



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ♦ DEO ♦ GLORIA

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

Paul in Route to Rome, Part 7

Paul Before Felix

Acts 24:1-21

June 1, 2008

- I. **Tertullus Accuses Paul Before Felix**
- II. **Paul Declares His Defense Before Felix**

- Certainly one of the greatest joys in my life has been witnessing the birth of our two children, Isabella and Elijah. I will never forget seeing them as newborn babies for the first time.
- However, they did not simply come into existence at the point of their birth. Their lives began as a single cell that multiplied time and time again. Eventually, out of that multiplication emerged a beating heart. From there the tiny little life developed even more into a newborn baby.
- Yet, even when a baby is born, that is not the end. That baby will eventually grow into a full grown human. What is fascinating is that every stage of a person's development is essential to that individual's growth and development into a fully grown adult.
- Because of this, at every stage of life, that individual possesses that same essential worth. Regardless of the size of the human, it is worth no greater or less than at other stages of his development.
- This idea is prevalent throughout God's created order. For example when we eat the fruit of a tree, for example an orange tree, that tree began as a simple seed. However God had put in that seed everything necessary [assuming a healthy environment and soil] to grow into a fruit-bearing orange tree.
- Even the pagan Greek philosopher Aristotle called the essence of an object, regardless of its size, its *form*. According to Aristotle, every apple tree seed will grow into an apple-bearing tree because of this invisible, mysterious "force" pointing it in that direction. This "force" gives the object its essence and is called its "form."

- ❑ Yet, in His providence, God revealed Himself to us through progressive revelation that is similar to the manner in which he created His universe.
- ❑ The Scriptures begin with a “seed”, if you will. That is, the Old Testament.
- ❑ Yet, the Old Testament, with its Laws and Prophecies, is not the end. It points to something much more “fruitful” – it points to CHRIST.
- ❑ Just as an apple tree seed points to an apple-bearing tree; so the Old Testament points directly to the “firstfruits of all who believe”...Jesus Christ.

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- ❑ Throughout the Book of Acts, the apostles seems to be consumed with this truth – demonstrating that Christianity, and particularly Christ, is the fulfillment of the Old Testament...that the Old Testament points to Christ.
- ❑ And so it is here, as Paul stands before Felix. Paul declares this truth.
- ❑ It is interesting that he is not simply speaking to a Jewish audience, but an audience of both Jews and Gentiles.
- ❑ Yet, even so, He boldly declares that he does not worship some new god, but rather He worships the God of our fathers.

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I. Tertullus Accuses Paul Before Felix

- ❑ Luke begins this section, stating, in **24:1-2a**, “After five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with an attorney named Tertullus, and they brought charges to the governor against Paul. After Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him...”
 - This scene, according to **Verse 1**, occurs five days after Paul had arrived in Caesarea.
 - Luke states that the high priest, Ananias, came down with some elders.
 - Ananias was high priest until 59 A.D. The date of this scene was likely either 56 or 57 A.D.
 - Along with the high priest and the elders was Tertullus, an attorney.
 - Tertullus was, more literally, a *rhetorician*, or “legal advocate.” He was a “hired legal gun.”

- It is uncertain whether he was a Jew or Gentile. It was rather common for Jews to hire pagan Gentile attorneys, as they would be more familiar with Roman law than the Jews.
 - In this passage, though, Tertullus seems to identify himself, at times, with the Jews [“we”], vv. 3,4,6; yet, at one point he seems to separate himself from them [“the Jews”], in verse 9.
 - The name Tertullus was a common Latin name, although it was not totally unheard of for Hellenistic Jews [Greek-speaking] to impart the name to their children.
- Then, in **Verses 2-8**, Tertullus presents the Jewish case against Paul to the governor, Felix.
- In Verses 2-3, Tertullus begins with a typical *capitatio benevolentiae*. That is, a flattering appeal to the governor with the intention of ingratiating himself to the ruler.
 - Tertullus’s words border on nauseating, as he praises the pagan ruler for the “peace” and “providential reforms” throughout the nation.
 - These words were intended to resonate with the ruler, as he, along with all Roman leadership, prided themselves in preserving peace throughout the empire in an age known as the *Pax Romana*.
 - However, the truth is that there was less peace in Judea during Felix’s reign than in any time leading up to the Jewish Wars of the late-60s.
 - Not only does Tertullus mention the “peace” brought about by Felix, but he also praises him for his “foresight” in bringing about [positive] reforms, saying “we [as Jews] acknowledge this in every way and everywhere.”
 - Yet, again, this totally untrue. The truth was that Felix was known among the Jews for his brutality and cruelty.
 - He had used overwhelming force to put to one insurrection after another in Judea during his rule.
 - In short, he made life miserable for the Jews during his time as governor.
 - Thus, far from recognizing the gracious leadership of Felix, the Jews, throughout Judea, hated and feared him.
 - Yet, this portion of Tertullus’s speech demonstrated the extent the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem [particularly, the Sadducees] were willing to go in order to win over the favor of the Roman occupiers.

- Tertullus concludes this section by referring to the governor as “most excellent Felix”, stating that the Jews “acknowledge” his goodwill “with all thankfulness.”
 - Once again, far from being “thankful” the Jews despised and resented Felix as a symbol of Roman tyranny.

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- Then, Tertullus begins with his accusations against Paul by stating, in **Verse 4**, “But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing.”
- Finally, Tertullus states his case against Paul in **Verses 5-8**.
- The charges, although completely false, are rather straightforward.
 - Tertullus accuses Paul of being: (1) a pest, (2) a political dissenter; (3) a desecrator of the Temple in Jerusalem; and (4) a “ring-leader” in the sect of the Nazarenes.
 - Tertullus states the first charge in Verse 5, stating that Paul is “**a real pest**”. An equivalent to the Greek here would be a “plague” or “pestilence.”
 - In other words, it is as though Tertullus is accusing Paul of being a “disease” which, like cancer, will spread unless it is contained and destroyed.
 - The second charge, also in Verse 5, is that Paul “stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world...”
 - This charge, compared to the first [which essentially amounted to petty name-calling], was much more serious.
 - This was a charge equivalent to sedition – a charge the Romans would take very seriously.
 - In fact, in order to emphasize his point, Tertullus used hyperbole, stating that Paul was stirring up “dissension among **all the Jews throughout the world...**”
 - Any threat to the *Pax Romana* would have caused the Romans great concern.
 - So serious was the charge of sedition that it warranted the death penalty in many cases.

- The third charge was that he was “a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.”
 - This charge was, in actuality, true. Paul was a leader in the movement sparked by Jesus, the Nazarene.
 - The term “sect” does not necessarily carry with it a negative connotation. It is used of both the Sadducees and the Pharisees in Scripture.
 - However, the term “Nazarene” was certainly meant in a negative light. It was often used as a pejorative term reflecting the unimportance of Jesus’ hometown.
 - Furthermore, the significance of this charge was that, if deemed true by Felix, then all members of the Christian community would be viewed as suspect.
- Finally, Tertullus mentions the charge that Paul, they claim, desecrated the Temple.
 - This charge reflects the incident in Acts 21:28-29, where Luke writes, “...This man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the Temple and has defiled this holy place.” For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.”
 - Again, there is ample historical evidence to suggest that the Romans had given the Jews jurisdiction over the Temple area such that any Gentile who entered into the Sanctuary portion of the Temple would, in fact, be subject to death under the Jewish Law, under the authority of the Sanhedrin.
 - So again, if Paul were found to have committed this crime, it appears that Felix would have been bound to hand the Apostle over to the Jewish leaders in order to face execution.
- Then, Tertullus adds that the Jews had desired to “judge him according to our own Law. But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands, ordering his accusers to come before you.”
 - This statement clearly puts Lysias, the commander of the Roman detachment in Jerusalem, in a bad light.

- **Yet, as much as Tertullus claimed to be defending Jewish Law, the fatal flaw in his entire case was that he had NO EYEWITNESSES to substantiate the claims he was making!**
- However, regardless of this glaring deficiency, in **Verse 9**, “The Jews [presumably members of the Sanhedrin] also joined in the attack [with Tertullus], asserting that these things were so.”

II. Paul Declares His Defense Before Felix

- After Tertullus made his accusations, Luke writes, in **Verse 10**, “When the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul responded: ‘Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense...’”
 - Here, Paul makes a similar *capitatio benevolentiae* as Tertullus did. However, Paul’s is much more brief, appropriate, true, and sincere.
 - Paul’s point: Felix had been a judge in Judea for many years, and it was now Paul’s opportunity to make his “defense.”
 - At this point, Felix would have been a judge for about five years.
 - As a result, Paul was confident that the evidence would exonerate him in the presence of a seasoned judge.
 - Again, this was Paul’s “apology” [see also Romans 2:15 and 2 Corinthians 12:19]; which, in the Ancient world was NOT “defensive”, but rather was a method of affirming what one believes in light of opposition.
- The order of Paul’s defense is as follows: (1) He went to **worship** in Jerusalem [v. 11]; (2) he made no disturbance [v.v. 11-13]; (3) his relationship to the Way was not in contradiction to ancient Judaism (vv. 14-16); (4) he never desecrated the Temple [vv. 17-19]; (5) there was no proof to these charges [vv. 20-21].
 - **Paul went to worship in Jerusalem.**
 - Paul begins his “apology” by stating that “no more than twelve days ago” he “went up to Jerusalem to worship.”
 - This demonstrates a truth that Jews never seem to grasp: Paul, being a Christian could still go to Jerusalem as a Jew to worship God. The fact that he was a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ did not cause him to deny the God of his father; rather, it caused him to fully embrace Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the faith of his fathers.

- Consequently, Paul was not going to cause a disturbance in Jerusalem during the time in question; rather, he was going to **worship**.
- **Paul was causing no disturbance.**
 - Next, in Verses 12-13, Paul states **flat-out** that he was not carrying on discussions or causing riots in either the temple or the synagogues.
 - He emphasizes that they cannot prove this – presumably with witnesses – because that which they claim **never even happened!**
 - Once again, the Law vindicates Paul!
- Then, in **Verse 14**, Paul shifts from **DENIALS** to **AFFIRMATIONS**.
- Here is Paul’s **confession of his faith** – NOT his guilt.
- In **Verses 14-15**, Paul states:

“But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I **do** serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.”

- Here, Paul’s words sound similar to those of Christ, recorded in Luke 24:44, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”
- Paul’s point is clear: **The God He serves as a faithful follower of the Way is the SAME God of our fathers.**
- Furthermore, Paul states that he believes “**everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets...**”
- Then Paul makes a profound statement: “**...having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.**”
 - Paul realizes that the “real bone of contention” with the Jewish leaders, especially the Sadducees, is the belief in resurrection.
 - The concept of resurrection is not new, in either the Old or New Testaments: see Daniel 12:2-3 [**Old Testament**]; Acts 10:42; 17:31; 23:6; Luke 10:12; Romans 2:5; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Timothy 4:1 [**New Testament**].

- Furthermore, the concept of a *total* resurrection of the righteous and the wicked is also not foreign to the Scriptures: John 5:28-29; Matthew 25:31-34; Revelation 20:11-15.
- In fact, Paul’s reference to the resurrection of both the wicked and righteous, read in light of **John 5:28-29**, takes on a whole new meaning.

John 5:26-29: “For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.”

- Therefore, Paul’s reference to the resurrection of the wicked brings to the forefront the **judgment of the wicked by the righteous judge, the Son of Man: JESUS THE NAZARENE!**

□ Darrell Bock states, “**Resurrection is...important because it indicates who Jesus is.**”

- In fact, consistent with Paul’s point, this truth is found first in the Old Testament Book of Daniel:

Daniel 7:13-14:

I kept looking in the night visions,
 And behold, with the clouds of heaven
 One like a Son of Man was coming,
 And He came up to the Ancient of Days
 And was presented before Him.
 And to Him was given dominion,
 Glory and a kingdom,
 That all the peoples, nations and men of every language
 Might serve Him
 His dominion is an everlasting dominion
 Which will not pass away;
 And His kingdom is one
 Which will not be destroyed.

- What Paul is declaring is that, while Felix may be the earthly judge seated in Caesarea, Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, is the One True and Eternal Judge, seated on the Throne in heaven.
- He, then, will judge the wicked, that is, those who reject Him as the Messiah.
- In his classic work, *On the Trinity*, Augustine of Hippo writes:

“For whereas both good and bad shall see the Judge of the living and dead, without doubt the bad will not be able to see Him, except after the form in which He is the Son of Man [physical; yet, glorified]; but yet in the glory wherein He will judge, not in the lowliness wherein He was

judged. But the ungodly without doubt will not see that form of God in which He is equal to the Father [that is, the Son of God]. For they are not pure in heart; and ‘Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.’ ... Wherefore He will judge as the Son of Man, yet not by human power, but by that whereby He is the Son of God; and on the other hand, He will judge as the Son of God, yet not appearing in that [unincarnate] form in which He is God equal to the Father, but in that [incarnate form] in which He is the Son of Man.”

- ❑ Therefore, at the resurrection ushered in by Jesus Christ’s own resurrection on the third day, the righteous will be resurrected and glorified, just as Christ was. They will then see Him, that is the Son of God, face to face. They will know Him and be with Him forever in life eternal in a New Heaven and a New Earth.
- ❑ However, it will not be so for the wicked. They will be resurrected, only to behold the glorified Son of Man, their judge. They will be judged for their deeds, and “their blood will be on their own heads.”
- ❑ So, this is what Paul is saying:

ALL OF THE OLD TESTAMENT POINTS TO CHRIST AND THE ULTIMATE CULMINATION OF TIME WHICH IS TO BE FOUND IN CHRIST AND THE RESURRECTION WHICH BEGAN IN HIM!

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- ❑ Finally, Paul concludes his “defense” by stating that he has done his “best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.”
- ❑ Then, in **Verses 17-18**, Paul states that, essentially, all he had done was to “bring alms to my nation and to present offerings; in which they found me occupied in the temple, having been purified, without any crowd or uproar.”
 - This is the one time in the Book of Acts where Paul confirms that fact that he had collected an offering for the impoverished church in Jerusalem and brought it to them. Other references in the New Testament include Galatians 2:10; Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 8-9.
 - So, what Paul is declaring to Felix is that, he was **honoring his Jewish heritage** by bringing them financial aid. Not only this, **he purified himself**.
 - Therefore, it was the Jews who were at fault. They had, quite simply, arrested a sincere worshipper.
 - Paul had not only done nothing right, he was in a “right”...purified state of worship when he was seized.
- ❑ In fact, Paul even “called out” those who were “in the wrong” – the “Jews from Asia.”

- The reason he states this is because, if Paul had done anything wrong, then **they should have been present** to make the accusations.
- Paul, then, concludes his “defense” by recalling the one act he did commit. He shouted, “For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today.”
 - With this final statement, Paul stops.
 - As one scholar [Fitzmyer] writes, “The resurrection of the dead thus echoes like a refrain in these later chapters of Acts.”

Revelation 20:11-21:7:

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.’ And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ And He said, ‘Write, for these words are faithful and true.’ Then He said to me, ‘It is done I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.’”