

Paul a Prisoner: Before Felix Acts 24:10-27

by J.R. Miller

Paul's address to Felix highlights the importance of kindness, confession of Christ, and living conscientiously, with the hope of resurrection motivating us to live for eternal years.

Scripture: Acts 24:10

Topics: "Courage in Faith", "The Danger of Procrastination"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes Paul's respectful approach to Felix, showcasing the importance of courtesy in Christian conduct. Paul boldly identifies himself as a follower of Christ, demonstrating that true faith requires public acknowledgment, even in challenging circumstances. He speaks of the hope of resurrection and the necessity of living with a clear conscience, urging believers to reflect on their lives in light of eternal judgment. Felix's reaction to Paul's message highlights the danger of procrastination in responding to spiritual truths, as he recognizes his need for change but delays action. Ultimately, Paul's imprisonment serves as a period of growth and ministry, illustrating how God can use difficult situations for His purposes.

Transcript

With true oratorical instinct, Paul began his address with a kindly word to Felix. He had confidence in appealing to him, since the governor had been so long in his position that he knew well the laws, and could understand and appreciate the facts which Paul was about to state. Paul's fine courtesy appears in these words. Some good people are careless about their manners. They do not think it worth while to be always kindly and refined, and sometimes they speak brusquely or act rudely. This is not the Christian way. "Love is not rude." Courtesy is a Christian duty. We should study the art of pleasing others. Many a man's light is kept from shining out brightly by the faultiness of his manners.

"I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect." While Paul was most strenuous in denying the false charges against him, he was very careful to confess himself a believer in Christ. We should never be ashamed in any place or in any circumstances to own ourselves Christians. Anyone can confess Christ in a Christian prayer meeting, where all are doing the same, or at the Lord's Table, where only Christians are sitting. But our Master wants those who confess him here to confess him just as boldly, when they are out among his enemies in the world.

"I have the same hope . . . that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked." This was part of Paul's confession of Christ. The hope of the resurrection was a wonderful one. The grave is not the

end--if we are Christians we shall rise again in a new body and shall live on forever with Christ. For the Christian the truth of resurrection is full of the most inspiring hope. Immortality is before us. This truth should be a great power in our life. We should live for the eternal years--not for the brief passing moment.

"Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." "Herein" refers to what Paul had just been saying about the resurrection and the judgment. He gets his motive of daily living from these great facts. If only we could realize and always remember that we shall rise again and go on with our life for eternity, and that every thought, word and act here will have a bearing on our character in the after-life, it would certainly have its effect upon us, in all that we think and do.

Paul's rule of life, with its mighty motive behind it, ought to be the motive of every Christian. We should train ourselves to live conscientiously. A true conscience keeps itself void of offence both toward God and toward man. Some people are apparently devout toward God--and yet selfish and mean toward men. Others are philanthropic and benevolent toward men--tolerant, charitable, kind, generous, and yet pay God no homage, no love, no service, never bow at his feet, never recognize him.

"As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix trembled." Paul's arrows had gone straight to the mark. He had aimed truly and had not missed. Under his fearless words concerning righteousness, self-control and judgment, Felix saw his own life in the mirror of truth and holiness which the preacher held up before his eyes. We should often look our own life squarely in the face. If we are afraid to do this, something is wrong.

Of course, if we are living in some sinful way it is not a pleasant thing to do. It hurts. Yet we are cowards if we are afraid to do it. We are worse than cowards--we are fools, for some day we shall be compelled to look ourselves in the face, with every shred of veil torn away! It will not do to deny the Bible teachings, saying we do not believe them, that they are only old wives fables. Such denials will not do away with the facts of eternity.

An old sea captain would not believe that there was a rock at a certain spot indicated on his new chart. He said he had sailed those waters for years, and he knew there was no rock there. Coming near the place he said, "Now I will show you that there is no rock there." He then ran his ship right upon the place where the rock was marked on the chart; there was a grinding and a crash and his vessel went down. Men disbelieve in the chart which marks judgment at the end--but too late they will discover that judgment is no myth, no fancy of devout souls--but a terrible reality.

"When I have a convenient season, I will call for you." That is the way many men do. They hear the truth, feel its power, are terrified--but postpone action. Felix was false to his own best interests that day. He was not honest with himself. Under the apostle's preaching, he clearly saw the wrong in his life. He had a glimpse, too, of the judgment day as the preacher lifted the veil. He was terrified. He knew right well what he ought to do--and yet he put the matter off. He did not doubt the truth of what the preacher said; he did not actually reject the Savior he offered--he merely postponed action. Some other time he would find it more convenient than now to adjust his life to the proper conditions. This way of postponement is a well-trodden road--and there always are thousands going down to destruction upon it!

For two years Paul remained in prison. Good came from this imprisonment, not only for Paul himself--but for others and for the cause of Christ. It was a mild imprisonment. Every possible indulgence was granted to him. His friends had free access to him. The rigors of prison life were greatly softened for him. No doubt the long rest did Paul good physically. He was not a robust man, and he had so spent himself in his

missionary journeys, amid hardship, persecution and suffering, that he was exhausted and sorely needed rest. Besides physical recuperation, he also got spiritual blessing in his quiet months. He learned new lessons in life which made him a better preacher ever after. Then his prison was a busy missionary center to which people came continually with their questions, their needs, their temptations and their sorrows.

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