

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

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CHAPTER FORTY

A MORE CONVENIENT SEASON

(Acts 24:1-27)

OUTLINE

Key verse - 25

Review of paragraph.

Paul at Caesarea in Herod's palace - trial must be soon - in five days - before Felix the governor of Judaea - Tertullus spoke for Paul's accusers - Paul made his defense - Felix withheld action - Felix touched by Paul's appeal - desired a bribe - held him waiting for money.

1. The duty of a faithful presentation of the Gospel.
2. The ensnaring grip of corrupt alliances.
3. The only way to find peace of conscience.
4. The danger of delay in accepting Christ.

In the last chapter we left Paul at Caesarea in Herod's palace. This was a fortress built upon a promontory extending into the sea the ruins of which still stand. The law provided that the trial of a Roman should take place as soon as possible. Therefore, within five days, as soon as word could be taken from Caesarea to Jerusalem and his accusers could return, Paul was tried before Felix the governor of Judea.

TERTULLUS HEARD

Ananias, the high priest, the elders, and an orator, or lawyer, who was to be their spokesman, named Tertullus, came to accuse Paul. Tertullus, after a flattering introduction in which he hoped to win Felix, accused Paul of being guilty of sedition, a leader of the sect called the Nazarenes and profaning the temple at Jerusalem. He also intimated that they would have taken care of Paul and this whole matter themselves, had not Lysias the chief captain interfered and, with great violence, taken Paul out of their hands. He appeared at this time, he asserted, because Lysias had commanded Paul's accusers to present their accusations before Felix. After examination, he continued, it would be apparent that the charges were true. The Jews joined in the charge, affirming that the statements of Tertullus were correct.

PAUL'S DEFENCE

Then Felix called upon Paul to make his defense. Paul began in a very courteous manner, saying, that since Felix had been governor for many years he could speak the more cheerfully. Felix had been governor during a number of uprisings and he knew how they had arisen. It must have been apparent to the judge that as Paul had gone to Jerusalem but twelve days before it would have been impossible for him to arouse the people to sedition in that length of time. Felix knew that it takes any leader longer than that to arouse men, organize a force, and collect arms sufficient to lead any sedition worthy of the name. He had not even tried to arouse a following of any kind. They could not prove that they had found him in the temple, or in the synagogue, or in the street stirring up the people or making any effort to gain a following. He had carefully avoided anything of the sort. His reason for going to Jerusalem was to bring alms and offerings to the people of his nation.

Paul admitted that he was one of those who were called a sect by the Jews who were accusing him, but it was far from being a lawless sect. They worshipped the same God as their fathers had worshipped; they believed all things which were written in the law and the prophets. They believed in the resurrection of the dead as the true Jews believed. Paul did not believe in making a profession and living a reckless life, but took care to keep a good conscience and to avoid giving offence either to God or man.

Moreover, he showed that he was not a pestilent fellow or one who profaned the temple or its worship. He had manifested his love for his people by bringing a great gift of alms to them to aid them in their poverty. He had gone through the usual form of purification before he entered the temple and had aroused no tumult. Those Jews from Asia who did stir up the tumult ought to have been there to present their objections to his actions if there were any accusations which they could prove. The fact that they were not there was a reasonable assurance of his innocence. He went on to admit, that, in the presence of the council when he was being tried by the Jews, he did cry out and say that he was called in question concerning his belief in the resurrection of the dead. It was when they were about to pull him to pieces because some agreed with this doctrine and some did not, that Lysias came and rescued him from them and sent him to Caesarea.

FELIX WITHHOLDS ACTION

Felix was a man of dissolute character. He was cruel and unjust in his office and immoral in his life. However, he understood the general differences between these sects among the Jews, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, and something of their hatred of those who accepted Jesus as the Messiah. He could not have lived with them for so many years without learning these things. We are told here that he had a more perfect knowledge of "the Way." Felix' wife, who was a Jewess, had, in all probability told him of the views and sects of the Jews. Felix had heard enough to convince him that Paul's accusers had no case of importance and that he was not a dangerous man to the empire. Therefore he adjourned the trial and withheld his decision until Lysias would have an opportunity to come to Caesarea when he would find out the real difficulty. In the meantime he commanded a centurion to take charge of Paul, but to let him have liberty and allow any of his friends to minister to him.

FELIX TOUCHED

After some days Felix and his wife Drusilla gave Paul a private hearing. Paul spoke on that occasion concerning his faith in Christ. He evidently fitted his message on that day to the need of the hour, for he probably knew that Felix had persuaded Drusilla to come to him from her husband Azizus, and that he was living with her in Caesarea in an adulterous relationship. Felix was not accustomed to hearing true, conscientious ministers, and it is not likely that he had any idea that Paul would talk of righteousness and purity and judgment to come. This, however, was what Paul did, and with such earnestness and power that even the hardened Felix was terrified. He stopped Paul before he had concluded his warning message, told him to go his way for the present and when he had a "convenient season" he would call for him.

FAITHFUL PRESENTATION OF GOSPEL

In this chapter one of the lessons which is outstanding is, the duty of a faithful presentation of the Gospel. When Paul was asked to meet with Felix and Drusilla he might have told in a mere historical manner of some things he knew of Christ and the following which he had. He could have been largely non-committal concerning his own interest in the Christian religion if he had so desired. This would have seemed the natural thing to do in view of the fact that Drusilla was a Jewess and Felix an elevated slave who was immoral and hardened with years of cruelty. Paul might have said to himself, it would be casting pearls before swine to try to influence them with any message of righteousness, sobriety or thought of a future judgment.

Paul was not a time-server. He could remember how hardened and cruel he himself had once been. He remembered vividly the time when he had been in prison and how the hardened jailor was frightened and cried out in search of salvation. He knew that there was no character too hard for the Spirit of God to awaken to a sense of sin and a need of repentance. Paul had longed to go to Rome, should he be afraid to present the Gospel to a Roman here in his own land? We who know Paul in history can hardly imagine in him any inclination to hesitate when he had an opportunity to preach the Gospel. Yet we know from Paul's own words that he had temptations just as we have them. There was a constant warfare going on within him. The evil one was constantly striving to lead him into sin. Satan no doubt tempted him there in Caesarea urging him to withhold his testimony, but Paul knew his duty and God gave him strength to perform it. He preached to Felix and Drusilla a most searching message. Felix was alarmed and terrified. He could not bear to hear Paul go on with his denunciation of sin. He felt that the application of the Gospel which Paul had made fitted him exactly, but he was not ready to yield. It meant a revolution of life and practice for him, the giving up the woman by his side and changing his method of conducting his office. The easiest way to get the matter off his mind for the present was to dismiss the messenger and this was what he did.

Are we as faithful as Paul? When we know that we are in the presence of vile sinners and they have it in their power to make us suffer if we offend them, do we present a clear and full Gospel? About a century after Paul's time the enemies of the church brought a faithful Christian before the king.

The king wanted him to give up Christ and his connection with the Christian church, but the man spurned the suggestion. The king said: "If you don't do it I will banish you." "You can not banish me from Christ for he says He will never leave me nor forsake me." The king became angry and said: "I will confiscate your property." The man replied: "My treasures are laid up in Heaven, you cannot get them." The king became still more angry, and said: "I will kill you." The answer came back: "I have been dead forty years, I have been dead to the world, and my life is hid with Christ in God, and you cannot touch it." Persecution may come but we need not fear; we should continue to give our testimony for He who is our life will take care of us and bring us with Him into glory.

F. W. Robertson was once reminded by a lady that his preaching would get him into trouble. He replied, "I do not care." "But," said she, "do you remember where don't care brought the man?" "Yes," said Mr. Robertson, quietly, "to the Cross." If doing our duty in presenting Christ's message brings us to the Cross, let us remember that it will bring us to Him who shall place upon us the crown.

THE GRIP OF CORRUPT ALLIANCES

Another lesson which is apparent here is, the ensnaring grip of corrupt alliances. Felix was at this time married to Drusilla, a Jewess, beautiful in features, but corrupt at heart. She was one of the Herods, a sister of King Agrippa with whom we meet in the next chapter. She was a daughter of Herod Agrippa of whom we studied in the twelfth chapter. She is said to have listened to Simon the soothsayer, sent by Felix, until he persuaded her to leave her husband, king of Emesa, and to come and live with him. Both Felix and Drusilla had records, which, if exposed would bring upon them shame and degradation. He was guilty of all sorts of corruption in office and both were guilty of immorality. The historian, Tacitus, says of Felix: "In the practice of all kinds of cruelty and lust, he exercised the power of a king with the temper of a slave."

When Felix heard the powerful appeal of Paul, though seemingly for the moment he would have desired to forsake his wicked life, he was bound by his alliance with Drusilla and by his record of corruption, and he did not see any way to get free from it all. There is many a man and many a woman who is bound in a similar manner by corrupt alliances and who dares not turn back on the past record without suffering shame when it is all confessed and exposed. Thus sins bind men like fetters when they are inclined to turn from them and follow Christ. The longer Satan can keep men in the midst of sin the harder it becomes for them to turn away from it. Will not you who are bound with sin, when you hear the call of the Gospel, turn at once from your sins? If you permit them to remain they will bind you the stronger with their encircling cords.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has promised to give grace to those who will yield themselves and make a full and free confession. The confession of sin may involve the giving up of wrongly gotten gains. Not long ago the report came through the public press of a man, who hearing the warning and pleading of a well-known evangelist, confessed his sin which made public a crime that had been concealed of a robbery of the mails, and which involved the man who confessed as well as others with him. He did not allow the results, or the penalty which would naturally follow, to prevent him from making a full and honest confession of Christ.

All things are open and naked in the sight of God. Why attempt to hide your sin from Him? You may hide it from men but you cannot hide it from God. The worst judgment that you may possibly receive in this world is as nothing in comparison with the judgment of God at the great and terrible day when He shall part the righteous from the wicked. The wicked shall be cast into a lake of fire, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Will you not forsake your sins? Will you not confess Christ now? Will you not endure any scorn or slights of men that you may receive favor with God and be assured of His pardon now and forever?

THE WAY TO FIND PEACE

The only way to find peace of conscience is through Christ. Felix had some knowledge about “the Way” before he heard Paul the first time. After he had heard Paul the second time, at which time he spoke **“concerning the faith in Christ Jesus,”** he was confronted with the need of repentance. His conscience was stirred. He wanted to put aside the terror which Paul had awakened in him and so he ordered the messenger out from his presence. Like Pharaoh, he thought that if he could be rid of God’s messenger, he would not be troubled about his sins. But from Cain to Ahab to Ahasuerus to Felix to the sinner of today, men cannot find peace of conscience so long as they go on in their sins. Christ can bring peace, but He will not bring peace into our hearts until we are ready to repent of our sins and rest in Him in faith. Bunyan’s Pilgrim found peace only when his burden had rolled away at the cross. **“If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”** (I John 1:9).

There has been many a man given to the use of liquor who has tried to free himself of the desire for it. Many such, when they have gotten into trouble, or into a remorseful condition, in place of going to God and seeking peace of heart and strength to meet the enemy, have tried to drown their troubles in more drink. There have been many, on the other hand, who, clinging to Christ and crying out to Him for strength have, by His grace, conquered this great enemy and found victory and peace.

Ruskin once said: “Peace may be sought in two ways. One way is as Gideon sought it when he built his altar in Ophrah, naming it, ‘God send Peace,’ yet sought this peace that he loved as he was ordered to seek it, and the peace was sent, in God’s way: **“And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon”** (Judges 8:28).

And the other way of seeking peace is as Menahem sought it when he gave the king of Assyria a thousand talents of silver, that **‘his hand might be with him . . .’** You may buy your peace with silenced consciences; you may buy it with broken vows; buy it with lying words; buy it with case connivances; buy it with the blood of the slain, and the cry of ‘the captive.’

“There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked” (Isaiah 48:22). **“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee”** (Isaiah 26:3). **“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 4:7).

THE DANGER OF DELAY

This is a striking passage illustrating the danger of delay in accepting Christ. Paul spoke to Felix and Drusilla concerning the most important subject in the world, **“concerning the faith in Christ Jesus.”** He had spoken of righteousness, no doubt telling them of the righteousness of Christ and how we may be made righteous through Him. He had told them of the necessity of living a sober and pure life; he had warned them of the awful judgment which will be meted out to those who go on in sin, when at the last day God will divide the righteous from the wicked. He had no doubt called upon them to repent of their sins and be saved. He had very probably urged this wicked couple to repent at once and continue in sin no longer. But Felix, though deeply moved, alarmed, terrified by the picture of the judgment to come, still wanted to put off making a decision. At another time he would hear Paul, perhaps he would consider his plea more favorably some day in the future, but so far as history records that convenient day never came. Felix continued in sin, was recalled to Rome and would have suffered the death penalty had it not been that his brother, a favorite with the Emperor, interceded and prevailed upon him to spare his life. Felix, it appears, went on in sin and died a slave of lust, unrepentant of his many crimes.

Pharaoh put off his decision until “tomorrow,” Felix until “a convenient season.” What a fearful mistake! The Psalmist had before him the history of those who delayed when he said: **“To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart”** (Hebrews 3:7, 8). Paul had dealt with many procrastinators when he said: **“behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation”** (II Corinthians 6:2). The writer to the Hebrews knew that multitudes had been lost because of neglect when he asked this searching question: **“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation”** (Hebrews 2:3). The opportunity which is given now may not be given again; the call which comes to you today and startles you with its burning words may not come again; the Spirit, who pleads with you so earnestly today, because you refuse to listen, may pass you by tomorrow.

Do not harden your heart when the Lord comes to you in His mercy or He may turn against you in His wrath. There may be some, who have heard the earnest call through one of God’s servants before, and who have been about to say, **“Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief,”** but who have turned away and have stifled their consciences and have gone on in their sins. Oh friend! We beseech you, will you not hear! Will you not yield! Will you not cry out, “Lord save me, I perish!” It is not merely the minister or the missionary who is pleading with you today; it is Christ who is calling! He is knocking at the door of your heart, and it is from Him you are turning away. Dare you turn from, dare you shut out the Lord of Glory! Did He not die for you? How can you refuse Him?

Who has not been urged by Satan to delay, and with how many has his argument been successful? Jas. S. Drummond tells us of a dream, “in which the sleeper was carried away to the dim court of hell, where Satan sat, with all his host in solemn council to deliberate upon the ruin of mankind. The question was proposed, ‘How can men be ruined in the greatest numbers?’ And one spoke in this wise and another in that. One advised that he be sent forth to preach that there was no God. ‘No,’ said Satan, ‘men cannot believe that: I have tried it long enough and it fails.’ Another proposed to tell them that God was so holy that none but the holy could reach Him, that thus they might be urged to trust in good works.

“‘No,’ said Satan, ‘they soon see through that and discover the fallacy.’ ‘Send me,’ cried another, ‘and I will tell them that salvation is through Christ and by His blood, and that all who believe will be saved - but I will whisper, *‘there is still time enough’*. ‘Go,’ cried the archfiend, ‘and prosper,’ and men have believed this lie in numbers.” Multitudes have gone down to eternal death because they waited for a more convenient season.

During the early years of D.L. Moody’s work in Chicago there was a man who attended the Tabernacle regularly and who frequently seemed about to decide for Christ. As Mr. Moody urged him not to delay but to accept Christ he replied, “No I cannot, my business partner is not a Christian and if I should accept Christ he would ridicule me.” Finally he became annoyed because Mr. Moody urged him and ceased to attend the Tabernacle. One day his wife came to see Mr. Moody with the request that he come to see her husband at once as he was very ill and the physicians said that he could not live. He hurried down to the house and found the man ready to listen. In response to Mr. Moody’s appeal he seemed to accept Christ as his Saviour. But to the surprise of all his friends, he began to get better. He recovered rapidly and the next time Mr. Moody called he found him sitting out of doors in the sunshine. “Now that you have recovered,” said Mr. Moody. “when you are able to be back at the Tabernacle I want you to make a public profession of Christ.” But the man seemed to have gone back to his old fear; he replied, “if I should do that my partner would ridicule me. But,” he continued, “I am going to move to a farm in Michigan and when I go there I will make a profession of faith in Christ.” Just a week after that his wife called to see Mr. Moody again, saying, her husband had a relapse and the physician, after a consultation said he could not live. She asked him to come and speak to him again. Mr. Moody went, but as he approached the man’s bed he said: “Mr. Moody I don’t want you to talk to me. It will do no good. I have had my chance and have thrown it away.” Though he pleaded and tried to show him that God was ever ready to hear and though he offered to pray with him the man said, “No, I have thrown away my chance.” Mr. Moody did pray with him, but as soon as he had finished the man said, “There, I told you it would do no good. It is too late. I have thrown away my chance.” All the afternoon as the man sank lower and lower he kept repeating the passage of Scripture, “**The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved**” (Jeremiah 8:20). And as the sun sank beyond the western prairies, his friends leaned over and heard him whisper faintly, “**The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.**” And with these words he passed into eternity.

One cannot but wonder whether Drusilla thought of the appeal and warning of Paul in her last hours, for according to the younger Pliny in a letter to Tacitus, she and her younger son perished in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius when Herculaneum and Pompeii were buried beneath its lava and ashes. Oh then! on that memorable day when the earth rocked beneath her feet and when she saw the flames shooting toward the sky; when she heard the terrific roar of the cracking rocks and the belching volcano; when she saw the mountain of red lava rushing like a river toward her; when she felt the hot ashes pouring down over head, heard the screams of the terrified refugees about her and was perhaps trampled beneath their feet; when she began to realize that escape from being buried alive was perhaps impossible; then, I wonder, did she not recall those searching words of Paul spoken years before at Caesarea when describing the judgment to come he had told them that they who did not repent and seek refuge in Christ should long to hide themselves from the wrath of the Lamb?

Then did she not wish that she had given up her immoral life and her trust in the pleasures of the world, and had trusted in the only saving Name? Then did she not wish that she and Felix had listened to the pleading of the apostle and had taken refuge in the rock that is higher than man? Then did she not lament that she had not made her dwelling in the secret place of the Most High and her abode under the shadow of the Almighty, whose praises she had sung in the innocence of her childhood? Ah, dreadful hour! Then it was too late! The convenient day had passed! The day of judgment had come!

Oh, you to whom this message comes! Will you not forsake your sins and seek the Lord while He may be found? Will you not call upon Him while He is near? Will you not respond to His voice as He calls you today? Will you not give your heart into the keeping of Him who is from everlasting to everlasting the same? Will you not flee to the LAMB that was slain from the foundation of the world? Will you not believe that though your sins have been as scarlet Christ can make them whiter than snow? Having received Him as your Saviour will you not say, with Peter, before all the world, "**Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God**" (Matthew 16:16)? Will you then not plead with Him that He may give you grace to walk in the strait and narrow way which leadeth to life eternal?

QUESTIONS (Acts 24:1-27)

1. Where was Paul during this trial?
2. Who was the judge before whom he was tried?
3. Why did he receive an early hearing?
4. Who were his accusers?
5. Why did they say he was brought before Felix?
6. What were the charges brought against Paul?
7. How did he answer the charge that he had been a mover of sedition?
8. What did he give as his reason for coming back to Jerusalem?
9. What did he say concerning his respect for the law?
10. What did he say concerning his respect for the temple?
11. What sect did he admit he was identified with?
12. Did a belief in the resurrection constitute any crime in the sight of the Roman law?
13. Did Felix know more than he stated concerning the divisions among the Jews?
14. Who was Drusilla?
15. What was the character of Felix?
16. What was the main reason why Felix continued to hold Paul?
17. What was the theme upon which Paul spoke to Felix?
18. What effect did it have?
19. Is it ever right to delay in accepting Christ?
20. What are some of the most common excuses given today?

~ end of chapter 40 ~

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