

08-18-13 - Hurry Up and Wait! **Acts 24:1-27**

Paul appears before Felix.

Background from Acts 23:12-35 - John mentioned this last week, but it sets up what goes on in Ch. 24.

A group of Jews from Asia Minor band together and vowed by solemn oath to kill Paul. They asked the High Priest to call Paul back to the Sanhedrin for more questioning and they would kill him while on his way there. They vowed not to eat or drink anything until Paul was dead. Paul's nephew overheard the plan somehow and reported back to Paul. Paul sent his nephew to the Commander (Lysias we later learn his name) with the news. Lysias took the plot seriously and commanded large groups of soldiers to go get Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea during the night avoiding the assassination plot. Lysias also wrote a letter to Governor Felix to be delivered with Paul in Caesarea.

Luke gives us the gist of the content of this letter that was written mainly to make Lysias look good in the overall scene. It wouldn't be good to have someone like Paul killed in an assassination plot under his watch. He explains in the letter that Paul is not guilty of any civil crime against Rome. Paul's offense is religious in nature and "certainly nothing worthy of imprisonment or death" (23:29b). This is another positive statement on his own behalf. Lysias has his own agenda as do most people we have dealings with.

Paul is delivered safely to Felix in Caesarea, the center of Roman government at the time. Felix, knowing Paul is a Roman citizen, asks him where he is from. On hearing Paul is from Cilicia, Felix decides to hear the case himself since this was his jurisdiction.

With no traveling needed, Paul's case could be heard and decided very quickly. Let's look at chapter 24 and see how things play out.

READ Acts 24:1-9 - Charges against Paul

They arrived: Ananias, the High Priest, head of the Sanhedrin, plus some of the Jews who rallied to accuse Paul, and Tertullus, a prosecuting attorney. Ananias selected exactly who he wanted there to best accuse Paul and get him convicted.

Tertullus presents the charges in the standard form:

- Praise and suck-up talk to Felix
- a promise to be brief (which they rarely adhered to)
- 3 charges against Paul (accusations) - remember the name Satan means accuser.

1 - Paul - a trouble maker - stirring up riots among Jews world wide. This charge could have been considered civil, since the Roman mandate was to keep the peace in the empire. Anyone or group that disturbed the peace of Rome would be imprisoned and

punished. The charge was deliberately presented in this way to show how Paul is instigating riots and disrupting the peace of Rome.

2 - Paul - ringleader - of the cult called Nazarenes or the Way - Christians.

3 - Paul - arrested by the Jews for desecrating the Temple. They said he brought a gentile past the point where gentiles were allowed to go in the Temple. This could be punishable by death according to Jewish Law.

Remember that Lysias sent Paul to Felix with a letter stating that he found no crime deserving imprisonment or death. Governor Felix was a ruthless leader. He worked his way up the Roman food-chain to become Governor and held this position for several years prior to this trial. He was all out for himself. He had three wives who all were from royalty. His current wife, Drusilla, was the youngest daughter of King Agrippa I. She was already married when Felix decided to have her for himself. He took another man's wife. This all plays into the events in our text today.

Felix was very familiar with the Way or the Christian group that was growing in number, but posed no threat to Rome. In fact, because of the peaceful life-style of Christians, they were the topic of many Roman conversations. It was known that they didn't go around starting riots. Meanwhile, Paul was being accused of starting riots and being the ringleader of the Christian movement.

God is always working behind the scenes, setting up circumstances, using believers, unbelievers and even enemies of believers to accomplish His purposes.

READ Acts 24:10-21 - Paul defends himself -

Paul respectfully makes his own defense against the charges. Have you ever had to defend yourself before accusers? Have you ever been falsely charged formally or informally for something you didn't do? How about just trying to defend your faith to an atheist or unbeliever? I read Sue Cerruto's Mizpah comment the other day. She flew off the handle when her mom gave her an article contradicting the Bible's integrity. I could so relate. So many times I react in the flesh rather than act in the Spirit. Paul's defense gives us a good example of how to act in the Spirit when facing accusations. How do you react when accused or put on the spot? Do you get defensive and fly off the handle, or are you like Paul - calm, planned, relying on the Holy Spirit to guide and direct your defense? Do you ever react, and then afterward think of how you should have responded?

Did you notice how Paul acted on his own behalf?

I'm sure he was in prayer as he waited for his case to come before Felix. He had five days to prepare (v. 1). Paul didn't go off on any tangents. He stuck to the facts to defend the accusations. He stayed on track dealing with each charge in order. He was respectful, but not overly so (no kissing up). He was truthful and didn't compromise on

any points. There is no plea bargaining with Paul. He will not admit to a lesser charge to get out of anything.

He doesn't get flustered and lose his train of thought. He is confident in the Lord to defend himself perfectly. I remember growing up in fear of having to speak to people. I would never volunteer for any type of public speaking or reading. I was paralyzed before authorities (teachers, principals, etc.). I could never express myself or defend myself. I can't be alone in this. It wasn't until I gave my life to Jesus and was filled with the Holy Spirit that I started to overcome these fears. It was still a gradual process, but I have a confidence in Christ that I never had in myself. I think that's part of our lesson for today.

READ Acts 24:22-23 - Felix procrastinates

Felix is a two-faced leader. He speaks out of both sides of his mouth, as they say. He wants to show his authority, but he also wants to appease the Jews. He knows Paul is innocent of all charges against him. He is being brought up on trumped-up charges. He could easily and quickly judge this case, but he chooses to postpone a decision. Lysias sent that letter that confirmed Paul's innocence. There is no reason for him to have to be there in person to make a statement. This is just a stall tactic. Paul is kept in custody, but he is given special privileges - friends are allowed to visit and care for his needs - it was loose custody.

READ Acts 24:24-27 - The Gospel Convicts Felix

After the dust settled, Felix and his Jewish wife Drusilla sent for Paul and asked him to explain his faith. Of course Paul is more than happy to oblige. He explains about the salvation plan of God by faith in Jesus Christ. However, he doesn't stop there. Paul adds in the whole moral aspect of this new life in Christ, a life of holiness. The Christian life is not all about the benefits without some requirements on holiness that are part of the deal.

This convicts Felix since he is not living a moral life - past or present. When Paul start talking about, "righteousness, self control, and the coming judgment," Felix gets scared. Sometimes, fear of the judgment of God brings us to the point of repentance. My first encounter with God was through a study in Revelation. I was scared to the point of accepting Jesus Christ into my life. Not everyone comes to that point though. Sometimes people run in the opposite direction first. Either way, the Gospel makes an impact in our lives and affects the heart.

Felix sent for Paul many times to listen to his teachings. Even though he didn't accept it, he still was stirred in his heart and wanted to hear more. This is the Holy Spirit tugging at his heart, drawing him to Christ.

Another testimony of Felix' character - we read that he kept Paul under custody hoping he would bribe Felix for his release. Maybe he thought Paul had access to the money

he brought to Jerusalem to help the poor of the church there - we don't know. What we do know is that Felix was lacking in his moral character in multiple areas.

When Paul's talk with Felix became personal, he was frightened. Many people we share the Gospel with will listen but are not affected. However, when what we share touches their lives personally, some will resist and some will run away, but the point is that the Word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit of God should be a life-changing experience. That's what it was for each of us here who have been affected by the Gospel and repented, changed our mind toward Jesus Christ. This is not something we should do intentionally. We just present the message, and God does the rest. If people turn to Jesus or not has nothing to do with us and is not a reflection on our success or the genuineness of our own Christian life. Don't take these things personally. Just obey.

The Holy Spirit is the One working all things for God's purposes!

We have been teaching through the book of Acts to show how the Holy Spirit is the one who does the work for God in all areas. Sometimes we know it's him and see and sense His working, and sometimes we don't have a clue, but it is still Him working. Sometimes we see things happening one thing after another, and sometimes we wait not knowing what will happen next or even if we are in the right place. Either way, God is working by His Spirit to bring about His will and plan.

Felix would not make a decision causing Paul years of unjust imprisonment. Paul was expecting to get to Rome in a hurry and preach and teach about Jesus there. The Holy Spirit had another plan in mind. It was a plan that would cause Paul to wait and trust in God. During this waiting period, Paul was able to share with Felix and Drusilla many times about Jesus. He was also able to preach by letters to instruct about Jesus. All who came in contact with Paul while in custody, saw how The Lord used him mightily.

Felix did not stay in his position of Governor for too long after Paul's trial. He fell from favor and was called back to Rome. Festus took over as Governor and immediately went to Jerusalem and met with the Jews, who had not forgotten their goal to kill Paul. They wanted Festus to bring Paul to trial in Jerusalem so they could ambush him. Festus invited the Jews to come to Caesarea and held Paul's trial there once more. Bottom line is that Paul, now frustrated with the process, appeals to Caesar. Festus agrees and sends Paul to Rome to face trial there. Finally Paul is going to Rome, but not the way he had expected.

While Paul's agenda might have been to hurry up and get some place, The Lord put him in places where he would have to just wait and trust in God. Have you ever been put on hold by God? What is your attitude during those times - anger, anxiety, depression, discouragement? God promised Paul would preach the Gospel in Rome. However, these two years of waiting was something Paul would have to endure. It was still within God's will and plan. God was able to accomplish other things during this time with Paul.

"Few things test our patience and faith like being forced to wait - which perhaps explains why our sovereign God often puts us in situations where we have no other choice." (Life Application Study Bible) Are you being asked or forced to wait right now by God? Even if you don't realize it, this is God's plan for you. How do you feel about that?

We have been teaching through the book of Acts to show how important the Holy Spirit is to our daily lives as well as the life of the church. I hope you see how important it is to be grounded in the Word and know the role and function of the Holy Spirit in your life. Trust Him to lead you even and maybe especially when your plans have been changed by circumstances beyond your control. God is still at work - He hasn't forgotten you. He hasn't abandoned you. Remain faithful in the mean time. He is doing something, but you may have to just wait for now.

In the first sermon in this series in Acts, PJ talked about Waiting - They were to wait for the Holy Spirit. Here we are 24 chapters later and God is still instructing us about waiting. The Holy Spirit is working - wait on Him.