

# Felix Trembling before Paul

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Acts 24.24-27

Today's passage in Acts 24 is very similar to what we saw last Sunday, but yet it is at the same time very different.

Paul is found again before Felix as we peak into the window of Herod's palace.

There is Felix with his young Jewish bride Drusilla, the great granddaughter of the man who built this place.

She was enticed from the arms of another man to whom she was engaged to be married, and has become his third wife.

There is Paul the Prisoner, a few days after making his brilliant defense, His commitment to Jesus the Way, the Resurrection, still unmoved.

Yup, he is still in chains, and now summoned to the court of the governor and his princess.

But pay careful attention. As they speak, as they ask and answer questions, see how it is not the lowly captive who trembles and quakes, but the king on his throne. Felix trembled and not Paul; the judge, not the prisoner! For the prisoner is not guilty, though he suffers as an evil-doer, his conscience is clear before a higher, a perfect Judge. And it is the guilty governor, known for his cruelty, oppression, deception, given to flattery and to bribery; probably guilty of some sort of adultery in taking another man's wife.

**So see here first of all the power and weakness of several things:**

See the vanity of worldly greatness – no throne, no power, no robe or scepter can calm the heart of the king caught in sin. Were we to judge by outward appearances, we would have chosen the place of Felix. But looking more closely – all his office, authority, power, wealth, luxury and pleasure are devoured by anxiety and dread.

But here is something which has cast out fear; a perfect love which is a gift of heaven above. Regardless of our state and wealth and name, a higher blessedness and peace crowns the brow of the prisoner with a calm not of this world.

See here the power of conscience. William Jay says conscience is a bosom friend or a bosom fury. Sometimes, like a frozen snake, the conscience can be numbed, until coming close to anything warm enough to awaken it, it strikes as the precursor of the final day. He says, “Fools men may live, but fools they cannot die.”

See here the power of divine truth, even upon a hard and sinful heart like that of Felix. The Word of God is like a hammer and a fire and a sword. Think of how many were astonished at the words of our Lord which came from his lips. Or have you not heard of wicked men coming to hear the great Whitefield with pockets full of rocks to throw, but are melted into submission by the Word?

See here the deceitfulness of the human heart, for there is no lasting effect upon Felix, but he delays and dismisses the good effect upon his soul. Here is the delusive stubbornness of a sinful heart, escaping from the presence of the truth by an open lie that it would be better postpone coming to the truth. The only reason Paul would be sought

later was not to speak of the faith, but to speak of more sin and wickedness by the ruler.

Think for a moment, looking away from this picture, to see where this governor is now. Is he not under the judgment of God, his body laying somewhere awaiting the coming resurrection, and his spirit suffering for its sins? Is it not most likely that he continued to harden his heart? That he never came to his more convenient season? That right now he is thinking what a fool he had been to turn such an opportunity down, to shut the door of gospel conviction, and now all is lost? Was this perhaps the last opportunity he had? Keddie observes that we often think we have our whole life to turn to Christ from sin and be saved, but this isn't really true. There are turning points offered, and when we reject them, God is not neutral, although He continues to welcome even those who turn at the last hour.

**Before looking more at this folly, let us secondly consider the content and nature of his trembling, his fearing.**

Observe first, it was a reaction to the convicting truth of the Bible.

Whatever knowledge Felix had of Jesus the Way, this took him to a different place indeed. Paul spoke of the very things which exposed and condemned the life-style of Felix.

Here is righteousness, the perfect and only standard for mankind, from which Felix had fallen short. God is perfect, right, true, holy, and eminently good; we are not. We are not only unrighteous, but we love sin, we love darkness rather than light, we call evil good and good evil. In short, God's perfect righteousness puts a spotlight on our flesh,

that we are rebels and fight against Him. This shows itself in a host of ways – turn over to Rom. 1.28ff.

Thus a righteous life, one pleasing to God, is not giving yourself up to your own will, your own desires, making YOU the center. It is quite the opposite. A righteous life must include self-denial, self-mortification, self-restraint, in short, self-control. Here is bowing the knee to the Lordship of God. His will, not ours is to be supreme. His Word and ways, not our own self-congratulating declarations must rule us. His truth is our constitution.

And last but not least, He has the power, authority and intention to back up His right to be God, to judge and to reprove all of His enemies to his own glory. Man is not right with God. His whole life must be changed to be under His lead. God will judge all sinners. It is surely coming, and will be felt at the resurrection of the dead.

Now don't miss a **second quality** here – all of this falls under and is included in Paul's speaking about faith in Christ Jesus – v. 24. Paul is not just pressing law, law, law, but this is beneath the grace of the gospel.

We cannot miss the similar language of John 16 – the conviction of the Spirit, of sin, righteousness, and judgment – yet, it is set in a radically Christ-centered way, focusing on Jesus' glorious work of dying on the cross, rising again and going to the Father, and casting out the ruler of this world when He overcame the tomb.

Here is an impossible dilemma for sinful men, but at the same time, the impossible remedy provided by a divine, excellent and loving Hand.

One more item – this **conviction**, while it is the porch to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, and none can come truly without stepping across that threshold; such conviction is not the same thing as conversion, of turning someone to Christ and salvation.

Sadly, many have been convicted repeatedly in their life, been warned and moved by a divine word, and yet, with Felix, say, maybe later; or with Augustine, not yet. Feeling bad about your sin, even that you are convinced that it is displeasing to God Himself, is not the same thing as turning **to** the Lord for mercy, forgiveness and life.

**We want then to close with this last point then – what is it that especially deceives souls into thinking the Lord will give them more time, and so put off to a more convenient season such necessary soul work?**

I will warn you ahead of time that the answers are not pretty.

I have borrowed some points from a sermon that is over 250 years old! This comes from Jonathan Edwards’ message in 1752, preached to American Indians in New York.

1. Stupidity! Senselessness of their danger and needs; being insensible of the reality, insensible of the greatness, senseless of the heinousness of their sin – an animal-like stupidity. Whatever convictions they have had are clearly not enough to ring all throughout their being, that they must flee to Christ right away! ‘You don’t know your sins like you should!’
2. The power of lust! He quotes Job 20 – “Wickedness is sweet in his mouth, he hides it under his tongue,” that is he spares it and forsakes it not, he keeps it safe in his mouth. What a picture this is!

Sinners treat their sin like candy, hide it from others, rolling it around in the mouth of their soul. They do not want to give it up. They always hold on to it, or perhaps it is always holding on to them! People seem always to desire to sin a little more.

3. An aversion to their duty. They don't want to come to Jesus. They see how difficult it is, what great changes must take place, they begin to count the cost and say 'I don't want to do that.' Their flesh rises up against the holy ways of God and insists, this is too difficult.
4. Ignorance of themselves and their self-confidence. A man who postpones until later believes he can turn whenever he wants to. They trust in their own wisdom, their own strength, their own foreseen opportunities. Maybe when I have more time, or when I am older and the pull of youthful sins and pleasures will not be so strong.
5. A spirit of self-blinding – what Edwards calls a sinful self-love. They don't even see how blind they are, placing themselves at the center as they do, and how strong that is in their sinful desires. This is an impossible chain to break in their own strength. They promise themselves great things – that God will hear them if they cry out later to Him, and save them later. But God calls us to turn now.
6. The subtle temptations of the devil. As Felix trembles at the Word of God, so does the devil tremble to see his prizes shaken and called away from the kingdom of darkness. He will do all in his power to keep souls in his dominion, as his own, as his toys. He will bring things into a sinner's life to distract them away from the gospel, from the ways of the Lord. How often have we seen in the ministry, a soul beginning to be touched by heavenly concerns, maybe a

Bible study is attended, and then suddenly, a young man comes into her life, or some other person or circumstance arises to lead astray.

As we close, I would have us be reminded of what was said earlier – how differently could this account have turned out; instead of just passing Paul on as he would do, what would have happened had he come to Christ! The very first ruler Paul met on his missionary endeavor, Sergius Paulus on the island of Cyprus, who believed, being amazed, at the teaching of the Lord.

The same could have happened here; of Felix coming to Jesus. Instead in most likelihood, he is today suffering for his sins eternally because he delayed.

As we share the gospel, and as we hear the gospel ourselves, know that part of our message is the urgency to us. “Hear my voice today,” says the Lord, “while it is called today.” Tomorrow is not promised unto you.

I know that it is a sales tactic to close the deal by saying it won’t be available to you tomorrow. But we are not talking about a couch, or a car, or a house. We are talking about heaven, and you only have one shot!

Think of it this way – tomorrow you will have even more sins to repent of, and the hold and weight of them will be that much greater; AND, tomorrow you will not only have more to repent of, but less time to repent in!

Come, says the gospel; come now, says the Lord; flee from the wrath that is coming toward you. Would you sit back and take your time if your house was burning down around you? How much worse is it

when your whole world stands condemned around you, and still you  
won't move; maybe you won't even tremble!

God have mercy!