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The Danger of Delay - Acts 24:22-27

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. *Procrastination*

1. A century ago a mid-western farmer who was an atheist, had a long running feud w/religion.
2. His debates with Christian neighbors were many & heated.
3. When he died with no survivors or friends, it was discovered that to spite his neighbors, his will left his estate to the devil.
4. The local judge didn't know what to do.
  - a. After months of consulting with his peers & legal texts,
  - b. He decided the best way to honor the will was to let the property go to weeds, the soil to erode, the house & barn to rot.
  - c. He said, "In this court's opinion, the best way to leave something to the devil is to do nothing."

### B. *Today*

1. We're taking a look at a story today of a man whose life illustrates that.
2. His name was Felix & he was the Roman governor of Israel.
3. Remember the cartoon, *Felix the Cat*. Well, this is Felix the Rat.

## II. TEXT

### A. *Set The Scene*

1. When some of Paul's old enemies saw him in the temple, they wrongly assumed he'd brought some of his Gentile friends into an area forbidden to them.
2. So they raised a cry against him & a riot ensued.

3. = They were on the verge of beating him to death when Roman troops intervened & hauled Paul to safety.
4. = Thinking Paul was the cause of the riot, the commander *arrested* him.
5. = When he later learned of a plot to assassinate Paul, he sent him covertly to Caesarea, the Roman capital of Israel where the governor lived.
6. = The Jewish rulers were desperate to do away with Paul, so they sent an impressive group to Caesarea to file formal charges against him. [We'll take a closer look at all this Wednesday evening.]
7. = When they finished listing their charges, Felix nodded to Paul to answer.
8. = Paul then gave his testimony & addressed the things the rulers accused him of.
9. = We pick it up now in v. 22 . . .

### **B. Vs. 22-23**

<sup>22</sup> But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of *the Way*, he adjourned the proceedings and said, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case."

1. = It's a clever & common ploy of politicians to pretend dumb until those appealing to them have had their say.
2. = By acting as though you're *ignorant*, you find out if they're going to try & pull something over on you.
3. = Luke says Felix knew about "The Way" which was one of the 1<sup>st</sup> labels given Christians.
  - a. As governor of an *exceedingly* difficult province, Felix had done his homework.
  - b. He knew about the many sects & groups in Israel at this time.
  - c. He knew all about the rift between the Jewish leaders & the followers of Jesus.
4. = Being ever the astute politician, who used every little thing to his advantage, Felix *delayed* his decision in Paul's case, saying he wanted to hear the testimony of Lysias, the arresting officer.
5. = But really, there was another reason for his stall, as we'll see.

<sup>23</sup> So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let *him* have liberty, and

told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him.=

6. Excavations at Caesarea show that near the governor's mansion was the **headquarters** of the Roman military command. Inside were several prison cells.

a. But they were different from the typical jail. The cells were large & well-made.

b. Archaeologists think that since Caesarea was the capital, this is where **political prisoners** were kept.

c. Common criminals were kept in a separate prison; This jail was for the wealthy & influential who were usually only kept for a short time before being released.=

7. That's where Paul was taken & though he was under guard, he wasn't kept in chains or isolated in a cell.

8. He had limited freedom to move about; his cell being little more than sleeping quarters.=

9. Felix told the centurion responsible for Paul to give him plenty of leeway & to allow as many of his friends to visit as he wanted.

a. You see, in that day, **the State didn't provide** for prisoners; that was up to the prisoner's family & friends.

b. The Romans didn't make Paul's meals, provide bedding, or clean & replace his clothes.

c. All of that was taken care of by the kindness & generosity of those who **visited** him.

10. Felix knew Paul was one of the leaders of the Church which had now grown around the Mediterranean into **dozens** of places & **thousands** of converts.

a. Caesarea was where Philip the Evangelist had lived for the past 20 years.

b. There was a large number of believers in the City & Felix was hoping they'd all take an interest in Paul's well-being.

c. Let me explain why. We need to know more about this guy Felix.

## **B. Felix the Rat**

1. He & his brother Pallas were born as slaves in the household of the Emperor Claudius when he was a child.

- a. Pallas became the childhood friend of Claudius; his = favorite.
- b. When they became adults, Claudius gave both Pallas & Felix their freedom.
- c. Pallas remained a close friend & confidant to Claudius & when he became Emperor, Pallas persuaded Claudia's to appoint his brother Felix as governor of Israel.
- d. Felix was the first person in Roman history = to rise from slavery to become a ruler of a province.

2. Now- **Literature** is filled with great stories of people who rise from poverty & oppression into greatness. Stories like *Sparticus & Ben Hur*.

- a. Though poor & downtrodden, they ascend to wealth & power, but use it **humbly & wisely**.
- b. We love those stories because we're= drawn to the heroic in them.
- 3. = Felix looks like the **perfect candidate** for being a **real life hero**; a true turn-around, greatness-rising- from-the-ashes tale.

4. = Sadly, it was not to be! In fact, the **opposite** is the case.

- a. Felix learned neither humility nor nobility = as a slave.
- b. And he never picked up any as a governor neither.

5. = 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, & corrupt.
- b. He hired thugs to intimidate & assassinate his closest supporters when he deemed they were in a position to harm him.
- c. He was married 3 times.

1) His 1<sup>st</sup> wife we know nothing about.

2) He got rid of her so he= could marry his 2<sup>nd</sup> wife; the grand-daughter of Antony & Cleopatra= . It was a marriage he entered for one reason, to advance himself politically.

3) Then, on a visit to the= king of Syria he became enthralled with his wife, Drusilla, the 19 yr. daughter of Herod Agrippa. This was the guy who'd killed James & thrown Peter into prison.

4) When Felix laid eyes on Drusilla, he dumped his 2<sup>nd</sup> wife, seduced Drusilla, & convinced her to leave her husband & marry him.

6. = Felix was actually quite intelligent & *politically astute*.

a. The problem is, he *used it all for one thing* – **himself**; his own selfish pleasure.

b. For Felix, power, influence, wealth, position – it was all good for only = one thing = 3D having a good time.

c. He liked being governor because it meant an unending supply of sensual delights.

d. Every decision he made was calculated to sustain an uninterrupted flow of goodies; food, wine, women, slaves to meet his every whim, & of course – entertainment!

7. = History tells us that ultimately it was Felix's mismanagement & brutality that led to the Jewish Revolt against Rome in 68 AD & resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of Jews & the destruction of Jerusalem & the Temple 2 years later.

a. It all began when Felix secretly hired some Jewish terrorists known as Sicarii to murder Jonathan, the high priest's son, whom Felix deemed a threat because Jonathan was gaining political power.

b. As soon as the assassination took place, Felix announced an all out "War on Terror" aimed at wiping out the Sicarii.

c. The oppression of Israel by the Roman that followed was so severe it led to widespread hatred & opposition on the part of normal, everyday Jews who'd up till then taken the occupation in stride.

d. Even after Felix was recalled to Rome & put on trial for gross negligence, the protests in Israel escalated into riots & eventually a full-scale revolt that drove Rome from Israel's shores.

e. Rome never took kindly to rebellion & returned with a massive force that reduced the nation to a smoking pile of ashes.

8. = So – this is Felix; & this is why he told the centurion to give Paul liberty & allow him visitors.

a. Felix was hoping Paul would be able to pull together a sizeable "defense fund" from his many contacts & admirers.

b. When word got out he was in jail, Felix hoped the believers would rally to Paul's defense from all over the Empire!

c. A discreet word from Felix through back channels let Paul know that *for the right price*, his release would be secured.

d. Felix had no interest in justice. His only interest was his own interests.

### **C. Vs. 24-27**

<sup>24</sup>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.

1. = As v. 22 says, Felix already had a basic grasp of the Faith.

2. = But now that the Jewish rulers were gone & Paul might feel free to speak more openly, he called for him to appear.

3. = Being the clever political operator he was, *Felix knew knowledge is power.*

a. The more he could learn about the movement that was making the Jewish leaders so upset, the better.

b. Paul's reputation as a leader of the Christians & one who'd traveled far & wide spreading the new faith commended him as a prime source of information.

4. = And of course, Paul was more than happy to oblige. He lived to tell the lost of the grace of God.

<sup>25</sup>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."

5. = Felix got more than he bargained for.

a. He thought he'd be able to pick up a few details he could turn to a profit.

b. He wasn't counting on Paul's ability to make the Gospel a *compelling message* calling for radical change.

6. = The only change Felix wanted was more power, more wealth, more pleasure.

7. = Yet here was Paul **REASONING** with him about the very opposite.

a. As Paul spoke about being right with God & how good it is, Felix saw the truth in it.

b. As Paul talked about the virtue & reward of self-control, Felix was drawn in.

c. When Paul turned to the inevitability of judgment, Felix recognized the logic

of= it.

8. = Paul built a clear case for the *complete reasonableness* of the Christian faith & before Felix realized what was happening, he *found himself admitting* the right & reasonable thing to do was yield.=

9. And while his head said “Go for it” his heart & will said, “Get out of here!”

10. Many of us = know exactly what Felix was going through.

a. We’ve been there. The Gospel was presented & it made complete sense.

b. We were convicted of our sin & knew the right thing to do was yield to God’s offer of forgiveness.

c. But then another voice spoke up, “Wait – hold on. You don’t really want to give up sin do you?”

d. “Think about all the fun & good times you’ll be missing out on.”

e. “And if you become a Christian, your friends & family are going to give you a hard time.”

f. “Look – okay, sure, there’s merit in all this Gospel stuff – so, let’s do this;

1) You don’t have to= go & get all religious.

2) You don’t want to= turn into some kind of weird, Bible-thumping, ‘glory-halleluiaah’ shouting Jesus freak

3) Just *cut back a bit* on t= he nasty stuff you’ve been doing & *be a nicer person*.

h. Yeah, that’ll work!

i. Then the *fear* at how close we came to ‘getting religion’ begins to subside.

11. As Paul spo= ke, Felix followed the logic & was brought under the *conviction of the Holy Spir= it*.

a. When he realized *where* he was being led & what his own mind was concludi= ng, he panicked.

b. All he could think to say was, “Okay, that’s enough for now. You, u= hh, go back to your cell & when I’m free to have another little chat = like this, I’ll let you know.”

<sup>26</sup>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.

12. Having sent Paul away, the old habits & mindset quickly reasserted itself.

a. He went back to being the old, conniving, power-hungry, money-grubbing, pleasure-seeking Felix.

b. He narrowly escaped the first time, but now on guard, he sent for Paul several more times.

c. Paul continued to preach – but each time that Felix reached the point where Paul's words began to draw him in, he halted the conversation & sent Paul away.

d. I'll bet he *ended each session* with the same words, "Thanks Paul, I've enjoyed our talk once again. But I have to go now. We'll talk again later."

13. The problem is, you can only say "later" so many times. Eventually you run out of time.

14. Felix did –

<sup>27</sup>But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.

15. How many conversations do you suppose Felix & Paul had in those 2 years? Quite a few!

16. But every time conviction grew hot, Felix bailed –

17. Then he'd dive into some new distraction to silence the voice of conscience & reason.

#### **D. Whose On Trial?**

1. = Tell me—who was *really* on trial here – Paul or Felix?

a. It wasn't Paul who stood before a Governor.

b. It was a governor who stood before the King.

2. = Paul was simply God's attorney, making his case for the Gospel. It was *Felix* who was on trial.

3. = His *response* to Paul's message determined the verdict of where'd he'd spend eternity.

4. = The same is true today.

a. When we testify by word & deed of 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're not judging us, they're judging themselves.
5. = The decision they make about Jesus determines their eternity.

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. A Grave Error

1. = The mistake many people make is the one Felix made – *putting off* responding to the Gospel.
2. = Like Felix, deep down they know they **OUGHT** to surrender to God.
  - a. It's the *right & reasonable* thing to do.
  - b. All that's noble & sober-minded within = urges them to do it.
  - c. But right at the point of yielding to God, *they back away*.
  - d. They talk themselves *out of it* by saying, "**Later.**"
    - 1) "I know I should = do this – & *one day I will*, but not right now.
    - 2) Let me take care of a couple things first, then I will.
    - 3) Let me sow my wild oats= over in this area first. Once I've got that out of my system, *then* I'll come to God.
    - 4) I mean, if I surrender = now, then all my life I'll wish I'd done this or that. So I'll just do it, *then* ask God to forgive me."
3. = Here's the problem – every time you hear the Gospel & experience the conviction of the Holy Spirit but don't yield to that conviction, you're hardening your heart.
  - a. Conviction is a spiritual pain meant by the Holy = Spirit to find relief in the forgiveness Jesus offers.
  - b. But if you respond to conviction by turning to some temporal distraction, you're only *numbing* yourself.
  - c. And eventually, you'll lose the ability to = feel conviction.
  - d. A callous will form on your heart – it'll become hard.

4. = Romans 1 & 2 Tim 3 refer to people God turns over to corruption.

a. They resist the Spirit so long & hard they've become totally insensiti= ve.

b. There's a poem that goes . . .

There is a = time we know not when, a line we know not where,

That marks = the destiny of men between sorrow and despair.

There is a = line, though by man unseen, that once it has been crossed

Even God Hi= mself in all His love has sworn that all is lost.

### **B. No More Convenient Time=**

1. = Felix, under conviction, backed away, using the excuse that he'd consider it again= at a "more convenient time."

a. Once, twice, thrice, a dozen times he played this little *game of chicken* with salvation.

b. And then, one day a ship arrived from Rome with a squad of royal guards from Nero.

c. They carried an arrest warrant for Felix.

d. His mismanagement finally reached the Emperors' ears & he was recal= d to Rome to= stand trial.

e. He never spoke with Paul again. His "more convenient time" never c= ame.

2. = It never does. There is no time more convenient time than this one –

3. = Because quite simply *we're not guaranteed tomorrow.*

4. = Face it =3D "One of these days" is none of these days.

5. = All we have is this moment. What we do with it counts for ever.

6. = My best friend in high school was Steve.

a.&= nbsp; Steve had to take an anti-seizure pill every day because of something that had happened to him when he was younger.

b. He was sitting on the couch watching TV when he suddenly passed out and fell to the floor.

c. His parents couldn't revive him so they threw him in the back seat of the= ir

car and rushed to the hospital where after a while they were able to revive him.

d. After lots of tests, the doctors concluded that though he had no evidence of epilepsy, he'd had a seizure.

e. Somehow, his brainwaves had interfered with each other so a part of his brain just shut off, like a circuit breaker.

f. They said it was probably stimulated by something he saw on TV.

7. = Technically, Steve was brain dead for several minutes.

a. Of course we had a lot of fun with that later.

b. Saying he often exhibited signs of being brain dead.

8. = What if that happened to one of us?

9. = What if a 1" meteor decided to crash through that roof?

10. All we have is this moment.

11. There is *no more convenient time* to do what's right than right now!

### **C. "Not Now!"**

**1. I end with this well-known but poignant story.**

**2. = One day the devil called a strategy session of leading tempters to devise the greatest of all lies.**

**3. = They sat around an immense table, pondering.**

**4. = Hours went by, then a demon shouted, "I've got it! Let's tell humans there's no God."**

**a. The devil said, "No. The existence of God is revealed by creation.**

**b. That won't work. Try again."**

**5. = So they sat in silence several hours more when another demon said, "Let's tell them there's no hell."**

**a. Satan shook his head, "People have an inner sense of right & wrong.**

**b. With it goes the inevitability of reward & judgment. Logic demands both a heaven & hell."**

**6. = Again, there was a long silence. Then a chuckle rose from the devil's end of= the table.**

**a. It grew steadily louder until all of the demons were trembling with excitement= .**

**b. Satan said, "I've got it."**

**c. "We can't tell them there's no God."**

**d. "We can't tell them there's no hell."**

**e. "We'll tell them there's no hurry."**

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