

Acts

Part 58 – “Paul’s Second Trial”

Acts 24:1-27

This is the account of Paul’s second trial, the first being before Claudius Lycius in Jerusalem (technically a pre-trial hearing). There are two episodes recorded in chapter 24: Paul’s trial before Antonius Felix (24:1-23) and his continued custody during the remainder of Felix’s administration (24:24-27). Paul spent two years in captivity in Caesarea, the seat of Roman government between Jerusalem and Rome.

Seeking to have Paul sentenced under Roman law, his accusers framed their charges in terms of sedition. That is, they were seeking to persuade the Roman authorities that Paul presented a danger to the peace of Rome; that he was treasonous. In Jerusalem Claudius Lycius found no guilt in Paul. The Saducees however hoped that Felix would see things their way. But the political complexity before Felix – the need to keep the Jewish leaders placated and the requirement to properly treat a Roman citizen – prove too much for Felix. So he procrastinates for the remainder of his administration.

Luke’s account reveals the nature of the opposition against Paul and, therefore, the gospel. The report of this trial reveals Paul’s commitment to be a faithful witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We also see that Paul’s opponents represent the real struggle to silence gospel witness.

Main Idea: No matter the opposition we must remain faithful witnesses to Christ which involves the obligations and warnings connected to the gospel.

Vs. 1 – Paul’s accusers employed a skill rhetorician to present their case before Felix.

Vs. 2 – This was flattery, not honesty. Jewish/Roman relations had deteriorated during Felix’s governorship.

Vs. 5 – The term had been applied to Jesus (2:22) but is used of Christians only here in the NT. It was probably a slur (Jn. 1:46: “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?”)

Vs. 6 – Now the charge is subtly different: he tried to profane the temple, but we stopped him.

Vs.10 – Paul must defend himself but has not drafted the services of a lawyer. We are probably to assume he did not want one because he was less interested in defending himself in the strict sense, than in making a case for and bearing witness to the gospel.

Vs. 12 – Felix could easily verify Paul’s account if he wished. Twelve days was hardly time to prepare some significant unrest in Jerusalem. What is more, Paul wasn’t involved even in evangelism in Jerusalem that time, he was there to worship. He would have left the preaching to the leaders of the church in the capital. Once again: the Christian Jews were still worshipping in the temple, even, in fact in the synagogues where they hadn’t, as yet, been made positively unwelcome.

Vs. 14 – He admits that there is a religious/theological division among the Jews. Note: Paul’s belief, with the rest of the NT, that what we call the OT was a Christian book. Of course, they would not have called it the OT; they would have called it simply the Scripture.

Vs. 15 – The general resurrection and judgment. Preparation for his discourse on this theme (24:25).

Vs. 16 – The multiple motivation of a Christian.

Vs. 17 – The fact that Paul apparently had access to some money may have led Felix to believe he was able to pay a bribe. Note v. 26.

Vs. 19 – Roman law did not like men who made accusations but failed to carry them through in court.

Vs. 23 – He ought to have released Paul, but, in the providence of God, he did not. But, he was to be treated in a manner appropriate for a Roman citizen who had not been convicted of any crime.

Vs. 27 – Like Pilate, Felix was more interested in currying the favor of those who were in a position to make him look good with his superiors and was willing to treat unjustly a single unpopular man to advance his own interests.

1. Gospel witness will be opposed by dangerous enemies.

- The religious leadership in Jerusalem presents a constant threat to Paul. They are willing to disregard and disobey the very law to which they proclaim fidelity in order to silence Paul. They do everything from presenting false charges, conspiring with assassins, and hiring a skilled rhetorician to present their case in court.
- Their approach in court is shrewd. They present their charges in terms of sedition. In this way they hope to appeal to Felix's desire to keep the peace and tamp down on any behavior that threatens the tranquility of the Empire. In this way they are once again dishonest. They care much less about the peace of Rome than they do about their own religious and political status.
- Christian witnesses in every generation may face dangerous enemies; those who hate Christ and his church. In those times we must remember that we do not advance the gospel with the worldly weapons of slander and violence. Rather we respond to the danger with continued faithful witness.

2. Gospel witness ought to be accompanied by personal integrity.

Vv. 11-13, 16-21

- Once again Paul mentions the fact that his conscience is clean. He is not guilty of the charges against him. Imagine the damage it would have done to the witness of the church had Paul been guilty of sedition. Imagine the damage done if Paul had lived a life of glaring inconsistencies. We must never allow our lives to unsay what our voices proclaim.

3. Gospel witness ought to be characterized by theological competence.

Vv. 14-15

- Paul appeals to the Old Testament to present Jesus as the Messiah. Once again we see Paul's theological/biblical competence. He demonstrates that Christianity is not some new sect but the fulfillment of what God had promised to Abraham and declared through the prophets. He also continues his proclamation of the resurrection as the basis for hope.
- Certainly one must not have the formal training and apostolic privileges of Paul in order to be an effective witness. But all effective gospel witness must be characterized by competence in handling the meaning of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

4. Gospel witness calls for repentance and holiness.

Vv. 24-25

- Felix was known as licentious man. He was corrupt and immoral. He had been married to multiple women and his current wife Drusilla was the adulterous daughter of Herod Antipas. Interestingly, after hearing Paul give witness to the gospel during his trial they desire to hear more. This is what all faithful witnesses long for. But Paul does not give them the false comfort of cheap grace.
- An essential component of faithful gospel witness is the call to repentance. The gospel has clear implications for how the believer is to live. In his continuing witness to Felix and Drusilla Paul is not shy to confront the two with some of the very sins in which they had indulged.