

The Trial Part 1

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] Okay, like us to go back to Acts chapter 24 and hopefully at some point we'll get some interaction together over this chapter. So far we're looking at Paul's trials. He's very much in the spotlight. It's like just from about chapter 21 onwards. It's like the lights, the stage lights go on and Paul and everything's shining on him and he is being examined very minutely about his faith and he's there standing very much as a representative of us this evening, a representative of the Christian faith in these early days when it is in a really detailed way, in a really minute way the gospel and the message of Jesus Christ I realize I've absolutely lost everywhere. I could be talking about elephants just now because you're all just looking at the thing and all that rain is just amazing. We should probably sing again just this rain because rain, the refreshing powers of the Spirit is killing one of these. Yeah, so Paul was at this stage where he was really representing us and it's for our benefit that the message of Jesus Christ is being examined minutely here because it stands examination and that's really important for us. He's defended his message, the gospel message in front of the Jewish crowd in chapter 21 and in front of the Sanhedrin in chapter 23 and now it's going to be in front of Felix and then it's going to be in front of Festus and then it's going to be in front of King Agrippa. So there's these five trials is coming Paul's way as he is defending the gospel and it's a reminder to us that Paul's coming here one man. One man with the message of the gospel, he's coming against two really big strong earthly kingdoms. He's coming against Jerusalem which kind of stands for tradition and for history and for all that goes along with that and he's also standing against Rome in its conquering power and in its organization. So these great two great and powerful kingdoms and here's little Paul, one man on his own and he's standing powerfully against it because the sovereign God is building his kingdom and we're the fruit of that this evening as the kingdom continues to develop and grow and mature in the world in which we live. So Paul here as one person stands against the corporate giants of the day Jerusalem and Rome and he stands against it in the name of Jesus Christ and with the power of Jesus Christ and he stands before the Sanhedrin as we've seen and then he comes before Felix and there's a lawyer that comes against him named Tertullus and he brings his case before Felix. So just want to go through one or two things from this, from the passage and I got some great answers to have the website up and running to, well

I don't know if there's any this afternoon but it certainly was some this morning and it's just really helpful, it's helpful for me as I said and I hope it's helpful for those that look at it as well and the helpful thing for me is that people find far more things than I find and I find that there's lots that we all learn from each other as we look at scripture. So when Tertullus stands against Paul here in this chapter and makes his defence as a church that's full of lawyers so we should be able to make something of this chapter surely and we find that Tertullus makes three accusations against Paul and they're pretty simple and straightforward. You're willing to tell me at least one of these if you give one answer each what is the accusations that he makes against Paul here in this third trial.

He's a troublemaker, Ian Neveson's quick with that one, he's a troublemaker, Ian's quick to point out any troublemakers in the congregation so he's well attuned to that. He says that Paul is a troublemaker, he's stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world and that had political undertones or overtones, some kind of tones, that it was something that the Roman authorities would be interested in, that Paul was potentially a troublemaker.

What else do we find that he's accused of? What's the second thing? He's a ringleader, he's a ringleader of the Nazarene sect and again almost this is a charge of heresy that he's coming up against here that he's leading a seditious sect that might well be dangerous and might well cause Rome trouble. What's the third one? He's a desecrator, he's desecrating the temple and that goes back to chapter 21 where he's accused of bringing a trophomus into the temple, trophomus was Greek and it would be a desecration of the temple to bring someone in to the temple. This is a third charge and would have been a charge that again Felix would have been interested in because the Romans gave the Jews authority to deal with any kind of religious disorder like that that the Jews could prove against someone.

So there was three fairly serious and difficult arguments that were coming up here against Paul. How does Paul answer each of them? So we have a trial situation and we probably could have worked in such a way that we had someone, a dramatic reading to the degree of each person having a part who was reading. But we have a trial situation and Tertullus has made these arguments and here we have in scripture Paul refuting these arguments.

[6 : 50] So he comes back with different arguments or sorry he comes back to refute these three arguments. So he's accused of being a troublemaker of being a fermenting political dissent troublemaker.

How does he respond to that? Yes.

Absolutely. That's the second of the two accusations that he's leading a sect. He says, well, you know, I do follow the way, but this way is absolutely in line with the Old Testament faith and the Old Testament religion in verses 14 and through to 16 he says, I admit I'm a worshiper of God. He says of God, the fathers has followed the way which they call us. I believe everything with the law and it is written in the prophets. I have the same hope in God as these men. So he's linking very wisely. He's linking in this stage of the trial. He's linking the Christian faith with the Old Testament faith and that's knocking away a whole kind of argument of the Jews who were against him and he's reminding them and us that the Christian truth is based in the Old Testament and is based in the truth of the Old Testament and that's significant for him and it's significant and it should be for us. It's not that Paul's an innovator that he is simply outworking the promises of the Old Testament and that we see in Jesus Christ. So that's the second of the responses.

How does he respond to being a troublemaker? Yeah, he's just simply saying it's simply not the case. I wasn't even involved. He says in an argument with anyone. I'm not a troublemaker.

I wasn't even involved in an argument. He says I've come to Jerusalem to worship in verses 11 and 12. He speaks about that and he refutes the argument. They had no time to ferment an insurrection. He is simply there to worship God. He's not a troublemaker.

[9 : 27] He is not introducing a new religion. He is worshiping the God of the Old Testament through Jesus Christ and the last of the accusations that he was desecrating the temple. How does he respond to that? He simply says, look, I did everything according to your law. I purified myself. I was ceremonially clean. There was nothing that I did to desecrate the temple. I didn't even take this man that you accused me of taking. I didn't even take him into that place. He defends himself consistently through what he's doing. He says not only has he done all these things, but he has a clear conscience before God. This is hugely significant. Paul defends himself in this court situation and as a representative of the Christian faith, he's defending the Christian faith against these accusations and we remember and recognise that this evening.

Moving on, can you build a picture of the character of Felix from this chapter and even maybe other sources? You've got him appearing before the Proconcil here. Felix is a Roman governor. We're not told that much about Felix in the chapter, but if you listened to the chapter, if you read the chapter with any kind of discernment, you would probably have built up some kind of picture because there's a few things said about him. Tertullian, the Roman, the Jewish lawyer and Paul, when they're both beginning to speak, they say certain things as in a courtroom. They give a certain degree of prominence to the judge. They speak about him in certain terms and we find out throughout the chapter one or two other things about Felix. So you build up a picture of the character of Felix. What do you think?

Because these are real people. You can go into history books and find out about Felix. You don't just need to go to the Bible. So what kind of character is Paul facing here? What's he like? He's insecure and weak. Well, now that wouldn't be what you would immediately think of when you read the kind of praise that he receives from Tertullian. Insecure and weak? He's a crowd pleaser. Why is he a crowd pleaser? Okay. So he's obviously been a bit of a crowd pleaser in his life, in his leadership. He's led for quite a long time, which was unusual in these days. And he is, yeah, probably a... There's something else that may give away the fact that he's a bit of a crowd pleaser. Yeah, he left Paul in prison because he was wanting to gain favour with the Jewish people around him. So we recognize him as a bit of a crowd pleaser. Anything else? Yeah, so what does that say about him? He's slimy. Okay. He's a bit of a slime ball. Because he's maybe in the pretext of listening to

Paul preaching, maybe that he was interested in Paul preaching also. But he was hoping that every time he visited Paul, Paul would possibly potentially give him a bribe to get out of prison. So he was corrupt. He was greedy, we could say that. Anything else we could say about him? Yeah, so, yeah, he had a conscience and he was concerned about Paul's preaching.

And it was uncomfortable. He didn't like what Paul was saying. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I think that's what he wanted.

[14 : 14] Do you believe that Jesus is the new, all the other human and global conscience? Yeah. The conscience suppressor. A conscience suppressor, yeah. That's exactly the case.

And it may have been made worse at one level. Drusilla was his second wife, who he had taken from her husband, and he had lured her into a relationship with him.

He was supposed to be a young Jewish woman of ravishing beauty, and he took her to be his own, having first had an affair with her. He then married her.

And history tells us that he lived, married to her for a number of years, and they had two children, but the two children and her died at Pompeii when Vesuvius erupted.

And so he eventually lost his family in that tragedy. But he was also known as a merciless oppressor. He crushed oppression in his region with mercilessness and with brutality.

[15 : 26] And so he was being damned with faint praise in many ways by those who are speaking of him here, but Tacitus and Josephus, historians of the time, speak about his brutality and his power, appetite, hunger to remain in power, which he did for a long time.

Sorry? No. True, he was allowed freedom, although that partly would have been, as a privilege, have been a Roman citizen.

But yeah, he did allow Paul, and he did hear Paul. I must not just presume that he wanted to bribe, that there may have been an ongoing conscience issue with him, that he was wanting to respond to the Gospel, but we have no evidence that he did.

Okay, let's move on. What might Paul have highlighted under the three headings in his discourse recorded in verse 25? A very famous verse, one that many preachers would take from this passage and preach from, as he preached on these issues, as Paul discourse, on righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, that's enough for now.

So what do you think was the focus of these three aspects of Paul's preaching? There's actually a clue.

[17 : 03] Okay, I'll give you the clue. As the verse before 25, he sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Jesus Christ.

So Paul was challenging Felix about coming to faith in Jesus Christ, about making a personal commitment to Jesus. Isn't that great that Paul's focus, wherever he was, whatever he was doing, as he witnessed was faith in Jesus Christ, that this is the key, you have to come to faith in Jesus Christ.

And he did so by speaking on these three elements, righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come. What would have been the righteousness, what element of righteousness would Paul have been focusing on when he's speaking about faith in Jesus Christ?

Let's think about that. What would he have been saying? When he talks about righteousness. Yeah, I think that's absolutely right.

He would have been speaking about the fact that we need a saviour, because our righteousness isn't enough to allow us a relationship with God, and so we need another righteousness, which Romans speaks about, a righteousness from God, which comes through the Lord Jesus Christ in his life.

[18 : 21] It's a better way. And as he speaks about that perfection and that righteousness, surely he would be exposing the unrighteousness of Felix' own life, and the injustice that he mired his life in as a Roman governor, and a different justice that was not one that was able to stand before the living God.

So we also recognize the importance of when we are sharing Jesus Christ, pointing out to people, and we invite them to Christ, but the basis is because our righteousness isn't enough.

Isn't it? This is a great help for us as we think about sharing our faith, because it gives us a structure with which we can share our faith, because many people live their lives thinking that they have a righteousness that will enable them to be accepted into heaven.

Now we are not condemning people by saying that that is not the case. We are simply pointing out to them that God requires something greater, something more perfect, something more obedient, something without fault and failure, and it is Jesus Christ who alone can provide that righteousness.

So the whole passage in Romans that speaks about the righteousness from God is hugely important, because it is important for us. So we move away from a self-righteousness in our lives.

[19 : 52] Self-righteousness, then he also speaks about self-control. What would he have spoken about self-control in talking about faith in Jesus Christ?

Righteousness, self-control.

There would have certainly been, I think, a sense in which Felix... conscience would have been troubled by the lack of self-control of his own life.

He was in a position of power and authority, and he was basically able to do what he wanted in many ways, certainly in terms of his moral behaviour.

And so there would have been a challenge to him. Whether it was a direct challenge from Paul, I'm not sure. But if Paul was speaking about self-control from God in the Gospel, what would we speak about when we talk about self-control from the Gospel?

[20 : 52] We were sharing the Gospel. What would we challenge people about on self-control? The aspects of the Gospel that require of his self-control.

Holiness. The Gospel is a Gospel of holiness. It requires that we deny ourselves, doesn't it? There's self-denial in the Gospel, isn't there?

Obedience. There's self-control required in obeying Jesus Christ. And the Gospel is being spoken of here as he reveals the significance in our lives of being transformed by Christ's power.

It's a transforming of self-control. We're becoming those who recognise the power of the Spirit in our lives to give us a life that is channeled and governed by the Spirit of God, and enabling us to be self-controlled in a way that is honouring and pleasing to God.

Morally structured and transformed by his grace. The righteousness, self-control, judgment to come.

[22 : 05] What would he say about judgment to come in relation to the theme of faith, putting faith in Jesus Christ?

We share the Gospel. We talked about judgment to come. What would we say?

Yeah, I mean, yeah, he was in a position of authority. He was sitting on in this chapter. He was sitting in judgment. But Paul is saying, Luke, you've put me in jail or imprisoned me here for two years, but I'm telling you there's a greater judgment to come.

And you'll be accountable before God in that judgment. And Christ is on the throne, he would say. I speak about the resurrected Saviour. Paul would say to Felix, he says, this is the one who's ascended to the right hand of the Father and who will return in judgment for all of humanity.

And it's a recognition that is a focussing as well in terms of faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the one who takes our sin on himself or we will bear our sin before God and pay the punishment for it.

[23 : 22] We face the consequences unless we are hidden in Jesus Christ. That was relevant for Felix, but it's relevant for you and it's relevant for me and it's relevant for the people we share the Gospel with.

We're probably afraid to say much about that, are we? But if we say it gracefully and in humility, we're pointing people to a hugely significant biblical truth.

That this is not all that there is. That God is the one before whom we stand. He is the ultimate authority and we do not have autonomy.

We are not rulers in our own universe that we stand before God. And that's good for us all to remember in our lives as well.

Okay, so we come to a chapter like this. It's a chapter where there are different characters where Paul who is defending the Gospel is being challenged again as he has been previously and will be again about the authenticity of his faith and of the authenticity and sincerity of the Gospel.

[24 : 32] And we've seen the different characters and we've heard about the faith in Jesus Christ that Paul sought to challenge Felix about. We're never told that Felix comes to faith.

It's quite sad really. We know even in history very little is known about his latter years, what happened to him. He certainly, there's no evidence that he came to faith in Jesus Christ.

So that's the chapter. What is God teaching us? What is God teaching you or me from a chapter like this for your life today?

Is this being a kind of doctrinal theological exercise of no significance or relevance to you? If you take a passage of Scripture like this, what lessons can you learn?

What teaching is there that you can take into 9 o'clock tomorrow morning into your life or into your heart this evening? What is the Holy Spirit saying to you from a chapter like this?

[25 : 39] Is there anything practical that we can learn from Scripture here? Can we wrestle with Scripture here? What was the Bible in the Bible in the Bible in the Bible in the Bible in the Bible in the Bible in the Bible?

Okay, that's very significant isn't it? Paul simply fulfilled his duty to preach the Gospel. He did it lovingly. I'm sure he did it prayerfully. He did it with all his passion and love.

But he wasn't able to convert Felix, but he was confident to leave Felix with God having offered him the Gospel. And that's our responsibility too, is we share the Gospel with people.

It's not up to us to convert people. It's not up to us to make them respond. But lovingly we share with them the Gospel and leave the responses to God, even though we will pray and be concerned for them.

Because God is sovereign over these things. What else can we learn? Some quick fire answers before we close. Just the gray matter.

[26 : 52] Can I go in? Okay, yeah, it's important to know.

Knowing the people you're sharing the Gospel with. Knowing the kind of things that are going to maybe convict them. Knowing the kind of truth that you're going to share.

Have a reason for the hope that's within you. Don't be surprised when you're not acquitted by the world's justice. Okay, right. Don't be surprised when you're not acquitted by the world's justice.

It's a Christian. But like what we were speaking about this morning. Anything else?

Okay, yeah, I know a lot of people that have come that close. They've become an accretion. But they've become afraid and they've walked away.

[28 : 00] Because of the challenge of the Gospel. And that's a reality for us. And it's a sad one in many ways. We pray that people will not come that close and walk away.

Because of the commitment that's involved. And can you imagine the huge changes that would have been involved in Felix's life? Obviously, great ones in terms of spiritual reality. But huge changes would have been required.

And he was afraid of that. He said, no more of that just now. We can't respond. And I think that's significant for us because at the same time, it's a reminder to us that there's not always, is there Hamish?

There's not always a more convenient season. That's what he was waiting for. He was waiting for when it was easier for him to come to faith. Maybe not so costly as we were looking at this morning. But he says, no.

We can't guarantee that more convenient season. If there's anyone here who's not a Christian and you're waiting for a more convenient season, don't do that. Scripture is very strong on that.

[29 : 04] That we don't do that. This is now is the day of salvation. Don't put it off for a more convenient season. It never comes, does it?

Anything else? Just looking for a way out of that situation to give evidence that God is a holy man, but we're counting on the word of God in the transituation.

Okay, yeah, Paul, it was a difficult situation. He was suffering in it, but like what we were talking about this morning. But he didn't look for a way out. He simply was obedient in it and saw an opportunity to serve.

Can I just say a couple of other things that I picked out? And I think it's very useful to think about these things and to think about applying Scripture. The sovereign purpose of God wasn't to be outdone by Rome or by Jerusalem or by any earthly powers because the kingdom of God was being built and that will not fail.

And that's an encouragement to us here in St. Columbus, in a secular city that we live in. The kingdom of God will progress and he will use us as we serve him in obedience. And again, related to that, the power of one life under God.

[30 : 17] Paul was just one person. Huge, huge impact that he had as we see the influence he had on governments, on nations, on individuals, on the world with the gospel.

The irrational opposition to Jesus Christ kind of linking in with this morning. The Jews were just so irrationally opposed to Jesus Christ and it just speaks of the spiritual darkness that there is.

Similar to what Audra was saying, the importance of a clear conscience. Paul could preach and speak because he had a clear conscience. He was in a right relationship. He kept a short fuse between himself and God.

He was always in God's company and his conscience was clear. He lived as important for us in our lives. We are living with a clear conscience that we are living close to God.

Short account with Jesus Christ, often in his company. Always looking for his nearness and for his forgiveness and for his help. Hypocrisy, you know, it does so much damage to the Christian faith.

[31 : 28] When we say one thing but we are living another way because we don't have a clear conscience. Because we are just living our own way and we are trying to mask what we really are. Paul's power lay in the fact that through the Spirit of God and grace he had a clear conscience.

You and I need to work at that clear conscience if we are to serve the living God. And I think maybe you've covered most of the other things that I had.

But just to finish with that solemn reality that there isn't always a more convenient time. Remember that for your friends as well.

Remember it's so important to share the Gospel honestly. Felix was used to listening. He was used to telling people to be quiet.

He was used to ushering people out of an audience with him. He was used to being in command and so he felt that he was the one who could control God for a more convenient season.

[32 : 32] And very often we can be like that. We can just usher God out of our presence. We can say I'll think about him at a more convenient season. I'm really too busy just now. I've got too much on. My life is too full.

I'm too self-important to think about him at that level. Maybe that we don't do that but that we recognise in a sense as we go back to Saturday night the wonderful freedom of being able to say our Father in Heaven hallowed be your name giving him the first place in our prayers and in our life and in our perspective so that we are living by grace with that clear conscience that enables us to serve him.

So let's bow our heads as we pray. Lord God help us as we learn from Scripture. To follow you and serve you. Help us to take narrative passages like this and engage with them.

Help us to work at them. Help us to like we're digging for gold. Sometimes it requires work and effort and energy. Maybe we were able to do that and find spiritual gold nuggets as we examine Scripture and as we wrestle with Scripture and as we find this truth of God and apply it to ourselves.

Maybe the work that we do be worthwhile. We not just come to church or live our Christian lives or have our quiet times with the Bible in an uncostly way where we are always expecting truth to just be given to us on a plate in simple, easy, digestible forms.

[34 : 15] Maybe we be diligent students of Jesus, disciples of Jesus who will take time to value this living word in all its depth and all its beauty and in all its richness and in all its variety.

And may we find with the Holy Spirit help and with a transformed life and heart that we are being excited and challenged and moved to respond to that truth on a daily basis.

So help us God and bless us in Jesus' name. Amen.