

Paul's Trial Before Felix, Part 1: The Case Against Paul

Scripture: Acts 24:1-9

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Take your Bible, if you will, and turn to Acts 24. Some passages in the Scripture are very theological. I can remember when we were studying the book of Hebrews in the evenings, and how deep and penetrating and sometimes very difficult the book of Hebrews was. There is so much doctrine, so much deep theology, and other books are very much the opposite. They are very much historical narratives, and Acts is one of those. The Gospels have an amazing way of being doctrinal and historical in a beautiful combination.

Here in the book of Acts, you pretty much have a running historical narrative, and doctrine comes rather sporadically. Often, it's implied rather than stated. So as we come to the conclusion of the book of Acts, what we're really seeing is the moving of God in the life of one man. Last week, we saw how God's providence acts, didn't we? We said that God works today through providence rather than through the miracle.

That's a word we throw around a lot, and I believe there are miracles today. The miracles God performs today, primarily, are the miracles of the new birth. That is a miracle. But other than that, this is not a day of miracles. This is not a day, I believe, when people are doing miracles. This is a day when God is ordering His will through providence. It means this: miracle is when God violates the natural world to accomplish His purpose. Providence is when God uses all the circumstances of the natural world to accomplish His purpose. It's just a different approach.

Today, we see God moving through many ways and doing mighty and wonderful things, but it is not the day of the apostolic miracles. Nevertheless, God is at work.

As we move through the book of Acts, rather than seeing, at least in the latter part, the great, dramatic miracles, we see God working through providence. It's almost as if God is beginning to phase out that apostolic miracle era. It's almost a different feeling that you get toward the end of Acts. Boy, in the beginning of Acts, you see miracle after miracle after miracle. All of a sudden, as you flow toward the end, you begin to see that God starts working more with His providence through the circumstances rather than in direct violation of them, where He just injects Himself and violates what is the normal flow. God begins to kind of work through the circumstances.

Remember, early in the book of Acts when Peter and John were in jail? An angel just reached down and yanked them out. Later in the book, what happens? Through a series of circumstances and the byplay between the Romans and the Jews, Paul gets out. But it isn't miraculous; it's providential. We begin to see this. So it becomes more and more a historical narrative.

In the background, what you need to focus on, and I'm telling you this at the beginning because I don't want to say it all the way through, you need to be aware that God is moving. In this morning's discussion, we'll only get down to verse 9, though we'd need to cover to verse 27 to get the whole story. In these verses, in the back of your mind, be aware of the fact that through all that is happening, God is moving. Of course, you'll have to come back next week to see what God is moving toward, because that's good too.

This is really the story of a man, and as much the story of a bad man as it is the story of a good man. It's the story of Paul, but it's also the story of Felix. Felix was a bad man. He was bad in every sense; he was corrupt. He stole his wife. As a 15-year-old girl, she married another man, a king. But Felix lusted after her, seduced her, and stole her. Tacitus, the historian, said about Felix, "He had the office of a king and he ruled it with the mind of a slave." You know something? He had opportunity and he blew it. He is a great illustration of lost opportunity.

Have you ever thought about opportunity? J.J. Ingalls wrote these words describing opportunity. "Master of human destinies am I; fame, love and fortune on my footsteps wait. Cities and fields I walk. I penetrate deserts and seas remote, and, passing by hovel and mart and palace, soon or late, I knock unbidden once at every gate. If sleeping, wake; if feasting, rise, before I turn away. It is the hour of fate, and they who follow me reach every state mortals desire, and conquer every foe save death; but those who hesitate condemned to failure, penury and woe, seek me in vain, and uselessly implore. I answer not, and I return no more." Opportunity.

The greatest story of opportunity lost in the history of man, I think, is Judas. Wouldn't you agree? Can you imagine living three years in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, seeing all that He is, hearing all that He says, and being a damned suicide condemned to Hell for unbelief? Lost opportunity.

What might Judas have been? Have you ever thought about that? Judas might have been one of the 12 Apostles of the Lamb, reigning in the Kingdom, one of the 12 foundations of the heavenly Jerusalem, one of the 12 stones on the breastplate of the Eternal High Priest. He might have been one of the great heroes of all time; he might have been one of the great and glorified saints of all eternity. What was he? Traitor, thief, villain, hypocrite, the darkest of men of whom Jesus Christ Himself said, "Good were it for that man if he had never been born." Lost opportunity.

Judas lived in the face of the unclouded Son of God and his life set in the night of terrible despair, he blew it. But there is another like Judas, and I don't think he's very far behind. His name is Felix. Felix is kind of a later Judas. Do you realize that, as we will see in our story today and next Lord's Day, Felix had the Apostle Paul living in his house for two years? You say, "Well, maybe Paul didn't say anything." You don't know Paul. That's opportunity, friend. There wasn't a mind like him; there wasn't a man like him. Felix rejected all that Paul stood for and proclaimed.

Formally, his name is Antonius Felix. Formally, he is the procurator of Judea, or the governor of Judea, and he follows in the rather infamous line of Pilate. He ruled in Judea from A.D. 52-59, and the reason he ruled is because his brother, Pallas, was buddy-buddy with Claudius, and he got the job that way, not because he had any qualities.

His term as procurator was marked by trouble; everything went wrong. The Sicarii, who I told you were professional assassins, were around during his time. He did manage to quell some riots, but he did it in such a dramatic way and overdid it to the extent that even when he stopped the riot, he had killed so many people that he alienated the Jews he was trying to protect. They hated him. He is a figure of infamy. He comes off, in this story, not only as indecisive and a procrastinator, but also a coward.

You know, when you read about the byplay of the Romans in the land of Judea during the time of Christ and afterwards, you wonder whether there was such a thing as a hero, or a Roman that really believed in anything. Now, as we look at the passage, we have to take it as a unit from verses 1-27, even though we'll divide it. It really is one unit, and it's the trial of Paul before Felix. There are three ways to look at it. You can look at what Paul is doing (that's what we'll do today), you can look at what God is doing (that's what we'll do next week), or you can look at what Felix is doing (that's what we'll sum up with next time).

You know, like so many passages in Scripture, it's like a diamond - it has facets. You can look at it one way or another way; the perspectives are almost unlimited. You could use this passage to teach the attitude of Paul in trial. You could use it, as I am, to teach the tragedy of procrastination. You could use it to teach the providence of God. You could use it to teach the hatred of unbelief and the hardness of men's hearts when they turn against Christ. You could use it to go a lot of different directions, and I trust the Holy Spirit may just implant these things into your brain as we go through it from the one perspective.

Just to give you the background, the book of Acts records the history of the church from the day of Pentecost until the church had finally spread itself to Rome. Those were the great early years when the church first bloomed and brought its message all the way to the great capital of the world, Rome. During those years, we find, in the book of Acts, all kinds of exciting things happening, but two people

dominate those years. The first few years are dominated by a man named Peter, and the last are dominated by Paul.

We're in the midst of the story of Paul. Paul is the man who took the Gospel to the Gentiles, and he really took three tours to the Gentiles. As we come to chapter 24, he has just finished his third one. This is the last of his tours as a free man; he is now a prisoner.

When he arrived in Jerusalem at the conclusion of his third tour, he was really trying to pacify some of the Christian Jews by going to the temple to show them he wasn't anti-Jewish, even though he was a Christian, and that he still believed in some of the customs of Israel. While he was there, some Jews from Asia Minor, where he had had such a dramatic impact on the Jews, and where he had won so many of them to Christ that the remaining Jews were very upset, they saw him there and attacked and tried to kill him. As we come to chapter 24, Paul has arrived in Caesarea.

His ministry as a prisoner took place in three cities: Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome. He only spent a few days in Jerusalem, a few years in Caesarea, and then he went to Rome. We remember what happened - the riot started when he came back to Jerusalem. The tribune, Claudius Lysias, was responsible for things in Jerusalem, was the ruler of Fort Antonia, and was under Felix, the procurator of the whole territory of Judea.

Claudius Lysias rescued Paul and assumed he must have done something terrible for people to be so adamant at trying to assassinate him, so he tried to get an accusation but couldn't. The mob screamed and yelled all kinds of things, since a mob never knows what it's doing anyway, and he couldn't get any answers. So he decided to torture Paul. He stretched him out on a rack to scourge him, but Paul reminded the soldiers standing by that he was a Roman and in a panic, they cut him loose. To scourge a Roman was a crime, and so there still wasn't an accusation.

Claudius Lysias then decided to take him before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council. Paul went before the council and they started fighting each other, but he still didn't have an accusation. So he's kind of in a hard place. As a Roman, he has a sense of justice and honor toward Rome and he wants to keep his job, so he can't execute a Roman citizen who is guilty of nothing. But in an area like Jerusalem, in a hotbed of Judaism, he's got to be sure that he pacifies the Jewish people or he'll have a riot on his hands, an insurrection, maybe lose his life and job because he hasn't been able to keep the politics to the level where there isn't a revolution.

So he's caught between a rock and a hard place. He doesn't want to break his knowledge of Roman justice or violate that, and he doesn't want to cause problems with the Jews. He can't accuse Paul of anything, he has no accusation, but he knows the Jews want to kill him. In order to try and get out from under the burden, he shuffles Paul out of town in the middle of the night and uses 470 Roman soldiers to get him to Caesarea. 470 people escort Paul.

Well, they got Paul to Caesarea, and that's where he comes to Felix. He's turned over to Felix now, and you can imagine Claudius, up in Jerusalem, saying, "Whew! Am I glad that's over." But now Felix is saying, "What do I do?" Claudius pushed the whole thing upstairs, and now Felix has the same problem. He's got a sense of Roman justice and an obligation to Rome, he can't kill a Roman citizen, either, without an accusation, and he's got to pacify the Jews too.

You see, this is the thing that finally destroyed Pilate, remember? This is the thing that destroyed him. He came out and said over and over again, "I find no fault with the man," but he wound up letting the Jews crucify Him because they put pressure on him. They said, "We'll report you to Caesar for allowing a seditionist to exist." He was trapped. Here we see the same thing happening to Felix. He reacts very much the way that Pilate did.

The passage divides itself into three very simple parts: the prosecution, the defense, and the verdict. It's really kind of a hearing. We'll see the prosecution. What are they going to accuse him of? They have to have an accusation. Claudius Lysias sent Paul, and a letter with him, saying, "I'm sending this guy, but as far as I can see, it's only a matter of Jewish theology. He hasn't really done anything for which he should be put in jail or killed." He really gives him a stamp of innocence. Then, Claudius Lysias goes to Paul's accusers and says, "Now, if you're going to pursue your case, you have to go to Caesarea; it's in the hands of Felix." So off they go.

You'd think that maybe these Jewish leaders would be content just having Paul out of town. No, they wanted him dead. He was a tremendous threat to them. You see, he undermined their security. They were smug and content, they ate up their prestige, and they loved their spiritual prominence.

Paul came along and just tore the slats out of it. He called them hypocrites, and preached Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Messiah, the very one they had deemed a blasphemer and executed through the Romans. So Paul was doing the same thing Jesus had done - he was stomping all over their ecclesiastical toes. He was destroying their theology, and they couldn't tolerate it. They wanted to get rid of him. Besides, he was winning Jews to Christ all over the place, and this was really creating problems.

So they march on down to Caesarea; they make the 60-mile trip down there, ready to accuse him. We see the prosecution in verse 1. First of all, we meet the accusers. "After five days, Ananias, the high priest, descended with the elders." You always 'descend' from Jerusalem. Anywhere you go is down. "With a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul," or who made the indictment.

Here are the accusers; it's an interesting group, frankly. First of all, there is the high priest, Ananias. Now for a high priest to get in on an accusation is _____. This guy was upset. Of course,

Ananias was corrupt; he was as corrupt as you could be corrupt, in every way. We talked about that last time and won't go over it again. He was a corrupt man, saw Paul as a threat, and wanted to get rid of him, so there he goes. He is part of the entourage that comes down to accuse. In addition to Ananias, you've got the elders. That would be key leaders out of the Sanhedrin. So you not only have the ruler of Israel, there's the Supreme Court too. They're all down to accuse Paul.

They didn't want to do it alone, so they hired a smooth-tongued, oily, slick character by the name of Tertullus. He's sort of a hired Italian, professional case reader. He's a guy who could come in and read this deal off, figure it all out, and then could go and plead the thing. This is a man who was probably versed in legal procedure as far as Rome went. He probably spoke eloquent Latin, and he was the guy they were going to have plead the case. It says at the end of verse 1 that, "He informed the governor." The high priest and others from the Sanhedrin just stood there while Tertullus did the talking.

Now it was very common for orators in those days to do what Tertullus did. In the first two verses, he just lays it on thick. The Latin description of what he did is *captatio benevolentia*. Do you know how that translates? Soft-soap job. That's a free translation.

What he did was butter Felix up with flattery; I mean it was so thick it was ridiculous. In the first place, there wasn't two minutes worth of good that could be said about the guy, so what he does is give a lot of generalities. You know, like the politicians who say, "My, that is a baby." A whole lot of generalities without any significance. But it was a very common approach to get a favorable hearing. Even though you know it isn't true, you like to hear it, right? It's like Herod. He sat up on his throne and gave his speech, then everyone said, "He's not a man, he's a god." Herod loved every bit of it, even though he knew it wasn't true. We know that about flattery; we know it isn't so, but we love it.

So he butters him up, even though the man is intelligent enough to know that the Jewish people hated him. They've hired a professional to come in and tell him how wonderful he is. Well, let's see what he says that's flattering. Verse 2.

"When he was called forth," the hearing began; we don't know if it was very formal or informal. Apparently, though, it was informal, because there had to be a later determination of the case according to verse 22. So it was some kind of official but informal hearing. He calls forth Tertullus, and Tertullus began to accuse Paul. This is how he began his accusation, "Seeing that by thee [referring to Felix] we enjoy great quietness." He says, "Felix, first of all, let me begin by saying we are so happy with the peace that you have brought."

Now, Felix had nothing to do with peace, he had made absolutely no contribution to Roman peace whatsoever. In fact, the only time Felix had brought peace was when he stomped out a riot that shouldn't have started in the first place if he had known what he was doing. And when he stomped it

out, he did such a lousy job that he alienated everyone else. So he hadn't really done anything that had contributed to peace, it was just a flattering statement. "We enjoy much peace."

Listen, many of the Jews didn't see the Pax Romana as peace at all. Tacitus said, "The Romans create a desolation and call it peace." It may have been peace for Rome, but it was oppression for everyone else. So when he says, "Oh, we enjoy this great quietness," that's just not so.

Then he goes on, "And very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy provision. Oh, you've done so much for us, Felix!" You know, I checked out 12 different books this week to try and find one thing Felix did and couldn't find one. Whatever he was supposed to have done, history never recorded it. But notice the generalities; there are no specifics. He doesn't say, "You did this, or that other thing," he just says all these generalities.

He had driven off the Egyptian impostor, which really potentiated a revolution, he had done that. He had quelled a few riots, but certainly no reforms of any consequence. He did some bad things. He assassinated Jonathan, the high priest, because he didn't like him. One way to be popular with the Jews is not to assassinate the high priest.

Tacitus, the historian, says, "He thought he could do any evil with impunity." That is, he thought he could do any evil and get away with it. Tacitus went on to say, "He indulged in every kind of barbarity and lust." Very worthy deeds? I don't think so. History hasn't recorded one; but he butters him up. Verse 3 gets even thicker.

"We accept it always. Whatever you do, oh Felix, we accept it. Always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thanksgiving." Notice all the 'alls': always, all places, all thankfulness, all bologna. I can just imagine the Jewish leaders standing there, the high priest and those from the Sanhedrin, just gagging. I mean, now I know why they hired a lawyer. They could never have said that with a straight face, it was impossible. I know Felix didn't believe it, and he was there with his tongue in his cheek, smiling from ear to ear because those Jewish people had to stand there and endure while he said that about Felix. So he was loving it because he knew they detested it. "Most noble Felix." There was nothing noble about him at all.

Verse 4 is interesting. How are you going to turn the corner after that? Well, this guy was pretty oily, pretty smooth. Verse 4. "Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto you, [I don't want to take your time reciting all the wonderful, wonderful things you've done, so I'll get on with it] I beseech you that you would hear us of thy clemency," that means yieldedness. The idea is that one is to give place to another, to give over your rights. "That you would be kind enough to yield to us a few words. I don't want to continue to recite all these things; that would be tedious to you." The real truth was, he didn't have a thing to say. That was it. It's like when a preacher says, "I have much more I could say on this subject," that means he's run out of material.

So he butters up Felix in order to get a hearing. Incidentally, the idea that 'I don't want to be tedious, I want to get this over with' was very common. There is historical evidence that orators did this very often before judges. They said, "This is going to be very brief." The reason they would do that would be to get the concentration of the man at the very beginning. It didn't always turn out to be brief, but it was a good way to sort of win over an immediate response.

So Felix is there, and I know he's smiling because these Jewish leaders are having to sit there and acknowledge all this flattery. I know they're gagging because of the flattery. Tertullus is doing his job. So there they are, all the accusers and their hired mouth have come down to bring their case against Paul. We'll leave the accusers now and listen to the accusation.

Verses 5-9 give us the accusation. I want you to notice that the accusation falls into three categories, and it's a very clear accusation. Sedition, sectarianism, and sacrilege. It's easy for you to remember that way. They accused him of sedition, that's a violation of Roman law, sectarianism, a violation of Jewish law, and sacrilege, a violation of God. They get him on his relationship to Rome, to the Jews, and to God. That's the accusation in total. Let's look at it in part.

First of all, the accusation of sedition. Sedition could be translated treason. Of course, if they could make this stick, they could really get him. If the Romans think for a minute that this man is committing treason, or is stirring up sedition or insurrection or riot, he is in deep trouble. Verse 5, and this is a generality, "We have found this man a pestilent fellow." What that really translates is 'a nuisance, a plague, a pest'. In the modern day, this man would be a pain in the neck. That isn't an accusation, that's just a statement, a very general statement, reflecting their attitude. "He causes us trouble."

Then they define the three areas in which he is such a pestilence. "He's a disrupter. He creates problems wherever he goes." First of all, sedition against the government. He is a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world. The idea is that he is getting Jews to revolt against Rome. This man is gathering Jews and they're revolting all over the world! He's treasonous. There is insurrection, riots are happening.

You know, they could have supported that. Paul didn't stir up riots, but he sure was in on a lot of them. He would preach, then someone else would get excited and stir up the riot, but he was usually there when the riot was happening. So if there had been any weight of evidence at all that this guy could have pulled out of his hat to support this, he could have had Paul in trouble because it was true that Paul had been in riots. We'll see, interestingly enough, in a few moments, that even in the midst of those riots, Paul could never justifiably be accused. That is made clear in the book of Acts.

There was, though, the potential that this could stick, if the right twist on the truth could be brought to bear. So they accuse him of being a man of sedition, and one who moves people to riot. The Romans

did not tolerate that; they were paranoid about revolution, insurrections, and riots, because they had managed to conquer. They had placed all their rulers and soldiers in these areas to keep the peace, and this is the one thing they feared.

Notice the exaggeration. It says, "He is a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world." I mean, that is a little broad, but again, these are great generalities. He doesn't name any riot, you know why? If he had named a riot in any area, it would have immediately removed the responsibility from Felix because they would have had to transfer Paul into that area to be tried under whoever had jurisdiction over the area.

Remember back in Acts 23:34, when Paul was asked the question where he was from, what province? He said, "Cilicia," and when he said that, Felix said, "That's my jurisdiction." If they had accused him of something that he had stirred up somewhere else, then they would have had to pass him on to the other person who was responsible for that jurisdiction. So they don't even bring that up. If in fact they knew very much about it, they may have been able to get information about it, but they wanted it done now. They didn't want to push him off somewhere.

So they accused him, then, of leading sedition among all the Jews throughout the world; it's an accusation of treason. It isn't true. He was accused, of course, of creating dissension everywhere he went, but that was only because people created dissension in response to what he was preaching.

This particular thing, just to give you an historical note, this particular accusation was very common in ancient times. Petty tyrants, tyrannical emperors, used this concept of sedition or treason or riot or insurrection at will to execute anyone who disagreed with them. It was a very handy little idea. So here is Paul, accused of this.

Let me add the note I mentioned I'd add. It is very interesting to me that, all through the book of Acts, Christians are on trial for their preaching. With great detail, the Holy Spirit records all the features of the trial. As you read the end of the book of Acts, you wonder why in the world the Holy Spirit tells us every detail of every one of these things. Why doesn't He just say, "Paul went here and had a little thing with Felix, then he went there," and then give us a bit of doctrine. I mean, why all this detail? I mean, we start out at the very beginning, and even in Paul's ministry, there is a trial before Gallio, there's the Sergius Paulus thing, you've got Felix, Festus, Agrippa, and all of these trials in the book of Acts. Even in the early part of the book, there's Peter and John before the Sanhedrin repeatedly.

Why does the Lord feel that all the details of all these trials have to be here? I'll tell you why I believe the Lord put it here. Because throughout history, in the early church in particular, in the early years, Christianity was always condemned on the basis of the fact that it was treasonous, that it was an insurrectionist movement, a revolutionary movement. The Holy Spirit is careful to record, in the book of Acts, trial after trial after trial after trial of Christians. In every single case in the book of Acts, it is

abundantly clear that they were innocent of any violation of civil law. I think that is important.

Christianity is not political treason. The Bible is explicit about that. Jesus said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's." The Apostle Paul said in Romans 13, "The powers that be are ordained of God." Peter said, "Submit yourselves to the kings and governors and police," in I Peter. Christians are not political insurrectionists; Christians should be class A, number one citizens, law-abiding. Unless you come to the place where you live in a society where there are laws that violate the laws of God, then you have the right to choose whether to obey God or men, and you should choose to obey God. But that's the abnormal.

So very carefully, competent judges like Gallio, Sergius Paulus, and Felix, really come up exonerating the Christian. Luke makes this very clear in the book of Acts, for all who would read, particularly in those early centuries, that Christianity was not political revolution.

They come, then, and they accuse him of this insurrection. It's interesting that I don't think Felix believed this, because Claudius Lysias had already written a letter. In his letter, he had said, "I perceive this to be a question about their law, having nothing to do with death or bonds." In other words, "It isn't a legal matter for us to consider, it's strictly a theological issue between them." I think he probably believed his own tribune, his own chiliarch. Lysias wouldn't have been in the position he was in, if Felix didn't think he was capable. So here, he knows these people would lie to him to get their whims and wishes, and he probably just accepted it for what it was.

It starts out, then, with a vague, non-specific charge, which is really inadmissible as any kind of evidence. The first charge is sedition against the government; the second is sectarianism against the Jewish people. This is most interesting. Verse 5 says, "A ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes."

Today we still have some people who call themselves Nazarenes, they're wonderful Christian people. That name was a name originally given as a term of derision, a mocking term, so was the term 'Christian'. But the term Nazarene came because Jesus of Nazareth was called the Nazarene. So the people who identified with Jesus came to be known, in a derisive sense, as Nazarenes. Remember what had been said? "Could anything good come out of Nazareth?" I mean, that was really out in the boondocks. It was an uneducated, hick town. Nobody came from there and amounted to anything. So when Jesus arrived from Nazareth, they all laughed and said, "Could anything good come out of Nazareth?"

So when they called these people Nazarenes, it was a slur. They say, "This man is a leader of the Nazarenes," and you can find six times in the book of Acts, Jesus is called a Nazarene. This is the only time that the people who followed Him are called Nazarenes. It was a term of contempt. Apparently, it was a very popular term, because Tertullus does not bother to explain it to Felix, he assumes he understands what that means. You know, they probably felt this could be a problem,

because there were a lot of Messianic groups at the time.

The Messianic groups, at this particular time, not that they believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but there were various Messianic factions, and these factions were very troublesome to Rome. The factions of the Nazarenes would be classified with this other pile of Messianic factions, and so they could well have been a threat to Rome, at least an irksome thing. So by calling Paul a ringleader of this sect of the Nazarenes, he throws him in the bag of a bunch of troublesome, Messianic offshoots of Judaism.

What they are accusing him of, from their standpoint, is heresy. He's anti-Jewish. He not only violates Roman law, but he violates Jewish laws. The third accusation appears in verse 6. This really was the thing that got them going in the first place, although it was a lie. It says in verse 6, "Who also have gone about to profane the temple."

Now the temple, to the Jews, was a very sacred thing. The laws of the temple were very binding. There was an outer court, and it was where the Gentiles could come. But Gentiles could not go past the barricade into the inner part of the temple. In fact, there were signs posted there, disallowing them to go in. We have even found archaeological remnants of those signs from Herod's temple; so much so, that we even know exactly what they said. But the signs were there that if a Gentile went into the inner part, he would pay with his life.

That was such a serious violation of Jewish law that the Romans allowed the Jews to have the right of capital punishment for that offense, and that offense only. That's why I said the Jews had to get the Romans to crucify Christ, because in any other area of violation of their law, they had no right to take a life, except in the violation of the sacredness of the temple. That was such a high priority that Rome gave them the right to take the life of one who violated that.

When Paul was in the temple, these people from Asia Minor, these Jews from Asia Minor who saw him there, accused him of bringing a Gentile in there. He hadn't done that, but they accused him of it. They were going to kill Paul. As I told you, that was ridiculous. If a Gentile came in, the Gentile would be the one killed, not Paul. The law said, "A Gentile who enters gets killed," not the one who brings him in.

So they were twisting the whole thing. Here, though, they back off of that, and don't say that he brought a Gentile in. They say, "He goes about to profane the temple." They didn't say he did it, they said he tried to do it.

You say, "Well, why did they back off? Why not just say that he did it?" Because that would be stupid, since it couldn't be proven. You know why? Because he didn't do it. They couldn't find any witnesses. But by saying, "He tried to do it," there was no way to prove that he didn't try to do it. So they figured

that was a safer accusation, to accuse him of trying to profane. They put it in terms that were vague enough that maybe the judge would say, "Wow, if he's profaning your temple, you know you have your rights. Go execute him."

It's amazing to me that religious people are often the most immoral and unethical. I look back at some of the things that Christianity has perpetrated and it staggers me. Throughout the history of civilization, you find terrible things done by Christians. Things like the Crusades, where the 'Christians' marched across Europe to take the holy places from the Turks, and while they were marching, they slaughtered all the Jews along the way so the Jews wouldn't hassle them about the holy places. This in the name of Christ.

You wonder why Jews have a hard time with Christians? They know their history. They know that Germany was the birthplace of the Reformation of Christianity, the home of Martin Luther. They know all that. They don't see that Christianity had much of an effect on any of the Germans that they're aware of.

At that time, in the time of Hitler, there was a state church, a 'Christian church'. You know, religious people, and I don't mean truly Christian people. Religious people are sometimes the most immoral and unethical of all. I mean, we're still having religious wars, you know. It isn't really that simple, but let's face it: the Catholics and Protestants are still killing each other, and that's in the name of Christianity. You understand that it's not true Christianity, but does the world? Why would they understand that?

You see, it's a very difficult thing to try to connect any kind of honest morality with religion, it just isn't there. True ethics and true morality comes with a true relationship with God. Apart from that, religious people can be just as criminal as anyone else. Sometimes even more so when they start to defend their little square inch of religion. There were people who, in the name of God and in zeal for God, wanted to kill a man who was innocent and they wanted to accuse the man with lies. That's how bad they wanted him dead, all in the name of religion.

What happened when they came and accused him? Three things. Verse 6 mentions an interesting thing, and I'll just give you a note on it. Some manuscripts do not include the end of verse 6, all of verse 7, and the first part of verse 8.

In other words, when we go to put together the text of the Bible that you hold in your hand, we have to make it up from the manuscripts that we have from ancient history, way back as far as we can go. We find old manuscripts of the book of Acts, for example, and maybe there's a variation. One manuscript has these verses and one doesn't, so we have what's known as a problem. Wait until I finish! I know you're saying, "Brilliant, MacArthur, brilliant!" That's the objective of lower criticism, trying to find out what texts are right. There are certain principles that we use to try to determine which one is right, but

in this case, it's very difficult to know whether the end of verse 6, the whole of verse 7, and the beginning of verse 8 should be in or out.

If you have a New American Standard, it's in the margin. It's more likely to be out than in. If it's more likely to be in than out, they'll have it in the text.

Now, I'm not any great expert in this area, but looking at it from a textual standpoint, I kind of lean toward the side of it being in. The reason I feel that way is, let's just assume, number one, that God maybe preserved this thing, since there's any doubt at all about it, and it was in some. We don't have clear indication that it isn't out. Let's just accept that it isn't going to hurt anything. Plus, it poses an interesting fact. If, in fact, it isn't there, it would read this way. Verse 6. "Who also hath gone about to profane the temple." Then jump to verse 8. "By examining of whom thyself might take knowledge of all these things of which we accuse him."

Now, if that middle section isn't there, who does that 'whom' refer to in verse 8? The examining of whom? Well, it would refer to Paul, wouldn't it? So what Tertullus is saying is, "Look, he's profaned the temple and if you'll examine him, you'll find this out." I have a problem with that. You know what the problem is? If he examined Paul, he wouldn't find it out, because Paul didn't do that. That's the problem.

So if you take it out of there, it's crazy. Why would the lawyer say, "All you have to do to get the truth is ask him," that doesn't make any sense. Paul is not going to agree with him. But if you leave those other verses in there, it changes everything. It reads, "Whom we took and would have judged according to our law." That's a lie. They weren't going to judge him according to their law; they were going to lynch him.

"But the chief captain Lysias came on us and with great violence took him out of our hands!" Sure he did. They were trying to kill him and Claudius rescued him, "Commanding his accusers to come to thee, he sent us here to carry out this trial." Now, "By examining of whom," and who does the 'whom' refer to? Lysias. That makes sense. They say, "If you want to know what happened, you just ask Claudius Lysias." You say, "Well, they told lies!" Sure, but Claudius Lysias wasn't going to get into a fight with them.

If you look at verse 22, it says, "Felix heard all these things...and deferred them and said, 'When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will determine your case'." It seems as though, the indication of 22 is that the reference was to hearing from Claudius.

So Tertullus says, "I've given you the accusations. If you want corroboration, you can get it from your chief captain. We were trying to carry out justice, then he swooped down and with great violence, he hauled Paul away. He commanded us to come to you. Check with him and see if that isn't so." So

later on in 22, Felix says, "I'll check with him." You know something, he never did. We'll see that next time.

If you're any kind of a lawyer worth anything, you'll have witnesses, right? You won't just stand there and state your case, you'll support it too. So in verse 9, he brings in a bunch of witnesses. "And the Jews also assented, saying these things were so." So-and-so took the stand, then another elder, and they all said, "Oh, everything he says is true." They just perjured themselves up one side and down the other, lying through their teeth. In the name of God, 'servants of God' they called themselves, 'lovers of God, lovers of the law' and here they are, blatantly lying in order to preserve their religion and to execute a man they didn't want around.

Now listen, this is a very clear illustration of what a Christian should expect. How many times have we seen that, if a Christian really lives his life in the face of an ungodly world, he'll make waves. Isn't that right? II Timothy 3:12 says, "Yea, all that will live godly in this present age will suffer persecution." If you're going to live a godly life in the midst of an ungodly society, you're going to get some flack. That's expected, that's how it will be. If you're not getting any flack, you're not living a godly life in the midst of an ungodly world. They can't handle it.

Listen to what Peter said in I Peter 3:14. "If you suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are you, don't be afraid of their terror nor be troubled. Sanctify the Lord God always in your hearts, be ready to give an answer to every man that asks you the reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." In other words, stand up there and give an answer boldly, meekly. "Having a good conscience," which means you can stand up with a clear conscience and give an answer. "Whereas they speak evil of you as evildoers, they may be ashamed to falsely accuse your good manner of life in Christ."

What is he saying? Two things. One, have a blameless life; two, have a clear testimony and let happen what happens. If you can't support your clear testimony with a blameless life, you're going to get shot down.

Jesus put it this way in Matthew 5. He said, "Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely. Blessed are you." What do you mean 'blessed'? That I made enemies? Jesus made enemies.

Let me close with this. Last week I spoke about the Jews' plot to kill Paul. There was a Jewish person here in the church, listening. I got a letter from this person this week, and the letter said that this person, in effect, was very upset. In fact, the letter just bounced around on the desk before I opened it, it was just short of ticking. I opened the letter and my heart was grieved, I mean grieved. This person was so upset that they were just near standing up and screaming at me in anger and accused me of anti-Semitism. Now this is not something new to me, this is something I hear frequently. I heard it when teaching about Jesus Christ and the crucifixion of Christ in regard to the part the Jews played

in it. Also, teaching in Acts when we talked about the fact that the Jews were given the guilt for the death of Christ.

It came again this week; this letter went on for page after page. What grieved me was the fact that this person does not understand that it is my obligation to teach the Word of God with clear conscience, and it does not reflect a lack of love for the people of Israel. If I can clearly state that, let me state it at this point.

When I pick up the pages of this 2,000-year-old book and tell you what happened 2,000 years ago with these individuals on that day in Caesarea, that nowhere reflects on any living person today. You are what you are before God; this isn't you. And I don't know, for the life of me, why Jewish people would feel they needed to defend something that some evil people did 2,000 years ago any more than I need to run around and get all excited when someone condemns a Gentile who lived 2,000 years ago. Listen, there have been a whole lot of scruffy, crummy, corrupt Gentiles. I don't go around trying to defend them all.

You have to accept that this is the revelation of God. This is what those people did in rejection of their own Messiah, in violation of their own law and the Word of God given to them, this is what the Bible says. I stand here with a clear conscience, as Paul did, and I proclaim it. I couldn't help but read that letter and think, "I'm in the same shambles that Paul was in. I'm getting the same thing that he got." What was it that the Jews accused him of? Being anti-Semitic. Against the law, against the people, profaning the temple. He said, "Wait a minute! I am not. I'm just telling you the facts of what happened." Paul turns around with tears running down his face and says, "My heart's desire and prayer is for Israel, that they might be saved."

He says in Romans 9, "I could wish myself accursed for my kinsmen." You know, if you want to see what Paul's attitude was toward the Jews, you read the whole book of Acts. You'll see him go in and give his body to stoning, and give his back to rod and beatings, and jail for the sake of reaching his people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I do not accept the criticism that I'm anti-Semitic; I don't accept that. I stand before you with a clear conscience, saying that I love the children of Israel.

I mean, I told someone not too many weeks ago, when they asked me about that. I said, "The people I love most in the world are Jews, all of them. I spend more time with Jewish people than I do with any other people." They said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I spend almost all my time with Jesus, Paul, Peter, John, David, Abraham, Moses..." That's true, and I love every one of them. There is no one in the world that I love more than Paul, I love him. My heart is for Israel.

I can't go to the land of Israel, like I did this summer, without having my heart in my throat, because I see God's people and I see what God is beginning to do in the restoration of Israel. I have great hope for Israel, great love for Israel, great concern for Jewish evangelism, but I still must preach the Word

of God the way it's written. I don't think people should become completely oriented to defending those evil people back there; that's history. The letter said, "Well, you Christians learned to hate the Jews. You make the people hate the Jews so much, they'll hate all the Jews today." That's foolish, foolish. We don't hate the Jews for what they did. Our hearts grieve.

Do you know what God said through Jeremiah? He said, "You had better repent, and if you don't, you'll die." In the very next verse, in Jeremiah 13, God says, "And if you do, My eye will weep tears, bitterly I'll cry." See? God's attitude is, "You have to repent because you've sinned. But if you don't repent, you'll die. And if you die, I'll cry." That's love, and it's there.

The Apostle Paul loved those people. I'm sure, in his heart, he had compassion for Ananias and the elders, just as we would for Jewish people. Just like anyone else. There's no need to even separate them. You don't love the Jews as a little glob in the corner as some strange commodity, these are just people that God loves. Yet, in God's wonderful plan, they have a unique place.

Well, we didn't get very far, but we got through the prosecution. Come back next week and hear the defense. Let's pray.

Thank You, Father, that this morning You gave us the privilege of looking into Your Word. Thank You for what it is, that the Spirit instructs us as we open our hearts and minds to the truth.

God, give us a love for Israel. Cause us to remember that we're not to be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, to the Jew first, then the Greek. Help us to remember that our Lord Christ came through Israel; salvation came through the Jews. There is so much to be thankful for. Help us to be grateful.

At the same time, Father, help us, with a clear conscience, to speak boldly, and to realize that there will be reaction. Father, I pray for this woman who wrote the letter, whoever she is, that the initial reaction of anger would turn to conviction. That she would truly see her Messiah, fall at His feet, that the Holy Spirit would convict her heart and bring salvation.

Thank You for our fellowship this morning, we praise You for it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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