



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 24:1–27

“The Governor Before the Apostle”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] [We are] in our Scripture reading to Acts chapter 24, so if you have your New Testaments, turn with me to that chapter, and we are going to, as last Sunday, we are going to read the entire chapter.

Our subject for today in the ministry of the Word is “The Governor Before the Apostle” or “Delegated Authority Before Ultimate Authority.” And if you, as [we] read, give a few thoughts to that general subject, I think you will see that at least it’s in harmony with the things that Luke writes in this chapter concerning the early church’s history. We begin at verse 1 of chapter 24, for our Scripture reading. You may remember that the apostle is in Caesarea and Felix the governor or the procurator has requested that the Jews be present and Paul be present, and a hearing will be given over the case of Paul.

“And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul. And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, ‘Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, we accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words. For we have found this man a pestilent fellow,

and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took.”

Now, I’m going to read some words that are not found in many of the most recent translations of the New Testament, and as we’ve often made comment, the reason for this is that the manuscripts of the Greek New Testament do vary in a number of places. This is one of the places. Some of the old manuscripts have these words that I’m going to read and some of the oldest manuscripts do not. And, in the light of the principles of textual criticism practiced by most New Testament critics today, these next words that I’m going to read are judged not to be part of the book of Acts, but they are part of certain manuscripts of the book of Acts that we have. And they are certainly true to the story that Luke is telling. So, after the words, “whom we took,” we read.

“And would have judged according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come unto thee.”

Now, those are the words that are missing in a number of the ancient manuscripts. And we continue in verse 8:

“By examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so. Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, ‘Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself, because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, or a sect, so worship I the God of my

fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets. And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.”

You know, when you were following along with me previously, when Paul was appearing before the council in Jerusalem, he made the same comment that he had lived in all good conscience before God until this day, before Ananias. Chapter 23, verse 1. And at that point the high priest commanded them that stood by to “smite him on the mouth.” Well, Paul repeated this in the presence of Felix, with the assurance that this would not happen again, because appearing before the Roman governor that could not happen. But he went ahead and made the same confession.

“Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult.”

Now, when it says “found me purified,” remember, he was simply undergoing rituals that had to do with purification.

“Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.’ And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way.”

It’s very interesting to ask yourself the question, how did Felix have a more accurate understanding of “the way,” the term that Luke uses for Christianity? The way? And, of course, we

do not know the answer to that question. It’s, there is tradition to the effect that even Simon Magus came to Caesarea, and instructed Felix in some of the Christian tenets. And then, if you remember, that Philip the evangelist was in Caesarea and there, no doubt, was then a group of believers who met there. It’s possible that he had heard about their meetings and through Philip and his ministry had some understanding of Christianity. But Luke doesn’t tell us how he had a “more perfect knowledge,” he simply says that he did have that. And so we read.

“He deferred them, and said, ‘When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.’ And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him. And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he [that is, Paul] as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, or self-control, the Greek term means and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, ‘Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.’ He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: whereupon he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.”

That means, in the sense of carried on conversations with him. And then, Luke concludes the chapter with, “But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix’s room. That is, he succeeded him as the procurator. And Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.”

May God bless this reading of his Word. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we are indeed grateful to Thee for the privilege of the study of the Word of God. We thank Thee that Luke, the historian, has faithfully done his research, as he said, and has given us this remarkable testimony of the things that happened in the early days of Christianity. We thank Thee for the ministry of the apostles, of the deacons, of other gifted men, and

we thank Thee for Luke, the historian, who has made it possible for us to enter into the experience of the early church. We thank Thee especially for this account that we have read, and we pray, Lord, that the lesson of it may strike home to our hearts. May we be delivered from putting off to tomorrow the things that should be done today.

We give Thee thanks for the whole church of Jesus Christ and we pray for every member of that body, wherever he may be today, in whatever assembly of people who are meeting he may be found. We pray for the believers in Christ, and we ask Thy blessing upon them. So, Lord, we commit to Thee the entire church; those who have by Thy grace committed their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation he offers through the sacrifice that he made on Calvary’s cross.

We pray for our country. We ask Thy blessing upon the president and those who are with him in the government, and for the other governments under which we, ourselves, serve as citizens. We pray for them as well. We give Thee thanks for the freedom that we have in this land and pray that it may continue. And we thank Thee for the ministry of Believers Chapel and for the faithful elders and deacons, people on the staff, and the volunteer workers who make it possible for so many to hear the ministry of the Word of God. We give Thee thanks, Lord, for all of the self-sacrificial service that is carried on here and we pray Thy blessing upon all who are associated with this testimony. And we pray for the members and friends and those who are visiting with us today, may they be richly blessed from Thee. We give Thee thanks especially for those who are ill and we pray, Lord, that Thou wilt give healing, according to Thy will. We commit them to Thee. We thank Thee for the prayers that have been offered for them by so many. And we pray that the other kinds of petitions as well may find an answer from Thee that will glorify Thy name. We give Thee thanks for the Lord Jesus Christ and we pray that in our meeting He may be exalted.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] “The Governor Before the Apostle” or “Delegated Authority Before Ultimate Authority.” “Felix trembled,” so our text says, but he did not repent. He was a victim of tomorrow.

If today has slain its thousands, tomorrow has slain its tens of thousands. Edward J. Young, some years ago in a lecture that I heard, said, “Procrastination is the thief of time.” But it’s also the burglar of eternity; and that is, of course, the sadness of tomorrow.

The Bible delights in striking contrasts. When we begin the reading of Holy Scripture in the 4th chapter, we read of Cain and Abel, and that left an impression upon the church because later the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews draws the contrast again, in his great catalog of believing men in Hebrews chapter 11. There is Elijah and Jezebel, and that has left its impress as well upon the readers of Holy Scripture. There is Jacob and Esau. Scripture saying, “Jacob have I loved; Esau have I hated.” And those words have rung down through the centuries. And, of course, our Lord appearing before Pilate, Jesus and Pilate, and when we think of those two we think of one of the great contrasts of the history of humanity.

Well, we see another one here, because Paul before Felix is one of those unforgettable stories. Felix, the man who was the procrastinator. He began his life as a slave, but due to the fact that his brother Pallas gained a great deal of favor with Antonia, who was the mother of Claudius, the Roman Emperor, he, also, gained his freedom as well. And these two, Pallas and Felix, brothers, had illustrious careers. Felix, ultimately, became a servant of the Roman empire in the land of Palestine, in Samaria, to be exact, and then, ultimately, he became the procurator and he was, ultimately married to Drusilla, a very famous Jewish woman.

Drusilla came from an unusual family, the Herods. And this was her second husband. He had seduced Drusilla by the use of a sorcerer and his incantations. But he had married her. Evidently, she was a strikingly beautiful woman.

Felix was a man who was also characterized by a ruthless greed. That becomes evident in his later history; and, finally, due to the expression of it and the resultant oppression of the Jews in the land, who brought a charge against him, he was recalled to Rome. But he began his life as a slave and became one of Rome’s important men. Tacitus, the Latin historian, says of Felix, “He exercised the powers of a king, with the disposition of a slave.”

It’s the responsibility of every preacher to preach the Word of God. In fact, our responsibility is great. No one can have a greater responsibility than a preacher of the Word of God. In fact, when Mr. Spurgeon said, “If God has called you to be a missionary, do not stoop to be a king.” He was expressing some of the same sentiment. That the most important thing that anyone can possibly do is to be a preacher of the Word of God. The responsibility of such a person is great. His responsibility is great for the simple fact that what we preach is the solemn truth of God. It is not, ideally, something that we have anything to do with, at all, so far as invention or discovery is concerned. It is the revelation of the Lord God, and it is our responsibility to communicate it, just like an ambassador communicates the word of the one whom he represents to some foreign power. “So we are ambassadors for Christ,” so the apostle says. The responsibility is great.

It is great for the simple reason that we may never preach again, and it’s also great because you may never have the opportunity of hearing the ministry of the Word of God again. So when we come to the Word of God, we come to something that brings great responsibility upon us all. And, particularly, when we come to such a magnificent chapter in which some of the fundamental experiences of life are set forth for us.

Paul is now in the custody of the Roman Empire. He’s in the custody of the Roman Empire because he has confessed the fact that he was a Roman, and he was delivered from the Jewish authorities who wished to put him to death. So Luke has said.

Now, he is going to appear before the procurator. And the custom of appearing before the procurator was for the individual who was to appear to be, first of all, indicted. And then, he would be cited, in the sense that he would be called upon to answer that he was there. And then, the meeting would be turned over to the prosecution, who would set out the charges against him. And then the individual being charged would have an opportunity to reply. So we’re going to hear the prosecution of the apostle and, we’re going to hear his reply.

Now, as you might expect, Tertullus was, obviously, a Roman lawyer, if we can judge by his name. He was probably an individual who had experience in appearing before the delegated authority

of the Roman Empire, just as today there are certain lawyers who have the power to appear before certain courts and others do not. This man, evidently, had the authority to appear before the Roman procurator, and he was secured by the Jewish authorities probably because they thought that he had a good reputation and was very successful in his prosecution. And so he is the one who is going to bring the charge against the apostle for the Jewish authorities. And, as you might expect, he engages in a bit of nauseating flattery. Listen to what he says, all the time remembering, of course, that Felix is really a very wicked man.

When Tertullus began to accuse Paul, he said, “Seeing,” Felix, “that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto the nation by thy providence, we accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.” In other words, he poses as the reformed governor of Judaea, on the lips of Tertullus the Roman lawyer. Almost as if we should say, pardon the political skirt that appears but, almost as if we should say that Franklin D. Roosevelt was a great defender of fiscal soundness by the fact that he closed the banks during the Depression or something like that. Or Lyndon Baines Johnson has been a great defender of the poor because he launched his poverty program and as a result we don’t have need for welfare any longer. Or something like this, I think you can catch the flavor it and I hope you don’t think my words are inspired, for they are not. But, you will notice that the charges that are laid against Paul are, first of all, political then, secondly, religious and, finally, he’s accused of sacrilege. Listen to what is stated in the 5th verse, we have two of these types of charges. “For we have found this man a pestilent fellow.” So Paul is seditious. This term, incidentally, describing Paul as a pestilent fellow is the precise term that is used to describe some kind of plague. So can you think of the Apostle Paul as “Paul the pest?” That really is what Tertullus is saying. “Paul the pest.” So he’s accused of political sedition; and the hired lawyer is the one who is accusing him.

The second charge is probably more serious, at least for us, he’s accused religiously of being heretical. It says, verse 5, “He’s a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.” In other words, he is a representative of a group of people who are illegally practicing religion in the Roman Empire. Now,

the Romans recognized certain religions as *licita* that is, permitted, that is, legal. But others are *illicita*, that is, they are illegal. They cannot be practiced with the support of the Roman Empire. Christianity had an ambivalent relationship for a time. But Judaism was a *religio licita*. But Paul is accused here of being a “ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes,” thus, a part of an unrecognized religion; a *religio illicita*. So that is the charge that is laid against him religiously. He is heretical; his religion is unrecognized, it is illegal. And, finally, in the 6th verse, Paul is accused of profaning the temple. “Who hath also gone about to profane the temple.” And the text reads, “Whom we seized.”

Now, of course, this is a lie. Paul did not profane the temple. As a matter of fact, they were the ones who were breaking the Mosaic Law, because they intended to have a lynch party and Paul would be the guest of honor. For they had already made it very plain that they wanted to put him to death. And, in addition, remember, forty others had also banded together to put Paul to death, as well.

One thing you can learn from this, and I won't labor the point because we don't have that much time, but it's quite obvious to any reader of the Bible, the point is this: religion does not cause men to do or to be right. A man may be a very religious man and a very wicked man. In fact, the history of religion, if one goes back to the beginning, might indicate that religion, or religious men are more likely to be wicked than to be spiritual. Unfortunately, that is true.

And we see it, not only in Judaism, not only in the other religions on the face of this earth, but we see it in professing Christianity, as well. It's not surprising that people can bring charges against Christianity that have a great deal of validity to them; because the professing body of Christians is large, and they are guilty of many, many wicked crimes, in the name of religion. So we should learn from the first pages of the Bible, in the experience of Cain and Abel, that religion does not cause a person to do that which is right or be that which is acceptable before the Lord God.

Now, when we are talking about the “new birth” that's something entirely different; because a man may be religious and never have experienced the “new birth.” So you can learn from this that the fact that a man is a religious man, the fact that he is part of the clergy, or the fact that he is part

of the cloth or the fact that he is an elder or a deacon in a church or the fact that he’s a member of a church, like many of you in this audience are members of Believers Chapel, or that you are a member of other religious bodies; that does not mean at all that your relationship to the Lord God is pleasing to the Lord God. So here are individuals, the leading religious leaders in the land of Palestine, and they are accusing the Apostle Paul of being Paul the pest. Think of it for a moment.

Now, the apostle will defend himself and he defends himself in verse 10 through verse 21. He begins, and the words with which he begins might make you think of the way Tertullus flattered Felix. But if you’ll read Paul’s words carefully, you will see that while he was courteous; he did it without flattery. He simply thanks Felix for the fact that he stands before an individual who has been a judge in the land for a considerable period of time. That’s about all you could have said honestly about Felix. He served for a lengthy period of time. So Paul, after the governor had beckoned to him to speak, he answered, “Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.”

Now, twelve days since Paul arrived in the city of Jerusalem and some of those days have been spent out of Jerusalem in Caesarea. It’s obvious the apostle didn’t have time to raise sedition against the Roman Empire. So the apostle simply pleads there is insufficient time for this charge of sedition. There is no evidence, he said. There are no witnesses. And, in fact, he could have said, and I think it’s implicit in the account, that the charges against me are generalities. There are no facts to which Tertullus or those who are charging me with sedition can point.

Now, the second thing that he responds to is the charge of heresy. And in verse 14, he says, “But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.” So he points to his worship; he worships the God of their fathers. He points to his beliefs, his conduct. He says, in effect, “I believe all that is written in the law and the prophets; and,

further, my faith centers in the fact that there is going to be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.” So how could anyone call that a heresy. If you speak of the Nazarenes as a sect or a party; you must see that this is a party that accepts the teaching of the Scriptures as we know them. And, further, we have centered our faith in the doctrine of the resurrection. And, of course, the apostle in his defense, has made it very plain that he is speaking about the resurrection, ultimately, of the Lord Jesus, as the Messiah of Israel, and therefore, the Savior of all men.

Now, so far as the charge of sacrilege is concerned, he answers that also. It’s a magnificent reply because I’m sure the apostle, he may have had a scrap of paper on which he wrote a few words in Greek or Hebrew or Aramaic, in order to have his thoughts clear as he heard the accusations against him. But, notice what he says. He says, in verse 17, “Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation and offerings.” These were monies that had been voluntarily given by the churches of Greece and Asia Minor, and he was bringing them to the poor professing Christians in the city of Jerusalem.

He says, “Certain Jews from Asia found me purified,” engaging in rites of purification, “in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. I was simply there with, about a half a dozen, men who were engaged in fulfilling a vow. And I had taken the charge of paying for their sacrifices,” he might have gone on to say, for that’s found in other parts of this record.

Further, “There was no crowd there; there was no tumult there. There is no reason to charge me with profaning the temple; and, furthermore,” he said, “If I’m going to be charged with that, those who saw me there should be here to make the charge face to face.” So he reminds them that they are not there. Verse 19: “Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had anything against me. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council.” And so he refers back to the time when he stood before Ananias, and he says, “See if any of you can point to anything that I did what was wrong when I stood before the council, except for this one thing. And that is that in the midst of the council, I cried out, touching the resurrection of the dead. I am called in question by you this day.” So that, of course, was the

occasion for the dispute that arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the apostle was left there standing while the Jewish people engaged in tumult over the question of the resurrection of the dead.

So, in effect, the apostle concludes with, “The real issue is the resurrection. Is it a crime to proclaim the doctrine of the resurrection?” And I ask you the question, who is the sectori? Is it I or is it they? I believe what the Scriptures teach, the law of the prophets. I believe in the resurrection of the dead. They have accused me of being of the sect, the party, of the Nazarenes. I ask you, who is the sectori? Am I or are they? Because if they are charging me with something wrong, their charge is, obviously, against the law and the prophets; and against the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. It’s a masterful defense.

Now, you will notice, of course, that no one is able to bring any charge against Paul. Lysias could find nothing wrong with Paul, so he sent him off to Felix. Now, what do you think the Roman procurator will do? After all, he’s heard the charge against Paul. He’s heard Paul’s response. There is no evidence of any reason whatsoever for the apostle to be delivered over to the Jews, to be judged by their law, which meant in their eyes to be put to death. What would you think a Roman procurator should do? Romans, who loved law. And even, of course, our legal system goes back to the Roman system. You would expect them to judge justly, would you not? But when it comes to Christianity, men don’t do right, because naturally men find the gospel of Jesus Christ an offensive thing, because it says to them, you have nothing with which to commend yourself to the Lord God. You must be born again. You are a sinner, justly deserving of wrath and condemnation. The Lord Jesus Christ has offered the atoning sacrifice on Calvary’s cross, by which, when you come to him, acknowledge your guilt and need, and receive him as your personal savior, you may have the promise of eternal life. But men don’t like to respond because, in effect, it says, you have nothing with which to commend yourself to God. Your church? Your good works? Your culture? Your education? Whatever it is in which you find trust, rather than Christ, is of no value for a man’s soul. “For by

grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast,” this man writes to the church in Ephesus.

Now, Felix, characteristic of human nature, adjourns the meeting, without decision. So we read in verse 22, “And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way,” and therefore more responsible, “he deferred them.” That means, he adjourned the matter. He deferred them. And he said, “When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.” In other words, Paul is given a limited amount of freedom; but he is bound over for further adjudication. He did what all weak men do in a crises; he temporized. He didn’t make the necessary decision. He had power, who said, “I find no fault in him at all,” did as Pilate did, nothing, in the cause of justice. Every individual before whom the gospel appears in the book of Acts, it seems, responds in that way. What a lesson. What a lesson for us human beings.

Now, the most interesting part of the chapter, in one sense, is the final few verses. “And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith.” Now, I said, previously, that Drusilla was the person he had induced to leave her former husband, Azizus, King of Emesa. She was one of the three daughters of Herod Agrippa I. Her father murdered James, and the murder is recorded in the book of Acts. Her great uncle, Herod Antipas, slew John the Baptist. And her great grandfather, Herod the Great, killed the babes in Jerusalem. So you can see, she comes from a great tradition. And so far as we know of Drusilla, she was of that kind of person. Now, Drusilla is there. She is a Jewess. She no doubt has a wide knowledge of the kind a person would have had, having heard about Christianity from a very corrupt and twisted way. She has that kind of knowledge of Christianity.

Felix, evidently, had a more precise and more accurate knowledge. But, now, they, perhaps one day when it was hot, maybe it was going to be a hundred and five, as it is today, doesn’t that encourage you folks, that live in Dallas? Just think of us, the Lord willing, we’ll be in Scotland in a

few days, where the temperature, high, is around sixty in the middle of the day. Think of us, will you? And we will be thinking of you and say, “oh, I’m sure glad I’m not going to be in Dallas.”

But, anyway, I imagine they got together and they said something like, “You know, court life is kind of dull. Why don’t we call for Paul, and talk with him? Maybe he can provide us with some amusement.” As a matter of fact, verse 27 says, in the Western text of the book of Acts, I won’t explain that technical term but in case someone here reads Greek, the Western text of the book of Acts says that when he wanted to show the Jews a pleasure, he left Paul bound on account of Drusilla. So, evidently, it’s possible that it was at her desire that Paul was left bound, by Felix. At any rate, they called them together, and the apostle is now going to get a chance to talk to them. What would you expect Paul to say to the Roman governor or the procurator? What would you expect him to say?

Well, I think, a lot of people would expect him to give a defense of Christianity, based upon the philosophical principles by which one might defend Christianity. It certainly can be defended on those grounds to any open-minded person. But, unfortunately, none of us is, by nature, open-minded. It’s only the Spirit who opens minds to Christianity. But you will see that the apostle does not attempt anything like that. He simply goes to the great doctrines of the Word of God, and he proclaims them boldly, trusting the Holy Spirit to bring them home to the hearts of those who are listening. So, surprisingly, I’m quite sure that many of us would never have thought of reasoning, of righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come, before Felix and Drusilla. But Paul did that. He went right to the point, and he spoke about righteousness.

Now, what he said about righteousness is not said here. He must have exalted the principles of righteousness before a right, holy and just God. If I know Paul, I think that he also spoke about how we may obtain the righteousness of God. And he pointed out that while we have no righteousness ourselves, and God demands righteousness, the only way by which we may be “right” before God is to receive righteousness as a gift, through the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross. And if I know him, and know him from his writings, he talked about being justified freely by his

grace, through the redemption that is in the Lord Jesus Christ. So he talked about righteousness and he talked about righteousness to an unjust Roman judge, Felix, the procrastinator. He also spoke about self-control, before two people who had not exercised self-control; Drusilla, in leaving her husband, and Felix in using a sorcerer in order to seduce her to becoming his wife.

And he spoke about judgment to come, because judgment is coming, and judgment for them has come, one way or the other. It has come. So he reasoned about these things. And I can just imagine that when Paul got well into his topic, that she may have punched Felix and said, “Stop that fool from saying anything more.” But Felix is listening and he’s terrified. And, in fact, the Scriptures say that he trembled. There is a throne higher than any earthly throne. The ultimate throne is the throne of God, and God has not only the power, but he has the authority of that throne, and he is able of his infinite power to induce fear in the hearts of what we might think of as the strongest of men. And Felix trembled as the apostle preached. And trembled in the sense that he was terrified, as he reflected upon what the apostle was saying. And, finally, he uttered, “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” But Felix. This is your convenient season. Right now. When under the power of the Holy Spirit, Felix is trembling with thoughts of eternal judgment, that’s the grace of God, when the grace of God brings a man to the realization of what he is before the Lord God, and we tremble before the Lord God, that’s the grace of God. Every single soul who has ever come to realize that he is lost before God, has realized the ministry of the grace of God, in showing us what we are. And it’s at that moment that we must turn to him, who has made it possible for us to have life.

The Philippians’ jailer trembled. The Scriptures say, in the original text, that he was frightened as Paul and then the men sang, and then the doors sprang open. He recognized the hand of God; he came, fell down before them, and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” That’s the response when a person trembles under the power of the Holy Spirit, in conviction of sin. And Paul said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” But, Felix trembled and then said,

“Go your way, Paul, for the present. When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” What was motivating Felix? Well, we learn there are some other motives in addition to the motive of fear.

We read, “He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul.” When fear left, the greed mastered him. And this wicked man, guilty of lust and greed and, actually, hypocritical breaking of the law for history records that he urged certain bandits to do certain things, in order that they may pay him bribes from the rewards that they gained from their wickedness, but, still, he continued to converse with the apostle. Isn’t that amazing? He sent for him the oftener and he conversed with him. What irony, that these conversations continued.

But, you know, when a man refuses the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and rejects it, having received the ministry of the Holy Spirit that leads to trembling, when he begins to turn away from it, another thing begins to work in his heart; and that is the work of the Holy Spirit in hardening. And it becomes more and more difficult for an individual who has received the ministry of the Holy Spirit to turn to the Lord.

So here is a man on the brink it would seem of responding to the gospel, but now in the meetings that follow there is no evidence even of as much response as has been given previously. One of the great opportunities of history is lost. As we look back, we say, “My, Felix certainly blew it, didn’t he?” Here was an opportunity to sit in the presence of the Apostle Paul and respond to the apostle’s ministry, hearing him preach, and he turned away from it. Lost opportunity. Felix, Felix different from others?

My dear friend, you have a greater opportunity than Felix. You are able to read all of Paul’s writings. You are able to read the things that Paul was given by divine revelation after Felix passed from the life of Paul. You have the opportunity to commune with the Apostle Paul, day after day, anytime you wish. You may go to your Scriptures, open them up, and commune with Paul. Think of it. Commune with Paul. Do something that even Felix could not do. You have an opportunity greater than Felix. You have responsibility greater than Felix. Every one of you. You children. You adults. You old people. Your responsibility is greater than Felix, for you have greater opportunity.

Commune with Paul. Most of us have very little communion with the Apostle Paul, though the opportunity stands before us constantly.

Wouldn't it be wonderful? Well, I don't know how wonderful it would be, but it certainly would be interesting, if we could listen to these walls, in this little auditorium, speak of the experiences of people who have been in this auditorium, hearing the Word of God, to hear the things that were going on in the minds of those who listened to the Word of God as the gospel was unfolded; and, the grace of God was set out. To hear the kinds of temporizing on one hand, and then the responses on the other hand. What a story these walls could tell us. And I say to you, my dear friends, in this audience, may God help you to realize the solemnity, the importance, of the hearing of the Word of God and the importance of responding to the things that are found within it.

Felix's decision is set out in verse 27, and it was a decision that God made. I guess he thought, “There's more time. I can talk to Paul further. He's made some interesting points. I'll think over those. I'll call him in tomorrow or the next day or next month.” But tradition tells us that the Jews finally lodged a protest against Felix that caused the Romans to recall him. And, Porcius Festus came as his successor. And Felix, wishing to show the Jews a pleasure, perhaps on the account of Drusilla, left Paul bound.

Now, I want to close with just a comment or two concerning these pictures that one finds here because there are three indelible pictures. There is the picture of the Apostle Paul, the fearless preacher of the way, who didn't hesitate in the place and in the presence of highest authority to say, there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end there of are the ways of death, as the writer of the Proverbs said. He preached Christ, and the justification that is possible through him.

There is the picture of Felix, the tragedy of procrastination, interested in The Way, from Philip. We don't know the source of it, but he was. He was convicted of sin, evidently, for he trembled, the last man one might expect to do this. He'd heard all kinds of orators. But God, in divine tenderness, toward the heart of Felix, had brought him to the place of conviction of sin. It was the watershed. It was the crisis of his life. But he procrastinated. In fear's presence, he postponed the

decision. If he had just climbed upon his terror, to the truth, and had bowed before the Lord God, he would have passed it, passed into a Christ-filled eternity instead of a Christ-less eternity.

You know, I don't know whether we have this now, but we used to have National Procrastination Week, in the United States of America. I can remember seeing little things in the paper like, “Next week has been announced or has been judged or determined to be National Procrastination Week.” And, usually, what happens is the president of the Procrastination Society asks the President to put it off for another week.

Well, procrastination is one of the things that is responsible, humanly speaking, for many lost people. So far as we know, Felix, by procrastinating, postponing the decision, dullness affected his mind, more hopelessness entered it. More hopelessness than the greed or lust or adultery that had gripped him. The opportunity was lost, the delay is really a rejection.

Incidentally, Felix's name, for those of you studying Latin may remember, Felix, or *felix*, means happy. So he was Mr. Happy, Mr. Felix. But now, it's a name of shame. He made a good beginning. He was the first slave to ever become governor of a Roman province, but he was a victim of tomorrow.

Drusilla, the third picture, a frivolous, wretched, vessel of wrath, fitted for destruction. And the preaching of the Apostle Paul? She didn't even tremble. But she was just as much in sin, just as much exposed to the grace of God, just as if you, whether male or female, have come into an audience like this, and you have heard the preaching of the Apostle Paul, and you haven't even felt anything whatsoever in your mind or in your spirit or in your soul. Drusilla, what a frivolous wretch. Tradition has it that she and her son perished in the fires of Pompeii. We cannot be sure of that. But we do know that there is judgment to come and that Drusilla has found out something of that. But the ultimate is still to come.

There is a marvelous little story about the devil, and a group of his demons have got together to try to figure out some way by which they can arrange to deceive as many people as possible, and win the kingdom for the devil. And in the gathering of the demons, Satan said that he

would like for someone to volunteer to go to earth and to seek to win the victory for his kingdom. And so one of the demons raised his hand and the devil said, “Well, what are you going to do?” He said, “Well, I’m going to go to earth and convince them there is no God.” And the devil said, “That won’t work because God, by creation, having created us in the image of God, has implanted in the heart of every man the conviction that there is a God.” Another one raised his hand and said, “I will go to earth and convince them that there is no heaven.” And the devil is supposed to have said, “That’s impossible, too, because men have the innate conviction that there is going to be a life after death, when the injustices and the unrighteousnesses of human experience will be settled before the throne of the Lord God.” And, finally, a few other excuses were offered and one demon then raised his hand, and he said, “I’d like to go.” And the devil said, “Well, what are you going to say?” He said, “Well, I’m going down to earth, and I’m going to simply convince them that there is no hurry.” And the devil said, “You’ve won the task.” There is no hurry. Tomorrow. It’s slain its thousands and thousands for all of eternity.

An old Rabbi once preached, “Repent the day before you die.” When someone asked, “But we don’t know the day when we’ll die?” He said, “Then repent today.” That’s good wisdom.

If you are here this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, I remind you, simply, of the fact that Christ has died for sins, he has paid the penalty, paid the penalty for sinners. And God calls upon his ambassadors to preach a free salvation, because we have nothing with which to commend ourselves to God. We are lost, we are sinners, we stand under divine judgment. He has called upon us to make the confession of our sin, and receive the Lord Jesus Christ and his salvation as a free gift, for by grace are you saved through faith.

There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. This unique savior and this unique salvation is the free gift of God, to men convinced of their sin, through the Holy Spirit. And so, as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus, I call upon you. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. Today is your hour, too. If you have never believed in Christ.

May tomorrow not gain another soul. Come now. Come to Christ. Believe in him now. Don't leave this auditorium without the assurance of the forgiveness of sins.

May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we sense that these great words that Luke has recorded for us, from the mouth of Paul and Felix and others, are very solemn words and are words that come from the Triune God, to bring us to the knowledge of our senses and our condition and to the knowledge of Christ. O Father, by Thy grace, if there should be any in this audience who have never believed in Christ, may at this very moment they say to Thee, “I recognize my lost condition, I see that Christ died for sinners, I cast myself upon Him for time and for eternity.” May grace, mercy and peace go with us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.