felix
13. And from Paul's perspective, it wasn't he who was on trial, it was Felix
  - a. Felix was the one being tried by the testimony of Paul
  - b. every time Paul opened his mouth and reasoned with Felix, evidence was piling up on the side of truth
  - c. Felix's response or lack of response to that evidence was judgment he was passing, not on Paul or Paul's message, but on himself
14. The same is true for people today
  - a. when we testify of Christ, when we proclaim in word and deed the truth of the gospel,

- b. people judge themselves by their response
  - c. when they reject, mock, scoff, turn away, ignore, grow hostile, whatever
  - d. they are not judging *you*, though they may think they are –
  - e. the fact is, they are judging *themselves*
15. For the decision they make about Jesus will determine their eternity
16. Paul spoke to Felix of *righteousness*: This would confront the governor's *public* life
- a. over and over, Felix had betrayed the trust of a public official
  - b. rather than using his position and power to serve the people, as Rome required that he should
  - c. Felix was brutal and corrupt and had filled the government under him with crooks and thieves
  - d. there was not one shred of righteousness in his reign and he and everyone else knew it
  - e. in fact, in just two years from this point, Felix was replaced because of his gross neglect of office and the injustice with which he dealt with the people
  - f. Paul told him that God requires perfect righteousness from us
    - 1) but that no one in their own strength can be good enough to be accepted by God
    - 2) so God makes a way for us to be righteous by giving us the perfect righteousness of Christ
    - 3) and this righteousness becomes ours by faith;
    - 4) by believing the Jesus died for us and paid for our sins on the cross
    - 5) that faith imputes, or transfers Jesus' perfection to us
    - 6) Roman 3:22 - "The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe"
17. Paul spoke to him of *self-control*: This would confront Felix's *private* life
- a. history tells us he was a pervert and given to gross immorality
  - b. his string of wives and the seduction of young Drusilla show how intemperate he was
  - c. his slave-mentality took full possession of the power he wielded as governor and he immersed himself in all kinds of depravity
  - d. any talk of self-control would make him uncomfortable in the extreme,
  - e. for temperance wasn't a virtue Felix was at all acquainted with
  - f. like most men, Felix had probably tried to reform himself at times
    - 1) but it was pointless - he had no strength
    - 2) so he would always give up and go back to his corruption
    - 3) Paul reasoned with him and showed him he needed help
    - 4) by faith in Christ, he would receive the empowering he needed in order to exercise self-control
    - 5) just as it says in Gal 5, the fruit of the Spirit is self-control
18. Finally, Luke tells us Paul spoke to him of *judgment to come*: This would confront Felix's *eternal* life
- a. and that eternal life would be determined by both his public and private life
  - b. by both righteousness and self-control

- c. because Felix and been anything *but* righteous, because he had shown everything *but* self-control: the prospect of judgment scared Felix
  - d. Luke says that he was *afraid*
    - 1) the KJV says he “trembled”
    - 2) the word means “to be put into fear”
    - 3) it’s an intense word which means to be plunged into fear
    - 4) doesn’t speak of a mild anxiety or slight apprehension
    - 5) it means to be placed into a realm of fear
    - 6) we’re talking stark, naked TERROR!
    - 7) remember when you were a kid, and you were really scared of something
    - 8) so much so that you were terrified!
    - 9) kids refer to that as being not just “scared” but “a-scared”
    - 10) Felix was a-scared!
  - e. and rightly so
  - f. for as Paul spoke about what God requires of man, Felix realized he could never stand in judgment
19. So he did the only *rational* thing a person under the conviction of the Holy Spirit can do:
  20. He got down on his knees and repented of his sin, crying out to God for mercy and grace, asking Him to forgive his sins and give him a new life through faith in Jesus Christ!
  21. Indeed, that is the only *rational* reaction to the problem of sin and the solution God freely offers
  22. But that isn’t what Felix did
  23. He said, “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.”
  24. You know, that’s the way most people deal with conviction
    - a. if we’re honest, we have to admit that’s what we did before we gave in and came to faith in Christ
    - b. we heard, we felt the drawing of the Holy Spirit
    - c. we knew we *should* repent and seek forgiveness
    - d. but we held out;
    - e. we said to ourselves, “Just wait and it will pass.”
    - f. “Soon the preacher will stop, I’ll walk out to the car, go for a burger at Carl’s and this moment and feeling will pass.”
    - g. in fact, you may be saying that to yourself right now
    - h. like Felix you say, “Not now. I have other things to attend to, But later, when I have a more convenient time, then I’ll think about committing my life to Christ.”
      - 1) there are a few things I need to work out first
      - 2) there’s some fun I want to have
      - 3) there are some things I am not willing to give up yet that I know I’ll need to; let me get to a place where I don’t want them anymore, then I’ll think about becoming a Christian
    - i. this just isn’t a good time - later
  25. But you keep coming to church, maybe not every week, but regularly

- a. and you keep coming because you know what you're hearing is truth
  - b. you know that what you are seeing in the lives of God's people is real
  - c. though they aren't perfect, still they have found something real and it's evident in the way they live and sing and care for one another
  - d. in a world of the plastic and fake, when you are in the midst of God's people, you know you are standing on solid ground
25. Just like Felix kept calling for Paul and listened to him share faith in Christ, you keep coming and listening
26. Just like Felix hoped that those visits with Paul would benefit him, you come because you hope the blessings and promises of God's word will make you a better person and give you wisdom to live in an increasingly complex world
27. But when the message becomes personal and the Holy Spirit tugs on your heart, you back pedal

### **C. Don't Put It Off**

- 1. Friend, listen!
- 2. There is no more convenient time than now
- 3. Do not put off till tomorrow what you can do today because you and I are not promised tomorrow
- 4. We are only promised this moment, this time
- 5. And what we do with this moment counts forever
- 6. Felix procrastinated
  - a. he put it off for a more convenient time
  - b. but a more convenient time *never* came
  - c. because he resisted the first time. It made it easier for him to resist the second
  - d. and because he held off the second time, the third was even easier
  - e. the third time made the fourth really easy,
  - f. and soon putting off the conviction of the Holy Spirit was a snap
- 7. Felix's more convenient time never came
- 8. In fact, he was dismissed from office and only narrowly escaped being executed
- 9. But even then, Felix died, and passed into judgment and a Christless eternity

## **III. CONCLUSION**

### **A. The Danger Of Procrastination**

- 1. Procrastination is a dangerous thing
- 2. I believe it is one of the devil's greatest tools
- 3. A story says that one day satan called a council of all the tempters in hell to devise the greatest strategy of all
  - a. as they sat around an immense table, one demon said, "I know, let's tell them there is no heaven."
  - b. many agreed it was a great lie - if there was no heaven, then people

- could live any way they wanted and not have to worry about getting into heaven after they died
- c. but after a while the devil said, “No. Most people believe there is a heaven because the knowledge of the existence of God is inborn in them. And they know heaven is His home. That won’t work.”
  - d. so they sat in silence for a while until another demon said, “Let’s tell them there is no hell.”
  - e. again, there was much support for this lie - if there was no hell, then people wouldn’t have to be concerned about staying out of it, and again , they would live whatever way they chose since everyone was going to go to heaven anyway.
  - f. but again the devil shock his head and said, “No. Just as most people believe in God and heaven, they know that there must also be a hell because they have an inner sense of right and wrong that try as we might we cannot erase. They know that God will judge them one day and if they don’t follow His way, will be sent from his holy presence for eternity. No, that lie will not work on most.”
  - g. again, there was a long period of silence, and then a chuckle began to come from satan
  - h. slowly it grew louder and louder until all of the demons leaned forward to hear what he was thinking
  - i. the devil said, “I’ve got it - We can’t tell them there is no heaven or hell. Rather, we’ll tell them these is, but then we’ll tell them there is no hurry.”
4. Oh how we need to have a sense of *holy* urgency
  5. Somehow we have this sense that we are immune from death
  6. People live the majority of their lives with the mistaken idea that they will never die
  7. Oh sure, if asked, they will admit that one day they will die
  8. But death is always a far off and distant thing
  9. So it’s easy to procrastinate, after all, I have all the time in the world
  10. But the point is this - NO I DON’T!!!!
  11. I have this moment and no other
  12. And I am eternally accountable for what I do with this moment

## **B. Immediate Obedience**

1. It’s easy for us to see how this applies to unbelievers coming to faith
2. But there is an important application for Christians too
3. For believers experience the conviction of the Holy Spirit too
4. God directs us to some issue of obedience
5. Do we delay? Do we agree with the need for change but then put it off to a more convenient time?
6. Many of us who have taken parenting classes and learned the importance of teaching our children the lesson of first time obedience need to practice it when our Heavenly Father directs us
7. If we can put away our procrastination and be prompt in our obedience to

the Lord, then God will find a people who are faithful and trustworthy to use in a mighty way

### **C. *Evan Roberts* -**

1. Welsh Revival began in 1904 when a 26 year old Coal Miner named Evan Roberts was attending bible school at Newcastle College, Wales
2. Seth Joshua, a Presbyterian Evangelist came to the school and held a series of meetings
  - a. He prayed, "Oh God bend us."
  - b. Roberts prayed, "Oh God, bend me!"
3. At school, couldn't study, felt compelled to return home
  - a. so went to Principle Philipps
  - b. and asked for permission to take a leave from his studies
4. Went home to Lockhor and told pastor of home church God was telling him to speak
5. Pastor wasn't convinced but consented to allow him to speak after their weekly prayer meeting
6. So when over, told people that young Evan had something to say if anyone wanted to stay
  - a. Most people left, but 17 stayed
  - b. Roberts told those 17,
    - 1) "I have a message from God for you.
    - 2) First, you must confess any known sin and put any wrong done to man right.
    - 3) Second, you must put away any doubtful habit out of your life.
    - 4) Third, you must obey the Spirit promptly."
7. By 10 o'clock, all 17 had responded.
8. The pastor was so pleased, he asked Roberts to speak the rest of the week
9. At the end of the week, the people could sense that something was beginning, so they asked him to speak one more week
10. And at the end of that 2<sup>nd</sup> week, the break came that later became known as the Welsh Revival
11. From that point on, that little church was filled almost continuously
12. A reporter from the newspaper came to see what was causing such a stir and wrote that shops closed early just so people could attend the evening meetings
13. The road leading to Lockhor was so crowded people couldn't pass
14. Nightly meetings ended at 4 AM, but the people were loath to leave and would just carry on in informal prayer meetings
15. Soon, every church in the area was filled to capacity and then the revival spread like a wave over all of Wales
16. It spread across most of Europe and leapt the Atlantic to the US where thousands upon thousands of people were converted
17. But it all began with one man who prayed, "Lord, Bend me."
18. And when the Lord bent Him, he promptly obeyed