

Felix and the Three Testimonies Acts 24:1-27

Introduction

It seems to me that we've been hearing an awful lot about "justice" these days but it seems also that **we don't really understand what the word means**

We have crowds in the streets chanting, "No justice; no peace!" when what is being demanded isn't truly justice but a form of retaliatory retribution for some perceived wrong or another

At one time the concept of justice was restricted to the proper assignment of reward and punishment on the basis of adherence to or deviation from a righteous standard

Much of society has strayed from viewing justice as a legal concept and is determined to turn it into a social construct of uniform distribution of the natural advantages and disadvantages that are part of this fallen world

And so our modern lexicon has expanded the concept of justice to include any and all "fairness" which means that any time there is any kind of inequity at all justice must be done to bring everyone to the same level

We have departments of justice at the state and federal levels of our government

But it seems that even our legal system has largely turned from a search for truth and justice and has become a contest where both prosecution and defense are only interested in putting another one in the win column

And once again we will see from our text today that people have not changed all that much in the past 2,000 years

We will be considering **Acts 24** in its entirety this morning and in this passage we will see what transpired during and around Paul's trial before the Roman governor, Felix

I have framed my presentation of the passage around the idea of testimonies and we will see two testimonies that occurred during the trial

First, we will consider the testimony from the prosecution as we look at **the Jews' accusation** in **verses 1-9**

Next, we will look at **verses 10-23** and **Paul's defense** as he gives testimony to refute the charges brought against him

Lastly, we will look at **verses 24-27** which is the smallest portion of the passage but by far the most important as we consider **Paul's witness** as he testifies before Felix and Drusilla privately about the reality of true, righteous justice

Please join me in Acts 24 and follow along as I read verses 1-9 (**Acts 24:1-9**)

Remember that Paul has been transported to Caesarea by a contingent of Roman soldiers and brought before Felix who conducted a preliminary examination by which he determined that Paul's case fell under his jurisdiction and he had put Paul into rather lax custody within the praetorium of Herod while awaiting the arrival of Paul's accusers

***1**And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul. **2**And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying:*

*"Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, **3**in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude. **4**But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. **5**For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. **6**He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. **8**By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him."*

***9**The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so.*

I. The Jews' Accusation (1-9)

The hired gun

These same Jewish leaders had conducted Paul's trial before the Sanhedrin but now that they were going before the Roman governor they enlisted the assistance of a lawyer named **Tertullus**

Tertullus was an experienced professional who was trained in the rhetorical and legal arts of the day

They obviously wanted every advantage in having their case prevail so they did as anyone would do today as they brought counsel to argue on their behalf rather than trying to go it alone

From **verse 1** it appears there may have been some pre-trial conference where the Jews stated at least prima-facie evidence before Felix to show that they believed they had a case against Paul

And in **verse 2** we see that they obviously convinced Felix to hear their case as Paul is summoned into Felix's court for the actual trial and Tertullus began to formally present the case against Paul

Tertullus began with excessive flattery toward Felix

In the rhetorical style of the day, Tertullus began his address by engaging in flattery of the governor

We wouldn't make too much out of his obviously fawning statements except for the fact that they were overtly excessive and obviously hypocritical

Tertullus began by stating that Felix had brought the nation much peace and great reforms but his claims, while factual, tried to hide the fact that Felix was largely despised by the Jews

To be sure, Felix had brought a measure of peace but it was peace through domination as he had put down several instances of rebellion and dissent through brutal and tyrannical means

In his insincere opening we see the vast difference between fact and truth and how something quite factual can be said in an attempt to deceive making it a lie even though it's technically true

Motive is a critical part of testimony and the motives of Tertullus weren't pure or noble as he wrapped the facts in a lie and tried to sell them as true

What the Jewish people felt about Felix was the furthest thing from gratitude and Felix had to know it

Tertullus was so over the top in playing the part of the sycophant that he even closed his opening remarks by claiming that he could only cut short his praise out of consideration for Felix's time as he promised to be brief

What kind of man was Felix?

In spite of Tertullus' claims, Felix was not a man of honor

He was a former slave who had risen to become a Roman governor

His brother was Pallas who was a close associate of the Roman emperor Claudius

The ancient historian Tacitus described Felix as "a master of cruelty and lust who exercised the powers of a king with the spirit of a slave" and as a man who acted as if "he could do any evil act with impunity"

Felix was a social and political climber who did everything with an eye toward improving his position

The case against Paul

After his thankfully brief opening, Tertullus turned his attention to laying out the case against Paul

Tertullus promised to be brief, which was also a matter of form that was expected in his day but even so it would seem that Luke has recorded only the highlights of the trial

It seems highly unlikely that either side in the dispute would have been quite so brief as to limit their testimony to what we see here without further expansion

But we still get a clear picture of what took place as Tertullus lists the charges they were bringing against Paul

He began by making the general statement that the Jews viewed Paul as a “plague” or a persistent pest – and then he levied three specific charges against him

1. Paul was a troublemaker, an insurrectionist who was stirring up riots wherever he went

In **verse 5** we once again we see Tertullus wrap the truth in innuendo

The Jewish leaders were without a doubt deeply disturbed by the turmoil that Paul created in their midst as he preached that Jesus was the Messiah and people began to be saved – they were losing influence every time Paul spoke!

But he wanted Felix to think that Paul was also a danger to Rome so he used the term that would cause Felix to think that Paul was an instigator of insurrection among the Jews throughout the Roman world

2. Next, in the last part of verse 5 Tertullus claims that Paul was a ringleader of the “Nazarenes”

Jesus had been referred to as “the Nazarene” so Tertullus used the name as a term of derision for the Christians who he calls a sect or a minor division of Judaism

Tertullus again tries to portray Paul as an instigator of deviance drawing people away from the established norm

He implies that Paul is guilty of heresy while at the same time attempting to minimize the impact of Christianity by referring to them in such a way as to infer they would be a minor annoyance if not for the heretical aspect

But what he subtly trying to do is plant the seed in Felix’s mind that he should defer to the Jewish authorities for how to handle Paul because this is primarily a Jewish matter even though it has implications for Rome

We see this tactic fleshed out in the other charge found in **verse 6**

3. Paul had “tried” to profane the temple but thankfully the Jews had stopped him in the nick of time

We need to notice that this charge was downgraded from before when they claimed he *had* profaned the temple by bringing Trophimus into it

“Missing” verses

Now we need to quickly address a matter that you may not have noticed and that is the fact that verse 7 is missing from our ESV Bibles

Actually, the end of **verse 6** and the beginning of **verse 8** seem to be missing as well but they aren’t really gone – they’ve just been relegated to the footnotes at the bottom of the page (placed within brackets in the NASB)

And that’s because archeological research has discovered older, better manuscripts that reveal the likelihood that those words were later inclusions and therefore not a part of Luke’s original text

They were likely helpful, explanatory notes that someone had written in the margins of a manuscript copy at some point that a scribe mistakenly copied into the text

But they do help us to see what Tertullus was likely up to as he attempted to get Felix to say that Claudius Lysias had interfered wrongly in stopping the Jews from executing Paul for having desecrated the temple

Again, we see that Tertullus was careful to avoid telling a blatant lie as he twisted and distorted the facts to give a wrong impression in the hopes of achieving what he and his clients would view as a beneficial judgment

Winning was far more important to Paul’s accusers than justice and they were willing to distort the truth in order to win and claim that justice had been done

But each of their claims of wrongdoing were broad, exaggerated, unsupported, untruthful allegations

And in verse 9 we see that the Jews affirmed that all these charges were true

But since they weren’t eyewitnesses they couldn’t legitimately affirm any of the charges in a Roman court

The only charge they could legally testify to was that they thought Paul was a pest and that’s hardly a crime

Proverbs 18:17 tells us, “The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.”

And after Tertullus had finished with his presentation, Felix nodded at Paul signaling him to proceed with his **defense**

II. Paul's Defense (10-23)

Follow along as I read **verses 10-23**

***10**And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied:*

*“Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense. **11**You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem, **12**and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. **13**Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me. **14**But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, **15**having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. **16**So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. **17**Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. **18**While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia— **19**they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me. **20**Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, **21**other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: ‘It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.’”*

Paul also begins in the rhetorical style of the day with a much milder expression of flattery in verse 10

Actually, Paul's opening remark wasn't all that flattering as he simply stated that Felix had been a judge over the nation for many years – which was true enough – and that because of that fact he would cheerfully make his defense. We might ask how Paul could cheerfully make his defense before a judge of such low character but Paul knew that he could trust Felix to act according to his nature.

Paul was confident that Felix was unlikely to act in any way that might cause his superiors to raise an eyebrow in his direction.

And Paul was sure that the evidence he would present would be enough to be acquitted.

Paul begins his defense in verse 11 by addressing the most serious charge of “inciting insurrection”

And Paul demonstrates his innocence by multiple proofs

1. He didn't have time to foment revolution

Paul reveals that it has only been **12 days** since he arrived in Jerusalem and Felix is well aware that he's spent the last **5 days** in custody in Caesarea and he was in the custody of Claudius Lysias in Jerusalem before that for at least **2 days**.

At best he had been free to move about in Jerusalem for **5 days** before he was grabbed up and locked away and having been gone from Jerusalem for over 20 years that was hardly enough time to stir up a revolt against Rome.

2. His accusers had not personally seen him arguing with anyone or inciting the public to act out and they can't offer any eyewitness testimony that he had done any of what they are accusing him of

Without a doubt, he had been in his share of disputes in various places as he was challenged over presenting the gospel. But on this trip he had engaged in no teaching whatsoever and no one could offer proof that he had been disputing with anyone or stirring up the crowds – not in the temple or in the synagogues or in the marketplace.

3. Paul then addressed his frame of mind and his motivation

a. He pointed out that he worshipped the same God as his accusers – the God of their fathers

b. He believed everything found in the Old Testament (the Law and the Prophets)

c. Therefore, he lives with the assurance that the dead will be resurrected and that there will be a judgment of righteousness – both of which are clearly found in the Law and the Prophets

d. And these beliefs cause him to endeavor to lead an exemplary life before God and man

It was this belief that caused Paul to strive to have a clear conscience – he was well aware of the coming judgment

e. He had only come to Jerusalem bringing alms to his fellow countrymen and offerings to God

Paul was no insurrectionist and he was no heretic – he was peaceably going about his business in Jerusalem when he was assaulted and taken into custody

Paul was in Jerusalem on a mission of mercy to his fellow Jewish believers and was demonstrating that he was no enemy of Judaism

4. In fact, Paul then stated that he was arrested while he was alone in the temple in the midst of his days of ritual purification according to the Law – hardly the activity of someone who was bent on fomenting a revolt against Judaism or Rome

5. Paul then brought up that the ones who made the accusation that got him arrested in the first place were not present –

It was a serious breach of Roman law for someone to make an accusation and then not show up to testify – a fact that should have automatically exonerated Paul and brought about his release

6. In light of the absence of his original accusers he asked for the Jewish leaders present to reveal what they had convicted him of when he had stood before the Sanhedrin –

But in reality they couldn't because they had not found him guilty of anything

The only complaint they could legitimately bring against him was that he believed in the resurrection of the dead

And that was a question that divided the Sanhedrin itself with the Pharisees on one side and the Sadducees on the other and while it caused many an argument, it certainly wasn't against the law

So, Paul was able to answer and refute each of the charges against him and he did so quietly and respectfully

But we need to note that it was his manner of life – the fact that he lived with a clear conscience – that permitted him to rightly say that no one could possibly show proof that he had done wrong

Different strategies

Like a magician who turns objects so that you see them only in the way they want so as to mislead, Tertullus had presented his case in a way that he hoped would cause Felix to think Paul was an enemy of Rome and worthy of punishment

But the charges he brought were complete fabrications without any proof whatsoever and Paul was able to show by his exemplary life and the demonstrable facts of his time in Jerusalem that they were false

And Paul was able to show that if he was guilty of anything at all he was only guilty of a difference in theological opinion and that was of no concern to a Roman court

Felix's Response

And in **verses 22-23** we see **Felix's response**

***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.*

Felix should have dismissed the charges against Paul and found him "not guilty"

But he procrastinated and deferred his verdict until such time as Claudius Lysias could come down from Jerusalem to testify

Apparently, Felix never sent for him because it seems he didn't come during the next two years

But we see Felix's true character revealed in his procrastination

First, we see in **verse 26** that he was hoping that Paul would pay for his release

Second, we are reminded that Felix was a political animal in that he wanted to be sure the Jews continued to think favorably of him in **verse 27**

We see God's hand in his procrastination though as Paul is given the opportunity to testify to the gospel before Felix and his wife, Drusilla during the time of his captivity

Look with me at **verses 24-27** as we consider our final "testimony" of the passage – **Paul's witness**

***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.*

III. Paul's Witness (24-27)

We have seen Paul witness to a Jewish audience by going to the Old Testament Scriptures and showing how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies and by reason showing that he had to be the Messiah

We have also seen how he witnessed to a Gentile audience by showing from nature who God is and what his plan for mankind is

Paul meets his audience where they are and uses their experience as a starting place to explain the gospel

As we've seen, Felix was a political man and marriage was a means of advancing his political and social status

Drusilla was Felix's third wife and he was her second husband having been wooed away from her first husband by Felix

She was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I which made her the sister of King Agrippa II and Bernice who we will meet next week when we look at Acts 25 – their marriage was a marriage of political expediency

Apparently, they thought it would be an entertaining diversion to listen to Paul since there is really no indication that they were seriously seeking to understand

But since Paul's methodology was to meet his hearers where they were, **his preaching soon crossed over into meddling** as he presented the gospel within the context of their lives

Paul spoke to them about "faith in Christ Jesus" in the context of "righteousness", "self-control", and "the coming judgment"

Paul no doubt shared with them **the fallen nature of mankind in contrast to God's perfect righteousness and the need of all to be reconciled to God and that Jesus was the way to be justified before God**

Then he in all likelihood shared with them that **the life of a Christ-follower was one of ongoing repentance of sin and striving to live a temperate lifestyle** as one who had made Jesus the Lord of their life

And he told them of **the coming judgment** where all mankind will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and answer for the things they have done on the earth whether good or evil (**2Corinthians 5:10**)

And Luke tells us that Felix was "alarmed"

The original Greek word carries with it an intensity of emotion – Felix was terrified about what Paul revealed

They had approached Christianity as if it were just another brand of philosophical musing but when Paul showed them the true cost of following Christ Felix was terrified

Felix and Drusilla had thought that conversing with Paul would be an entertaining diversion and didn't count on the moral implications and the coming judgment

Whether his terror was because of the things he had done and was doing or whether it was over the thought of having his morals adjusted we can't be sure

But we do know that there was no repentance or acceptance of the gospel

Felix was obviously pricked by the sharp truth of the gospel but again he procrastinated and he made the same mistake that many still make today in thinking that he could decide later

2Corinthians 6:2 – "now is the day of salvation"

Psalms 95:7-8 "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts..."

Eventually, God may well stop trying to bring the resistant and rebellious person to repentance (**Romans 1:28**)

Felix apparently met with Paul and conversed with him over the next two years but it seems his heart was more set on receiving a bribe than it was on receiving salvation

Conclusion

When Paul stood before the Sanhedrin in Acts 23 and claimed that he had lived so as to have a good conscience and when he appeared before Felix he said that he took pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man

As we saw last week Paul wasn't claiming to have lived a perfect life but rather a life where he made every effort to live according to the biblical standard and when he erred he readily admitted his error and tried to make amends

And today we saw that Paul was able to maintain his clear conscience because he endeavored to shed hypocrisy and insincerity as he spoke the unvarnished truth with **sincerity** and **honesty** and **boldness**

As Christ-followers, Paul's example in his testimony before Felix is worthy of our imitation

We live in a world where people are perpetually offended and defensive

A world where no perceived slight can be overlooked and the even the smallest measure of disrespect is reason enough to protest and getting even – or better still getting ahead – is the goal rather than justice

How different might we appear to those watching us if we got rid of all guile and deceit, all flattery and hypocrisy, but also all bitterness, accusation, sarcasm, ridicule and the like and made every effort to only speak the truth in love?

What if we were to live such exemplary lives that no one would have justification to speak ill of us?

In **Matthew 10:16** the Lord told his disciples to be *"wise as serpents and innocent as doves"*

And a huge part of wisdom is remembering to remain winsome

Because as you see the first part of **that verse** says, *"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves"*

And the wolves of the world are waiting and looking for any reason to turn on the Lord's sheep

Therefore we must conduct ourselves in such a manner that they can find no reason to attack us other than for the offense of the gospel we proclaim

And we must act when the Holy Spirit convicts us

Seeing someone reject a clear presentation of the gospel is a very hard thing

When Felix procrastinated and decided he would listen more when it was convenient to do so he made a mistake that had eternal implications

He was clearly jolted by what Paul shared with him but he deferred his decision until a later day and as far as we know that day never came

But, as believers, we can likewise be guilty of ignoring the urging and conviction of the Holy Spirit and decide that we will pay attention when we "get an opportunity"

Think about all the ways we in essence tell God, "Don't call me; I'll call you" as we put off listening to him and doing what he is telling us to do

As long as we walk this earth there will always be a next step in our growth of fellowship with Christ

There will always be some repentance needed, some obedience required, some forgiveness to be sought, some restitution to be made, or some next step to take – and with each of them we must decide whether to act

The prophet Joel referred to this life as the valley of decision in **Joel 3:14** –

Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.

What is the Lord saying to you today that has you tempted to say, "Later, Lord; I'll obey when it's more convenient"?

Felix was the poster boy for procrastination and his indecision cost him the opportunity of a lifetime as he turned down the chance to repent and be saved – all for the hope of receiving a payoff

Decisions present themselves every day; let's pray and ask God to keep us from being like Felix and so miss out on a more fulfilling life now and eternal reward in heaven

Because, while we may not find true justice on the earth, we know the righteous Judge will render absolute justice in the end – Let's pray