

Acts 24 Vs 1-27

"An Inconvenient Truth"

Ladies and Gentlemen: let me get right to it. When's the right time to respond to the message, (the invitation unto salvation), extended by the gospel? Once I hear the need for righteousness & self-control before God, receive the warning of the reality of the resurrection (both of the just & the unjust) & the coming judgment, do I delay? Or respond today? That's the question that we'll be confronted with & need to have an answer for, by the time this message is over.

As we enter Acts 24, Paul the apostle has a problem. Or perhaps more accurately, Paul has *become a problem* both to the Jews & the Gentiles in that he's been arrested on trumped up charges... The Jews wanted to kill him, the Romans (appropriately) intervened but there was so much confusion in the mix (& obvious ill intent toward Paul by the Jews) that the Roman commander had him taken out of Jerusalem under cover of night, (escorted by 470 soldiers) in order to prevent them from assassinating Him. & He was delivered to a man named Felix, the Roman governor down in Caesarea, who was over that region. Ch 23 comes to a close w/Paul being held in Herod's Praetorium awaiting his accusers from Jerusalem so that he can "have his day in court."

Vs 1

This kind of gives us an idea of how serious the Jewish leadership was about obtaining a conviction against Paul. The high priest himself, along w/the elders & a skilled, silver tongued lawyer show up to present their case & offer evidence against him.

& I'm just gonna forewarn ya that this lawyer is going to lay it on *so thick* that we're gonna need a shovel to dig our way out.

Vs 2-4

Wow... that was quite the opening statement wasn't it? He really knows how to butter a guy up, how to flatter a man to try & gain advantage. Which btw is *exactly* what's happening here.

He speaks of the foresight that Felix has (you know, "through your great wisdom we enjoy peace; & prosperity has been brought to this nation through *your* providential care..."). Guys; do a little research, Felix was known for just about *anything* but peace & providential care. Oh, there was a "peace" of sorts under him because of his violent use of repressive force. He was known for his corrupt self-aggrandizement, he was (according to the Roman historian Tacitus) "a master of cruelty and lust who exercised the powers of a king with the spirit of a slave" (Historiae 5.9, cited in Longnecker).

In other words, he used his authority in such a way as to make others pay because he felt like it was owed to him. Felix actually began his life as a slave, but because his brother was a friend & chief advisor to the Emperor, he obtained his freedom. Then through conspiracy, deception & backroom deals he became the 1st former slave in Roman history to become a governor over a Roman province in 52 AD.

He was known for immorality (his 1st wife was the granddaughter of Mark Anthony & Cleopatra, [which started his political career] we know nothing of his 2nd wife & his 3rd wife was Drusilla whom he convinced to leave her husband [around the age of 16]- she was the daughter of king Herod Agrippa the 1st, sister of Agrippa the 2nd. It was her great granddad (Herod the Great) who had tried to have Jesus murdered as a baby, her uncle who had J.B. beheaded & her dad who had martyred James & was ultimately stricken by an angel, eaten by worms whereby he died... So, quite the family tree!

This is the “most noble Felix” to whom Tertullus is now speaking. & Believe me when I tell you, that’s just a little snapshot of who he was, not an exhaustive explanation. & Just an observation, if there was such peace under his oversight, why did Paul need an escort of nearly 500 soldiers to ensure his safe arrival in Caesarea? (I’m just sayin...)

This lawyer is *flattering him* to try & gain advantage. Now; what does the bible say about flattery? Let me just tell you. To compliment someone is nice, to flatter them is sin. What’s the difference? A compliment, a word of encouragement is for the other person’s benefit. Flattery is self-seeking, it’s for my own benefit. Flattery is a mouth full of empty words that I don’t really mean, but if it will somehow *serve me*, or be of *gain to me*, I’ll say what I need to. At its root, it’s deception. To the Romans Paul said this, “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech *deceive the hearts of the simple.*”¹

Jude, in speaking of ungodly language said this, “*These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage.*”² The bible has much to say about flattery, none of it good.

According to Ps 78:36 we can even flatter God... (think about that!) How do we flatter God? Through insincere praise. When we draw near to Him w/our mouth, & honor Him w/our lips, but our *heart* is far from Him.

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ro 16:17-18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jud 16-17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Tertullus has Felix all buttered up, begs him to (by his courtesy) hear just a few words from him.

Vs 5-9

So he basically brings 3 charges against him & says, “You know, it’s really a Jewish thing, we’d have handled it ourselves but the commander (Lysias) took him out of our hands w/great violence & made us come down here.” Which if you remember right, Lysias sent Felix a letter explaining his position. So Felix is already smelling something fishy here because the letter he got & the case just made aren’t the same.

But basically he says, “Listen, we’ve found this man to be a plague...” This is the 1st accusation, he’s nothing but a troublemaker, he’s stirring up riots everywhere he goes. & Of course, though it’s a *personal* charge, it had some political overtones because Rome was real serious about “Pax Romana” maintaining the peace of Rome. They didn’t deal kindly w/people who were always stirring up trouble.

2ndly, he’s a ringleader of a sect of the Nazarenes. Again, political connotations & accusations of being the leader of an “illegal religion”. By calling him a ring-leader & referring to Christianity as a “sect” he’s basically trying to brand him as a cult leader who’s nothing but trouble for the Empire. He’s the David Koresh of the branch Davidians. The Jim Jones of the Jonestown followers known as the Nazarenes.

Now, we know that Nazareth was held in contempt by most people in that day. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” That was the basic position most people held. So he’s piling on all this scorn. Paul is just a problem & we’re ready to offer a solution.

Btw, you should know that it’s not uncommon for unbelievers to see you just the same. You’re a troublemaker, a plague, a problem, you’re brainwashed... What they don’t understand is that you pesky Christians are really their best friends... The ones they want to get rid of are really the ones they need the most...

Be that as it may, the 3rd accusation? “He tried to desecrate the temple.” But there’s only 1 problem w/all these accusations... There’s zero proof of any of it. To the contrary the evidence points the other way. “How do I know he’s a troublemaker?” “Well, I said he was!” “Where’s the evidence of this ‘dangerous’ cult that he leads?” There is none. “In what way did he desecrate/profane the temple? Where are the eyewitnesses?” We have none.

But this is the case he lays out & all the Jews, assent. “Yes, yes!”

Vs 10

No flattery here. Simply, “Well Felix, you’ve been a judge for several yrs around here so I know that you understand our customs. Therefore, I’m more than happy to tell you what happened.”

Vs 11-13

He says, “Just do a little digging around Felix, you’ll find that it’s only been 12 days since I entered Jerusalem.” (He’d been waiting for his trial in Caesarea for 5 days, so he’d only been in Jerusalem for a week). The implication here is that a week in Jerusalem is hardly enough time to set up some kind of insurrection. & As for these other things they’re saying, “disputing in the temple, desecrating the temple, inciting the crowd or stirring up trouble... they can’t prove these accusations, because they’re simply not true.”

In essence he’s saying, “Where’s the proof, Felix? These sure are some stiff charges for a bunch of guys that have zero proof of any of it. It was just last week, if there are people who can vouch for them, where are they?”

Paul wasn’t worried about the truth, because the truth was on his side! & Can I just say, that as a believer that’s a wonderful place to rest in. To simply know that the truth is on your side... Isn’t it interesting, the amount of people over the *centuries* who’ve thought they’d discover the silver bullet & completely prove the bible wrong? That it’s all a bunch of lies & man-made tales & they’re going to prove it historically, archaeologically, expose holes in prophecy & all the rest... But we’re still here, the bible still holds up under the most stringent scrutiny & can I just tell you that after some 2,000 yrs of accusation & interrogation no one has succeeded in proving God’s word untrue & no one ever will. We have nothing to fear about the truth, it’s on your side... Heaven & earth will pass away, God’s word will by no means, never pass away.

Vs 14-21

Look back at Vs 14. “But this I confess to you, that according to *the Way* which they call a sect.” This is how Christianity was referred to in the early days of the church. As followers of “The Way.” & I like that. Because it reminds us that Christianity, following J.C. is much more than a philosophy, or ideology, a belief system (if you will). It’s a way of living life. It’s about being a “doer” of the word, not a hearer only.

But Paul says, “I haven’t abandoned the God of my fathers, I worship Him fully, believing *all* things which are written in the Law & the Prophets.” He’s saying, “I haven’t forsaken the word, I’m worshipping in accordance w/the fulfillment of the word.”

He says, "I have hope in God, just like they do, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both the just & the unjust."

Of course, Paul's trust in the resurrection was connected directly to the resurrection of J.C. from the dead. & This is what's at the very heart of your belief as a Christian. That J.C. died for your sins & He was raised from the dead for your justification.

Now; I want to point this out while we're here. The idea of soul sleep, or annihilationism has zero foundation in the word of God. To be absent from the body (as a believer) is to be present w/the Lord. To be absent from the body as a non-believer is to be separated from the Lord... in outer darkness, or hell...

& The day is coming when we will all stand before God. The resurrection of the just & the unjust. I know that people like to paint a Rosy picture, that somehow & in some way, regardless of how people have lived that we all go to heaven in the end... But I'm just saying (w/all the sensitivity that I can muster), that's not what the Bible teaches & I'd be remiss to lead you in *any other way*. It's *because* I love you & am concerned *for* you that I share the *truth with you*.

We all have an eternal destiny & it's tied *specifically* to your position on the Person of J.C. ...I know that some deny an eternal state, but it's not many. Do you know why? Because the bible tells us (Ecc 3:11) that God has placed eternity in our hearts. In other words, people (basically by instinct) know that this life isn't all there is. That there's got to be more beyond the here & now. & There is, there will be a resurrection of the just & the *unjust*...

But Paul says, "Look, all I was doing was bringing alms & offerings to my nation. It was some Jews from Asia that caused all the uproar & if they had any objections to me, they should be here themselves!" "Or if these guys have something that they saw me do wrong; let them say so, unless it's for this one statement, 'Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.'" He's always bringing it back to the resurrection.

Vs 22-23

The truth is; that having a more accurate knowledge of the Way, he had all the evidence he needed to rule in Paul's favor. But under this pretense of wanting to hear from the commander he holds onto him. He's avoiding a decision. He knows Paul is innocent, that's why he gives him liberty, but he holds him in custody. He's trying to walk a middle ground, so he goes w/no decision.

Truth be told, this is a lot of people today. They have enough evidence to make a decision for J.C. but they don't really want to identify w/Jesus or His followers, so they decide not to decide. I won't say "every time" but many times it's just that simple, they lack the courage to identify w/the gospel & the Person of J.C. as their Savior.

They may be tough guys, or strong girls physically, but when it comes to making a stand for J.C., quite simply, they're afraid. Jesus said, *"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels."*³ & That's the category many people find themselves in today.

Vs 24-25

Wow... This is incredible, we could make an entire study out of these 2 verses... The 1st thing I want to point out to you is in Vs 25, your faith is very "reasonable". Paul, "reasoned" w/him. The gospel is incredibly reasonable, *"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool."*⁴ God says, "I'll take your sin, & give you My righteousness. I'll take your shame, your guilt, your filth & cleanse you & make you new." Ladies & Gentlemen; you're not going to get a more "reasonable" offer than that! Beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning & the garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness.

So Paul was "reasoning" w/them. What about? This blows our mind, the boldness of Paul. "Righteousness, self-control, & the judgment to come." These were Paul's topics of conversation! To a man known for his brutality, his immorality & his absolute disregard anyone else's needs over his own wants.

Paul began to reason w/them about what it is that God demands in order to be accepted by Him. Absolute perfect righteousness, & he laid out what the Law says, No other gods before Me, no idolatry or priority above Me..., you shall not murder, you shall not steal or bear false witness, you're not to covet your neighbor's wife or house or whatever..." There's Felix... guilty, guilty, guilty...

& Paul explained how we've all sinned & fallen short of the glory of God. Today we say that like this, "Well, nobody's perfect." But Jesus came, was all ways tempted as we are tempted yet w/out sin.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Lk 9:26]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 1:18]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& He laid down His life upon the altar of the cross & paid the penalty for our sin. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. *"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*⁵

Felix, Jesus has taken our sin upon Himself, & through faith provides us w/His righteousness, we become a *new creation* in Him...

He reasoned about self-control. Having already given you a snapshot of their lives, let's just say that "self-control" was not in their wheelhouse. The truth is, man can control just about everything, but himself. & It gets us in trouble quick. We shoot off at the mouth, we run to that addiction, whatever... D.L. Moody once said, "I have more trouble with D. L. Moody than with any other man I ever met." – Dwight Lyman Moody (1837–1899)

But the fruit of the Spirit, Christ *in* you, is the power of self-control, contentment over covetousness.

He reasoned about the judgment to come. The fact that we're all going to stand before God. As the author of Hebrews said, *"...it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,"*⁶ The ultimate White Throne judgment of the unbeliever you can read of in Rev 20. *Felix, your sins are either on Jesus (who bore your judgment) or they're on you, & you'll bear your own judgment. You'll give an account to God of every idle word you've ever spoken, how much more every deed you've ever committed... In Christ we find salvation, reconciliation to God, outside of Christ only condemnation & separation from God. Note it well, Jesus is either your Savior, or He's your Judge & there is no in between.*

When Felix heard these things he was "afraid" more literally, "he trembled". He was visibly shaken by what he heard. But look at what he said, "Go away for now; when I have a 'convenient' time I will call for you."

How tragic. Listen, there's never a *convenient time* to repent. Felix was enlightened intellectually; he was moved emotionally; those things aren't enough. Many people catch a church service, they learn a little something, they're moved emotionally, they think "I'm good". You're not good. You have to *willfully* respond to the facts concerning Jesus & the conviction of the Holy Spirit upon your heart. You have to place your faith in J.C.

It's the same ol' lie of the enemy. Not that there's no heaven, or there's no hell, just that there's no *hurry*.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [2 Co 5:21]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Heb 9:27]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Listen to me, don't be so foolish as to think that you're going to have a "convenient time" to turn from your sin. That's why the bible says, "*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*"⁷ The claims of Jesus are never convenient. He never said He was the easy way, but that He was the *only* way. If you wait till it's convenient, you'll never come, today is the day. Now is the time.

Vs 26-27

Listen, don't delay, trust Christ today. The longer you put it off, the more seared your conscience becomes. Now's the time, believe on the Lord J.C. & you will be saved.

Call upon the Lord even now (lead in prayer).

Prayer Points:

God we thank You for Your word, for Your love for Your grace & for Your mercy. May we never be those who wait for a convenient time to respond in obedience to Your word, but having heard Your word, may we be doers of it. Be glorified in our lives.

⁷ [*The New King James Version*](#). (1982). (2 Co 6:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.