

Scripture Reading:

Acts 24:23 “So [Governor Felix] commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him. 24 And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. 25 Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." 26 Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him. 27 But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.

'Paul Reasons About the Judgment to Come'

We have been reflecting on how the Apostle Paul reasoned with Governor Felix and his Jewish wife Drusilla regarding righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come. While Luke gives us no details of what Paul said in regard to these important topics, I have suggested several ways that we can understand how such discussions came about. *[Remind them of two years]* Paul could reason about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come by sharing his own testimony...

- Sharing how God graciously gave him the righteousness of Jesus by faith, what we call justification.
- Sharing how he learned self-control by the same faith which we call sanctification and finally,
- Sharing about the fact that Paul had no fear of the judgment to come because he had the promise of eternal life, what we call glorification!
- We also considered how these discussions reflected what Jesus taught His disciples about the work of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit who was poured out at Pentecost.

Jesus said when He comes “He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9 of sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; 11 of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”

I think we can argue that we have here again, justification, sanctification and glorification only in reserve order: The ruler of this world was judged at the cross where God poured out His just wrath on Jesus so He could be both Just and the Justifier of those who believe in Jesus.

- In other words we are justified!

The Spirit convicts us of our lack of righteousness as we live our lives here on earth while Jesus is away from us seated at the Father’s right hand:

- In other words the Spirit sanctifies us!

And the Spirit convicts the world of sin because all those who refuse to turn to Jesus for salvation will face God’s just wrath at the great judgment day rather than being glorified.

- As Paul witnessed to this governor and his wife he would have drawn the contrast between his yielding to the truth of God by faith with their stubborn rebellion and unbelief.
- As we pointed out, they were suppressing the truth in unrighteousness and this is why Felix is afraid and sends Paul away.

We know from the Proverbs that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and thus Paul’s witness is the right witness, but sadly it appears that neither Governor Felix nor his wife turned from their wicked ways...

- But rather they refused to be drawn to the Lord, who they now rightly feared.

So this week we focus on the third topic of the judgment to come...

- Time for a real hell fire & brimstone sermon!

Judgment and certainly hell fire are not popular sermon topics these days! However, as we pointed out, if someone does not understand that they are lost, they will see no need to be saved. Yes, Paul would have shared the glories of the Gospel as he had opportunity before Governor Felix...

- However, he would also have pulled no punches in pointing out that they had NOT turned to Jesus for the righteousness that only He can give, and that their lives, which lacked any kind of sanctification or real self-control, were damning evidence of that fact.

They needed the righteousness and self-control that only God could give. And finally Paul would have shared his hope in the Gospel knowing that Jesus had given him life eternal.

- At the same time he would have warned Felix and Drusilla about the judgment to come!

I believe that over the course of these discussions Paul would likely have touched on the three judgments that all of us will face.

- Our individual judgment.
- The judgment of our community or nation.
- The final White Throne Judgment where all the scales of justice will be balanced.

As Paul spoke to them about the faith in Christ, I am sure he would have shared many of the teachings of Jesus regarding all three judgments. First and foremost Paul would have reminded them both of their need to repent today: Telling them as we read in the Book of Hebrews, that Jesus “has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.” [Hebrews 9:26-28]

- When is our day?

Jesus made it very clear with one of His most pointed parables that we do not know, but should live each day as if it were our last... We studied this back in Luke chapter 12: “ 16 Then [Jesus] spoke a parable to them, saying: 'The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.' ' 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided? 21 So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.' 22 Then He said to His disciples, 'Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. 23 Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.'”

- We are told that Governor Felix brought Paul before him often hoping that bribes would be paid to set him free...
- What a perfect opportunity for Paul to share about the judgment to come as he stood humbly before this human governor, who though he had much power and wealth was simply looking for more.

While Paul would certainly have made such personal appeals to Felix and Drusilla he was also God’s ambassador speaking to civil rulers...

- And as such, he would also have warned them about how God judges nations as well.

As we often do during our commissioning, we will read responsively and sing together the words of Psalm 2 at the end of our service this morning:

- This Psalm reminds us that God judges the nations and that we are to continue to call for their repentance as God's ambassadors today.

Both Governor Felix and his wife Drusilla would have been very familiar with the Psalms and I can hear Paul declaring before this governor: "Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve Jehovah with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him." [Psalm 2:10-12]

As we have considered at length, the time was fast approaching when God would pour out His just judgment on the whore of Babylon and the beast she was riding in Revelation chapter 17.

- The nation of Israel & the Roman Empire
- Luke is careful to make the point that Drusilla is Jewish, so this royal couple represented both kingdoms.
- Jesus had predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple which would take place in AD 70, just a few short years hence.
- At this point, Nero had already become Emperor of Rome as Paul witnessed to Felix and many would argue that his reign was the beginning of the end of Imperial Rome.

I am sure that Felix would have been amused by any talk of the collapse of the Roman Empire. Since Herod's Temple was finally reaching its completion, Drusilla would have chuckled at the thought of being destroyed...

- Nonetheless the Apostle Paul faithfully proclaimed the judgment to come these civil leaders.
- It is also a good reminder for us, who are privileged to live in a free land during this election year: We still have the same obligation to be witnesses to our nation today!
- Finally, I am sure that Paul spoke about the final judgment as well.

We were reminded about some of what the Apostle might have shared in our reading of Psalm 94 on Friday: One of the Psalms which Paul & Drusilla and even Governor Felix would have been very familiar with!

1 O Jehovah God, to whom vengeance belongs-- O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth!
2 Rise up, O Judge of the earth; Render punishment to the proud. 3 Jehovah, how long shall the wicked, How long shall the wicked triumph? 4 They utter speech, and speak insolent things; All the workers of iniquity boast in themselves. 5 They break in pieces Your people, O Jehovah, And afflict Your heritage. 6 They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. 7 Yet they say, "The Lord does not see, Nor does the God of Jacob understand." 8 Understand, you senseless among the people; And you fools, when will you be wise? 9 He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see? 10 He who instructs the nations, shall He not correct, He who teaches man knowledge? 11 Jehovah knows the thoughts of man, that they are futile. 12 Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O Jehovah, And teach out of Your law, 13 That You may give him rest from the days of adversity, Until the pit is dug for the wicked. 14 For Jehovah will not cast off His people, Nor will He forsake His inheritance. 15 But judgment will return to righteousness, and all the upright in heart will follow it. 16 Who will rise up for me against the evildoers? Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity? 17 Unless Jehovah had been my help, My soul would soon have settled in silence. 18 If I say, "My foot slips," Your mercy, O Jehovah, will hold me up. 19 In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul. 20 Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law, Have fellowship with You? 21 They gather together against the life of the righteous, And condemn innocent blood. 22 But Jehovah has been my defense, And my God the rock of my refuge. 23 He has brought on them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; Jehovah our God shall cut them off."

Paul warned them about the judgment to come for them individually and as civil representatives and as far as we can see, they were unrepentive. The Lord did indeed bring an end to the lives of Felix and Drusilla as well as the end of the nation of Israel and the Roman Empire.

- And we know from the final chapters of Revelation that God will bring all creation before His Great White Throne where all the scales of justice will be rightly balanced.

Those proud Pharisees who laughed as Jesus was crucified taunting Him to come down from the cross so they could believe in Him, will see Him enthroned as God almighty & know for all eternity that they should have bowed the knee willingly!

Emperor Nero who delighted to burn Christians on poles in his garden for the entertainment of his guests, will stand before Jesus and be cast for all eternity into the lake of fire.

There will be no grading on the curve where we get to ask God to consider how good we have been compared to Attila the Hun or Adolf Hitler:

- No each of us will answer only one question, which will determine our eternal state:
- What did you do with my Son Jesus?

Two weeks ago when I began this mini-series, I gave credit to Charles Vaughan who pointed to the importance of the subjects that the Apostle Paul chose to reason through with the Governor and his wife.

I thought it only fitting to use his conclusion as our conclusion of the matter, as we consider not only the reaction of Governor Felix & Drusilla,

- But how each of us and those we share the Gospel with today may respond as well...

Mr. Vaughan said this in conclusion:

“Felix trembled. But he found a short way – a way often trodden – to relief and respite. He said to the Apostle, ‘For the present go thy way: when [or if] I get an opportunity, I will summon thee.’

Thus he cut short the pain which he would not make remedial: and when he next met his teacher, a meaner thought had taken possession: ‘he sent for him, but it was in the hope that he would give him money; that the prisoner might fee his judge [pay a bribe] for freeing him; and with such a motive at work, no wonder that the charm of the Gospel was counteracted: the sordid desire of gain, and from such a source, could not coexist with any aspiration after heaven: his chance was gone; forfeited by himself and sinned away. He proceeded on his downward course. Soon he was summoned to give an account to his imperial master of his unfaithful, his dishonest, stewardship.

And then he and his instructor parted, we must suppose, for ever; the light had gleamed once upon his path, but it now died away, and left the darkness thicker yet and gloomier and more hopeless than before. It is a true parable. Every man has his opportunity; and if he misses it, it comes not again.

Ours is the present; let us grasp it, and use it, and live by it, while we may. Felix vanishes from the page of Inspiration: yet has his converse with the man of God left an impress upon that page for ever, and thousands and tens of thousands owe their first convictions to the record of his opportunity and his obduracy [*we would say stubbornness*].

Dare we hope, my friends, that all of us have listened and feared? Have felt conscience pricked and stirred within, and have not, like Felix, deferred to act upon conviction? Which of us all has never said to the troublesome admonition, outward or from within; to the monitor, visible or invisible, who uttered it; Go thy way for this time?

Has no sermon ever sounded in our hearts with convincing force, and yet we have gone away to forget, to trifle with it, and to disobey?

How have we reckoned upon prolonged life, upon renewed and repeated opportunities of fetching back at will the discarded rebuke or exhorter! When I get an opportunity, I will summon thee. Not now; not now:

I am busy, I am at ease, I am indisposed, I am unfit: I have bought a piece of ground, I have married a wife: the occupations of life, or the cares of life, the affections of life, or the pleasures of life, are too strong for me at present:

But soon perhaps the opportunity will come: I shall be less busy, or I shall be less happy or I shall be less prosperous, or I shall be less careworn: Perhaps I shall be sorrowful some day; perhaps someday I shall be sick: Then will I call for thee. Yes, so it is: Such is the tale of life throughout its generations.

Soon, but not now: Not while time is ours; Not while it can do any good to listen; not while it might guide the life, while it might mitigate care, while it might counteract or overbear temptation:

But some day, some fancied day, when I shall be ill, and yet not too ill – then will I turn to God; Tomorrow, not today; peradventure, not for certain: No, not for certain; for what is certain on earth save the moment that is? Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.'

Be sure that whatever awakens a serious thought in us, even for a moment is a voice from God; and that to trifle with it, or to delay acting upon it, is to trifle and to procrastinate with God. Be sure too, that, in what form so ever the call come to us, whether as a warning or as an invitation, whether as a reproof for sin or a promise of blessing, it is equally in either case, if we will listen to it, as a call of love, and he who puts it away or puts it off puts away or puts off his own happiness.

God grant that this may not be a last opportunity, and a lost opportunity, for any of us.

How many such opportunities has God already given to each of us! Nothing can bring back to us those that have been wasted:

➤ **Let not this one be wasted too!"**

Communion Meditation: I Corinthians 10:11-17

“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. 14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

15 I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? 17 For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.