

Trial Before Felix

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Date: 22 November 2009

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[0 : 0 0] Lord God bless us now as we hear your word and see your apostle on trial declaring his faith and may we have courage to do the same in our day. Amen.

Friends we continue through the book of Acts and I'm going to open today with a little bit of a show and tell and give you two tips on how to best read this part of the book of Acts, these adventures and these trial journeys.

My first tip for you in reading this part of the book of Acts, in fact all of Acts, is you have to read Acts remembering that the Jesus who died for you on the cross is now risen at God's right hand and is actively reigning, ruling, spreading his kingdom.

You just can't, you'll just miss a lot in Acts if you don't think about Jesus as a king who's in control and is energetically working in the world to spread the message of his gospel.

Just think about the way that Acts is shaped. I mean the book of Acts starts with Jesus saying when I go up you will get power and then he goes up and he sends the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The message of Pentecost, Jesus is the reigning king, Lord and Christ at God's right hand.

[1 : 1 4] Then you get to people like Stephen and the first martyr and why is he martyred? He's martyred because of his faith that he says I see Jesus standing at the right hand of God and they say well let's kill him for that, it's blasphemy.

But the point is clearly that Jesus makes an appearance to show that he is reigning, ruling even when his people are suffering, especially suffering injustice. As you go on in the book of Acts, Jesus appears to Paul.

Again, it's a cameo appearance of his reign which continues even when you can't see him. He is reigning, he is energetically working. So we are to read Acts remembering that that risen Lord is present today, that he's present in your life, in our world, energetically reigning.

So it's not just that we have a kind of a Christian confidence resting in his death on the cross, but the one who died on the cross is now energetically reigning at God's right hand, present in our lives, in power.

That's the first way you need to read Acts is with that in mind. The second tip I would give us for reading the book of Acts is that we need to sort of have our feet on the ground with respect to persecuted Christians.

[2 : 3 3] Because otherwise Acts becomes a little bit of a historical fiction. It's an unknown experience to us to read about Christians on trial, Christians being tortured, assassination attempts on Christians.

That's a very Acts thing, but that's not really our world. But it is our world if we are aware of what is happening to our brothers and sisters in Christ, in China, in the Middle East, in places around the world.

And one show and tell, I'll give a plug. I mean, there's lots of resources to find out about the persecuted church. One that I really like and I use in prayer is the Barnabas Fund.

They're a British organisation that reports on the persecuted church. This is their magazine called Barnabas Aid. You can get this for free just by going to their website.

They'll send it to you for free. They'll send you monthly prayer points. They're not very long. They're very good at giving you well-researched and fact-checked information about the persecuted church.

[3 : 37] Sometimes I get a bit frustrated because I worry that Christians overzealously forward on emails and you're never quite sure if it's true or still current what you're being told about the persecuted church.

So, I think it's important to find sources about our brothers and sisters in Christ on trial like Paul that are well-researched and fact-checked. And the Barnabas Fund are very good at that.

They're very open and very transparent. See, I think if we are in touch with our persecuted brothers and sisters, then the book of Acts has more power for us.

It has more punch. It has more gritty reality. This world of courtroom trials and corruptions aimed at destroying Christian faith, that is happening today.

And I think by reading Acts and by being in touch with stuff like this, we will be better prepared to be Christians in the 21st century. And we don't know what will it be like to be a Christian in Australia in the next 50 years.

[4 : 38] And it may be more like the world of Acts than we want, but it may be coming or it may be coming on our children. And so, we ought to be well-grounded in what's happening.

Well, let's jump into it, into the courtroom scene. Last week we were in Jerusalem. Paul declared that he was on trial for his belief in the resurrection, which led him to minister to Gentiles, which caused some Jews to hate him.

There was a riot and the Roman Tribune sent him up to Caesarea to the Roman governor Felix. And so, we're before Felix today. And Paul's enemies follow him.

We remember last week Paul got through an assassination attempt. Well, there's going to be another one today. And we now have a court scene. And it seems that the Jewish enemies of Paul have hired a big gun attorney.

That's what our verse 1 says. They have a certain tertullus, an attorney. Now, the word here for attorney is rhetor or a rhetorist.

[5 : 46] That is, they've hired a really good public speaker because they know that Paul is a preacher and a herald. And really, this gospel issue is a war of words.

And so, they're getting a bit smarter and they've hired someone who's a professional at words. So, maybe not so much a lawyer, though he is that, but also kind of a very good PR person. And you'll see that in his speech.

So, he addresses Felix. Now, the Roman custom in a courtroom, it's a little bit like this today, is that you would begin with a respectful address to the judge or to the authority in the room.

But hear how tertullous, this professional, hear how much he, I don't know the right phrase, he sucks up to the judge. Your Excellency, verse 2, Because of you we have long enjoyed peace and reforms have been made for this people because of your foresight.

And that's an out and out lie, actually. It's well known that it was a very disruptive, unpeaceful time under Felix in the area of Jerusalem and Judea.

[6 : 58] Anyway, it keeps going, it keeps on kind of get close to him. We welcome this in every way and everywhere with utmost gratitude. But to detain you no further, I beg you to hear us briefly with your customary graciousness.

So, that's really a bit too gushy, I think. Paul will do a similar thing but with slightly more control. We have, in fact, and here's the attack on Paul.

And it's very interesting that when people want to attack Christ, they attack Christ's followers. And this is personal. They don't attack Paul's message.

They go for the man and they attack the man. And it's expected that, you know, everyone in this courtroom has heard of Jesus of Nazareth.

They've heard about this guy who died under Pontius Pilate and they've heard that his followers claim he's been raised. So, when they say sector of the Nazarenes, everyone knows they're talking about Jesus because he's not mentioned in this whole courtroom trial.

[8 : 09] Paul even tried, verse 6, here's a little bit of a real crime, to profane the temple and so we seized him. By examining him yourself, you'll be able to learn from him concerning everything of which we accuse him.

And verse 9, the Jews also joined in the charge by asserting that all this was true. So, it may even have been that Tertullus wasn't a Jew. He was a Gentile Greek that they've hired to attack Paul for ministering to Gentiles.

That's sort of ironic but that's the attack. Basically, they're saying to Felix the governor, this guy is seditious. And by indication, Christians are seditious.

They are not loyal to the government. They are not loyal citizens of Rome. They are agitators. They are pestilent. Paul is a ringleader of a sect. He's a menace to the order of society.

So, Felix, if you are a good governor, if you want to keep in good standing with Rome and want to keep the peace here in the Middle East, you will have this man kept in jail.

[9 : 16] Well, friends, is that true? Is Paul disloyal to the state? Are Christians seditious? Well, clearly the book of Acts has said, no, we're not. We are loyal citizens of whatever country we are in.

Paul now is going to defend himself. And he's going to defend himself as both a loyal citizen of Rome and as a loyal son of Israel. And as also a follower of Christ.

Paul in this trial noticed that he's not just defensive. He's not just concerned with getting the case won. What he wants to do is testify to the risen Jesus Christ.

He wants to give a statement of faith to the court that if he is right, it's a smashing reality for both Rome and Israel, for Rome and Jerusalem, because they are the two main powers of the day.

So, here's Paul's speech. Polite opening, verse 10. I cheerfully make my defence, knowing that for many years, Felix, you have been a judge over this nation.

[10 : 26] As you can find out, it is not more than 12 days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem. Now, Paul seems to have more facts in his speech. He has details because the facts bear out the truth that he is innocent.

They did not find me in Jerusalem disputing with anyone in the temple or stirring up a crowd, either in the synagogues or throughout the city. Neither can they prove to you the charge they now bring against me.

And so, Paul here is just happily submitting himself to the processes of justice. To the civil authorities, because he's got a good case. There's no evidence.

He'll say later in the speech that the eyewitnesses who accused him of profaning the temple aren't even in the room. They haven't even travelled, so they don't even have any eyewitnesses.

Paul the Apostle lives out the teaching from Romans 13, where Paul says, That is to say, The Christian respects the authority of the judge in the state because God has given them that authority.

[11 : 44] And so, we are loyal, good citizens. And Paul is using the means and mechanisms of the court to clear his case. But he also has another agenda.

And here he kind of tricks the court a bit here. He says, verse 13, Neither can they prove to you the charge they now bring against me, but this I admit to you.

That is, this I confess to you. I've got a confession to make. Everyone, listen closely. I'm about to make a confession. And everyone's like, You know what he's going to say, don't you?

This I admit to you, that according to the way which they call a sect, I worship the God of our ancestors, believing everything laid down according to the law or written in the prophets.

I have a hope in God. I hope that they themselves accept that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous. I hope that they should know from Daniel 12 that God's King, God's Messiah, will raise everyone on the day of judgment.

[12 : 55] That's a very clear biblical teaching that Paul knows the Pharisees at least believe, but his opponents should believe. See, Paul has shifted gears now. He's using now the court to preach the gospel.

He's using the court to preach his message of serving the resurrected King who's going to raise everyone on the final judgment and judge them.

So Paul has shifted now past mere justice and he's moving into proclamation. So I have this hope in God. Verse 15 and 16 are really, really key.

This hope in God that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous. Therefore, I do my best always to have a clear conscience toward God and all people.

Now what does he mean by saying, I do my best because of a general resurrection to have a clear conscience before all people? I think what he means is, if he knows, if his King Jesus has been raised from the dead and will raise everyone, to keep his conscience clear, he wants everyone to hear about the gospel and get an opportunity to meet Jesus as saviour before they meet him as judge at the final resurrection.

[14 : 14] That way his conscience will be clear because you could imagine what it would be like and this could be us, that Jesus will raise everyone on the last day. He said he would and it's there in Daniel 12 for judgment.

And imagine being there at the judgment. I don't know whether there will be cues or whether we'll see other people, but imagine seeing someone and you see your saviour, they're seeing him as judge.

I'd be thinking, if I were them, I'd be thinking, why didn't you tell me this was going to happen? Yeah? And I don't want that on my conscience, you see. Paul doesn't want that on his conscience.

So he says, you know, I'm on trial for preaching the gospel to Gentiles and giving them the promises of God. Why do I do that? Because God is going to raise everyone. And he's proven that actually by raising Jesus from the dead.

They're going to meet King Jesus as judge. I'm going to do my best or strive or discipline myself so that everyone will have a chance to meet him ahead of time, to meet him ahead of time.

[15 : 20] Because if you can meet Jesus ahead of time, you can know him as saviour before you meet him as judge. I mean, this has a lot of implications, I think, just thinking about the fact that everyone is going to meet Jesus on judgment day.

I mean, just think about, this is tangential a little bit, the people that you are sitting with now in church, we worship Jesus together now. We're going to stand and worship him together on the final day.

That's profound, I think. That's a bond that glues us together stronger than anything else, I think, that we will stand together, that the people that we don't like at church, the people that we may have been rude to or may have been rude to us, there's good cause to overlook that or to try and reconcile that because on the final day, you're going to stand together before the judge.

So it's better to work that out now than to have Jesus have to sort it out then, do you see? Jesus will raise everyone from the dead, the righteous and the unrighteous.

That's why Paul says, I'm on trial. And so it's very encouraging to think that the person that you would like to become a Christian, that you're trying to share the gospel with in your own way, and I know this is very hard to tell people about your faith, it's good to think, well, they are going to meet Jesus one day.

[16 : 44] And so it's better for me to tell them something now than for the whole thing to be a surprise, right? And that's a great motivation that looking at someone and thinking, Jesus, they're going to meet you.

Why don't I try and introduce you now and I can know you as Saviour now? And that's what drives Paul's ministry. I have this hope in God that there'll be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.

Therefore, I do my best, I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and all people by preaching the gospel, by preaching the gospel. Everyone Paul meets, and you see this, don't you, in Acts, everyone he meets, even in a courtroom, gets a chance to meet Jesus because he knows everyone is going to meet Jesus eventually at the final resurrection.

So this is Paul's confession and he goes on to say that, you know, your eyewitnesses aren't here, I haven't done anything wrong, I'm just a worshipper of God, I'm basically on trial here for what I was on trial for there, that is the resurrection, verse 21.

He kind of gloats a little bit, he says, they were too embarrassed to tell you, Felix, that really the issue here is, I told them, it's about the resurrection of the dead, that I'm on trial before you today.

[18 : 01] Now Felix is a bureaucrat and a politician, he doesn't want to resolve this, he's got nothing to get out of it, so he basically says, oh well, why don't we just sort this out when the Roman trivium Lysias can come up and give us facts as an independent witness.

But we already know from last week that Lysias has washed his hands of this matter, he's not going to come up and he doesn't. And so Paul is basically left on trial or under house arrest for two years.

Luke tells us that Felix, in verse 22, was rather well informed about the way, that he knows what Paul's doing and he's not really interested in hearing about Jesus being the way, the truth and life and the king and the resurrected king, although he does want to bribe, Luke tells us.

And his wife is interested, Drusilla. And so some days later, Felix came with his wife, Drusilla, verse 24, who was Jewish and he sent for Paul and heard him speak concerning faith in Christ Jesus.

See, everywhere Paul goes, he wants them to meet Jesus ahead of the day and he discussed justice or righteousness, is probably more accurate, self-control and the coming judgment, the coming judgment day.

[19 : 18] Meet Jesus now before you meet him in judgment. Felix became frightened, as some people do when they kind of half get it. Go away for the present. When I have an opportunity, I will send for you.

And of course, Luke tells us he hoped that money would be given to him by Paul and for that very reason he used to send for him very often and converse with him. It's kind of ironic, you know, he keeps sending for Paul.

Paul thinks, I'll just share the gospel again and he just wants an envelope with cash in it, you know, or some gold coins or something. And two years pass, this doesn't get resolved.

Felix is called back from the emperor to go back to Rome and take another position there and a new governor of Judea, Festus, is installed.

Now, we won't go through this in detail, but during these two years is probably where Paul wrote many of the epistles that make our New Testament. So, Philippians and other prison letters were probably written in these two years and we know from the history records that Festus succeeded Felix at about 58 or 59 AD.

[20 : 28] So, we know in five years there'll be the fire of Rome which is blamed on Christians. We know in about seven or eight years there'll be a war against the Jews and the Romans and we know in 12 years the Romans will destroy Jerusalem and pretty much end that era of Judaism, of temple and sacrifices and such things.

A very pivotal thing is going to happen now. Festus wants to resolve this prisoner that he's got called Paul. He calls a court together and there's another plot to get Paul back to Jerusalem to kill him.

This is in chapter 25. It's an ambush in verse 3. They requested for Festus to give the Jews a favour and to have him transferred to Jerusalem.

They were in fact planning an ambush to kill him along the way and so Festus doesn't know this but he calls a court. Again, the same thing's happened. He hears the charges against Paul and the Jews say, can we try this back in Jerusalem?

This is a Jewish thing. Can we do this back in the capital? And so Festus says to Paul in verse 9 and this is a critical turning point in the book of Acts, do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and be tried there before me on these charges?

[21 : 57] He's trying to do Paul a favour saying, why don't we just do this in your hometown where you can have more witnesses and we can resolve actually what happened. Did you profane the temple? This would be good for you, wouldn't it, Paul? And Paul says, I am appealing to the emperor's tribunal.

This is where I should be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews as you very well know. And if I'm in the wrong and I've committed something for which I deserve to die, I'm not trying to escape death. But if there is nothing in the charges against me, no one can turn me over to them, I appeal to the emperor.

I appeal to Caesar. And that is a huge turning point in the book of Acts. From this point on, Paul has to be delivered to Rome because a Roman citizen has a right of appeal to the ultimate authority of the state which is to Caesar.

And that foils the Jewish plot because now they can't ambush him, they can't get him on the way back to Jerusalem and he's escaped yet again.

Is that good? Well friends, it's not good. Who is Caesar? Who's Caesar in 58 AD? Every Roman emperor takes the title Caesar but they're different dudes each time.

[23 : 17] Caesar in 58 AD is Nero. Nero is a psychopath. Nero is violent, cruel, vindictive, capricious.

Everyone knows this. by saying, I appeal to Nero. He's basically saying, if I'm going to die, I will die in Rome. I will not die in Jerusalem.

I will die in Rome. That's what Paul is saying. He's actually doing, it's a suicidal act to appeal to Nero. Nero is the kind of person who would kill his own mother if it helped him politically which is what he did that year actually.

In 50 out of 59 AD, Nero had his own mother killed. He tried to poison her three times but she'd taken antidote. He had a boat specially built that would sink but she knew how to swim.

Eventually he framed her and killed her and had it framed as a suicide. He was that evil. He kills people in his own family. He's going to have, and he hates Christians.

[24 : 16] Everyone knows Nero hates Christians. So this is a suicidal thing for Paul to do. This is not a victory. This is not a good legal manoeuvre to get out of an ambush in Jerusalem.

This is something that only Paul would do. Why would he do it? To testify to his risen saviour. He's not doing it for justice.

He's doing it to glorify Christ. And Jesus has already told him, you've testified to me in Jerusalem, you must testify in Rome. He knows it's going to cause his death and that's what's going to happen.

The book of Acts ends with a dot, dot, dot and you just join the dots. Paul is killed under Nero. That's how it ends. But he's doing it to testify to the resurrected saviour.

Because again, that's how he can keep his conscience clear. It doesn't matter if people kill you. If your saviour is going to raise you and there's going to be a judgement day where he's going to judge everyone and set everything straight, you can overlook injustice in this world against Christians so that you can testify to Christ so that many will be saved.

[25 : 28] Luke is often showing us that Paul is innocent. And he's often showing us that Paul uses civil processes where they can help him.

But there comes a time where even then he doesn't just fight for his innocence. He doesn't just fight for justice. He fights for his saviour. He fights to declare Christ.

There are things more important than just justice in this life. Some things are more important than individual rights. Some things are more important than clearing your name.

Honouring Christ is more important than all those things. Testifying to the resurrection of Jesus as the world's true judge is more important than all those things.

And many of you, I think, have suffered some injustices for being a Christian. You've had your reputation tarnished because of your Christian faith. I think the book of Acts would say, well, if you can, clear your name and use the authorities that be.

[26 : 28] But it's not our ultimate goal. Our ultimate goal is to honour Christ. And I think Paul has in mind Jesus' teaching in Luke 21. Because remember, at least Luke is putting this together because Luke and Acts are like part one, part two.

And in Luke 21, there's a whole chapter where Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem. And he says, before that happens, and so we're here 12 years before that happens, Jesus says this.

Luke 21, verse 12. Before all this occurs, they will arrest you. And Paul could go, tick, they will persecute you. Tick, they will hand you over to synagogues.

Tick, and prisons. Tick, that you'll be brought before kings. That's next week. A king, Agrippa. And governors. That's this week. Felix, Festus, governors. Because of my name, says Jesus.

Because of my name, Jesus Christ is Lord. Why will this happen? Jesus says, verse 13, in Luke 21, this will give you an opportunity to testify.

[27 : 34] It doesn't say this will give you an opportunity to achieve justice. It doesn't say this will give you an opportunity to clear your name. This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defence in advance.

For I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends. Lots of bad, unjust things will happen to Christians because of Christ.

Because you carry the name of your crucified Saviour. You will be hated. They'll put some of you to death. You'll be hated by all because of my name.

But not a hair of your head will perish. I'm not sure how that works because it says some of them will put you to death. Not a hair of your head will perish. Think about that. And finally, by your endurance you will gain your souls.

So ultimately saying you'll get a resurrection body and you'll get a full head of hair. I guess that's the point. You know, and you'll gain your soul. You'll gain eternal life for suffering injustice for Christ in this world.

[28 : 41] If you can clear your name I think it's a good thing to do but it's not the ultimate thing. The ultimate thing for us as Christians is to prepare people to meet Jesus now before they meet him at the final resurrection.

Jesus says that will be your opportunity to testify to introduce people to me so they can know me as saviour before they meet me as judge. Remember Jesus' words last week?

Keep up your courage, Paul. Just as you testified to me here in Jerusalem you must do it in Rome. You must do it. This will give you an opportunity to testify.

Friends, I know that we're not all big evangelists. I'm not trying to make you feel guilty for not standing on a street corner and opening your Bible and you know what I mean?

That's not most of us. But it does make a difference that the people you see are going to meet Jesus one day and you know Jesus now and you can point people to him now as saviour and through you they can meet him or at least be invited to meet him or at least be encouraged to think about and search it out and open a Bible and find him and meet him and know him as saviour and Lord before he raises them on the day of judgment because friends, on that day the Bible is very clear it's too late.

[30 : 10] It's too late to repent on judgment day, isn't it? Jesus makes that inevitably clear that man is destined to die once after that final judgment. This life is the opportunity and so Paul because of the general resurrection keeps his conscience clear before God and before all people.

That's why Paul does what he does. Everyone Paul meets gets a chance to meet Jesus because he knows everyone will meet Jesus at the final resurrection.

So friends, who will meet Jesus through you? Speak about him and just let the chips fall where they may. Let the injustices fall where they may.

If under Jesus the government protects us and gives us freedom to preach the gospel, we will embrace that. That is good. Paul uses that sometimes. But if under Jesus the government turns on us the way it does in some countries, we will not fear them because our saviour is Lord above them.

Their authority comes from him. There is no injustice that Jesus' justice will not straighten out. Every threat to us we can relish because of the promise of Jesus.

[31 : 33] By your endurance you will be saved. May everyone that we meet get a chance to meet Jesus because we know that one day they'll be raised to meet him as their judge as we will too.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for proving the fact of the coming judgment and resurrection of all by raising your son from the dead.

We thank you that because of his death anyone, everyone can be forgiven through him today. We pray, Father, that in whatever opportunity you give each of us we might take the chance to introduce people to Jesus now before they meet him on that day of judgment.

And Father, forgive us for the times we haven't done this and we pray that we'll be able to keep our conscience clear and be bold and have courage as you ask Paul to have courage.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.