

THE SERMON THAT TERRIFIED A ROMAN GOVERNOR

Ac.24:24-27

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I. INTRODUCTION – Background information leading up to our text.

1. Paul had come to Jerusalem after his third and final preaching journey through out the country, Ac.21:17.
2. As had been prophesied Paul was taken into protective custody because of enemy opposition; i.e., the opposition of unbelieving Jews, Ac.21:8-15; 22:22-23:22.
3. When Claudius Lysias learned that more than forty men of the enemy Jews were bound together “under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul,” (Ac.23:12-22), he, under heavy guard (200 soldiers; 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen), and under cover of darkness (the 3rd hour of the night) sent Paul to Caesarea to Felix, the Roman governor, along with a letter explaining the circumstances concerning the charges against Paul (Ac.23:23-33).
4. Upon Paul being presented before the governor and having received and read the chief captain’s letter, he promised to hear his case when his accusers were also come before him. Then he commanded Paul to be kept in Herod’s judgment hall pending the hearing, Ac.23:33-35.
5. In Ac.24, after five days, Paul’s accusers, composed of Ananias, the high priest with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, presented their case against Paul before Felix, the governor, Vv.1-9.
6. Then the governor allowed Paul to present his own case, which he did by answering and refuting each one of their false charges, Vv.10-21.
7. Felix, having heard both sides, and now “having more perfect knowledge of that way,” did three things, V.23:
 - a. 1st, He deferred the case.
 - b. 2nd, He stated his reason: He said, “When Lysias the chief captain shall come down (i.e., from Jerusalem to Caesarea), I will know the uttermost of your matter.”
 - c. 3rd, He commanded a centurion to keep Paul, who was to have some liberty while waiting for the hearing, but none of his acquaintances were to be allowed to minister or come unto him.”
8. This brings us to our text and the record of the event which took place while Paul’s case was pending.
9. Our text is a very interesting and informative one, which we shall now develop.

II. DISCUSSION

A. V.24 FURNISHES US WITH THE OCCASION FOR THE STUDY AND INTRODUCES THE PEOPLE INVOLVED.

1. “After certain days,” i.e., some days after Felix had made his decision to defer Paul’s case.
2. Felix’s wife, Drusilla, was a Jewess.
3. Felix came with his wife and sent for Paul.
4. They “heard him concerning the faith in Christ.”
5. This hearing of Paul was a private one separate and apart from the case pending brought against Paul by the Jewish officials.

B. NEXT WE OFFER FURTHER IDENTIFICATION OF THE PREACHER AND HIS AUDIENCE, WHICH SETS UP THE REASON FOR THE TYPE OF SERMON THAT WAS PREACHED.

1. The preacher.
 - a. Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, and a fearless preacher of the gospel of Christ, summoned by Felix, when he appeared before this powerful, but evil, adulterous couple, evinced no timidity in preaching what they needed to hear.
 - b. Having the Lord on his right hand so that he would not be moved (Psa.16:8), he presented as valiant (brave, bold, courageous) a front as David did to his enemies, or as Daniel did before Nebuchnezzar (Dan.4:19-27), and Belshazzar (Dan.5:22-28).
 - c. The man who had fought with wild beast at Ephesus (1Cor.15:32), who had confronted the mob from the castle stairs in Jerusalem (Ac.22:1), who had faced and refuted the Sanhedrin in their Star-chamber(Ac.23:1), and who had already appeared before the representatives of Roman law and majesty (Ac.23:aff), was not likely to quake or tremble before a Roman governor again or at the sight of his very beautiful adulterous wife, and fail to expose the sinfulness of the marriage relationship of her and her husband.
 - d. Every preacher of the gospel today should be as Paul was then – a preacher:
 - (1) Ready for every call to preach that presents itself.
 - (a) Paul was summoned, V.24.
 - (b) Paul readily responded to the invitation; he heartily embraced the opportunity to preach the faith of Christ; to reason about the faith in Christ.

- (2) Bold, courageous, and uncompromising in facing every audience before whom he stands or which he addresses.
 - (3) Faithful to the truth of the gospel in every sermon he delivers, ever recognizing that his primary work as a gospel preacher is neither to teach science or philosophy, nor focus merely on current events, nor to disseminate the elements of ordinary knowledge on secular subjects; but to preach the gospel of Christ and that alone.
 - (4) Who is direct and plain in the manner of his teaching.
 - (a) A good gospel sermon, besides having a Bible text and a Bible subject matter, should be appropriate and applicable to the needs of the audience, delivered in a plain, heart-searching, truth-revealing, sin-condemning, and conscience-touching sense.
2. Felix, was one member of his audience, and a man who was:
- a. A powerful, but unjust ruler, a Roman governor of Palestine.
 - b. Said to be a licentious (unrestrained morally or legally; lascivious; dissolute [loose in morals or conduct]); one given to sensual enjoyments or luxury or pleasure.
 - c. Was of such character that its hideous cruelty and rapacity (the quality of being rapacious or greedy, covetous, subsisting or prey) caused Josephus, the Jewish historian, to pronounce him the worst ruler that ever swayed the destinies of Judea.
 - d. An inveterate (habitual, obstinate) procrastinator.
 - e. A crafty promoter of his own selfish interests.
 - f. An unprincipled trampler on the rights of others.
 - g. An avaricious (greedy of gain; grasping) money-hunter. Note the love of money as exemplified in Felix, V.26.
 - (1) It was rooted, presumably, in his corrupt and unprincipled heart.
 - (2) It was fostered by his wicked life. For his personal extravagance and licentious indulgence he needed money, and this need kept the demon of avarice awake in his life.
 - (3) It was obstructive of higher impulses in his heart.
 - (a) It stifled his conscience, hardened his heart, and destroyed his soul.
 - (b) It prevented the entrance of the saving power of the gospel into his heart and life even though it moved him to fear and trembling when he heard it.
 - (4) It was productive of other sins committed by him.

- (a) It led to his procrastination and/or trifling with his own highest and best interests.
 - (b) It led to his infliction of injustice upon Paul, by his continued imprisonment.
 - (c) It led to his practice of hypocrisy, in pretending to commune often with Paul about the faith in Christ, when secretly “he hoped that money would be given him by Paul.” Cf. 1Tim.4:10.
- h. Who was terrified by what he heard Paul preach, thus indicating that his conscience was not yet seared to the point of being past feeling.
- 3. Drusilla, was the second member of this audience, the wife of Felix, and was a woman:
 - a. Of high exalted birth – the daughter of one king and the sister of another.
 - b. Of ripe personal beauty.
 - c. Of deeply depraved character.
 - d. Who had deserted her lawful husband, Azizus, king of Emesia, to become the third wife of Felix, who had formerly been a slave, but was then the governor of Palestine.
 - e. Who was living in an adulterous marriage relationship with Felix.
 - f. Of an obviously seared conscience; for the record doesn’t even hint that she was affected one way or the other by what she heard Paul preach.

C. CONSIDER AND COMPARE PAUL, FELIX, AND DRUSILLA FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THREE PHASES OF CONSCIENCE IN EVIDENCE.

1. Paul exemplifies the courage of a **good conscience**.
 - a. Being faithful to his calling, and preaching what was needed to his audience, he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, before the unsaved and adulterous pair, V.24.
 - b. Cf. John the Baptist before Herod, Mt.14:3,4.
2. The alarm of a **guilty conscience** is illustrated in Felix, the governor, who trembled (was terrified) as a result of Paul’s preaching, V.25.
3. The insensibility of a **hardened conscience** is exhibited in Drusilla, who heard the same powerful preaching, but was (as far as the record reveals)

unmoved by the heart-searching, soul-saving, sin-condemning message of Paul. Cf. Eph.4:18,19.

D. NOW TO THE SERMON PREACHED WHICH WAS SPECIFICALLY DIRECTED TOWARD AND APPLIED TO THE NEEDS OF THE AUDIENCE ASSEMBLED.

1. Paul's basic, fundamental, primary message preached to them concerned "the faith in Christ" or was "about the faith in Christ," or "the gospel of Christ," V.24.
 - a. Cf. Ac.20:17-21; Rom.3:21-24; Gal.2:16.
 - b. See 1Cor.2:1,2; 15:1,2; Gal.1:23; Eph.3:1-6; Mk.16:15,16.
2. But V.25 reveals three specific, obviously important, matters pertaining to the spiritual needs of his audience, which are included in and a part of preaching the gospel of Christ: "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come."
3. "He reasoned of **righteousness**," which is a word that refers to and covers two different topics in the N.T. and/or to phases of gospel preaching in the N.T., one flowing naturally out of the other.

("reasoned"—primarily signifies to think different things with oneself, to ponder; then with others, to converse, argue, dispute)

 - a. At times it speaks of "the righteousness of God," not of God's personal righteousness, but of God's means of making sinners righteous, or God's way of saving men from past sins, through faith in and obedience to the gospel. See Rom.1:16,17; 3:19-22; 10:1-3; Phil.3:8,9; Mk.16:15,16; 2Th.1:6-10; Cf. Ac.10:33-35; 11:13,14.
 - b. Flowing out of this comes a second idea having to do with:
 - (1) What is right, or whatever conforms to the revealed will of God, Mt.5:6,10,20; Jno.16:8,10.
 - (2) Whatever has been appointed by God to be acknowledged and obeyed by man, Mt.3:15; 21:32.
 - (3) The sum total of the requirements of God, Mt.6:33.
 - (4) The opposite of ungodliness – living "soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world," Tit.2:11-14.
 - c. Once men are right with God through obedience to the gospel, they are much more likely to have and to maintain right relationships with their fellowmen as well as with god.

- (1) Such relationships both Felix and Drusilla had and were continuing to violate with both God and man.
 - (2) Thus the reason for the subject matter Paul preached to them.
 - d. No doubt Paul taught them the gospel of Christ, the righteousness of God, or God's means of making sinners righteous, or saving them from past sins, through their faith in it and obedience to it.
 - e. But he also taught them the absolute necessity of standing born of God after obeying the gospel, of the need of practicing righteousness as saved persons, of living righteously, of avoiding sinful practices; the life to be lived after obeying the gospel!
 - f. Thus he "reasoned of righteousness" in its two aspects to this sinful couple!
4. He also reasoned of "**temperance**" as a part of "the faith in Christ" or "about the faith of Christ," V.25.
- a. Temperance is from ENKRATEIA, from KRATOS, meaning (moral) strength, controlled power. Also found in Gal.5:23; 2Pet.1:6
 - b. In Ac.24:25, "temperance" follows "righteousness," which represents God's claims upon man, temperance or self-control being man's response thereto; in 2Pet.1:6, it follows "knowledge," suggesting that what is learned is required to be put into practice; in Gal.5:23 it is identified as one of the fruits of the Spirit against which there is no law.
 - c. Being temperate is keeping one's life in control. Cf. 1Cor.9:25-27.
 - d. A lack of temperance or self-control is indicated by the:
 - (1) Noun, "incontinency", from AKRASIA, which denotes want of power (a, negative, kratas, power); hence, want of self-control, 1Cor.7:5; in Mt.23:25, translated "excess" in the KJV.
 - (2) Adjective, "incontinent," from AKRATES which denotes powerless, impotent; in a moral sense, unrestrained, without self-control, 2Tim.3:3.
5. He also reasoned of "**The judgment to come**" -- i.e., the final judgment that is facing all men at the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ.
- a. What he preached on this is no doubt indicated by the following passages, Ac.17:31; Rom.2:4-16; 2Cor.5:10; 2Th.1:6-10; 2Tim.4:1; Heb.9:27,28; 2Pet.2:9.
 - b. Some will face it prepared.
 - c. Some will face it unprepared.

- d. But all have the opportunity to be prepared to face it.

III. CONCLUSION

1. As Paul reasoned on these three things about the faith in Christ, Felix was moved to fear; in fact, he was terrified by what he heard.
2. Though terrified, he did not repent and obey the gospel. Rather, he sent Paul away with the weak promise of feeble, insincere, excuse: “God thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will send for thee,” V.25a.
 - a. V.26 indicated that he was not sincere in his excuse of waiting for “a convenient season.”
 - b. V.26 says: “He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: Wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.”
 - c. Moreover, V.27 further indicates his insincerity in sending for and communing with Paul, “But after two years Porcius Festus came in Felix’s room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews (the very ones who had falsely accused Paul) a pleasure, left Paul bound.”
3. Consider this about convenient seasons.
 - a. They are always present to those who love the truth, are in earnest about their soul, and truly believe the gospel of Christ. To such as are:
 - (1) Convinced of their own guilt due to sin.
 - (2) Alive to the necessity and importance of salvation.
 - (3) Aware of the uncertainty and shortness of this life.
 - b. They never come to those who are indifferent about the importance of truth and the difference between truth and error. To those who are:
 - (1) In love with sin and its pleasure instead of truth and righteousness, Tit.3:3; 2Tim.3:1-6; 2Th.2:10-12.
 - (2) Blinded by the god of this world, 2Cor.4:4.
 - (3) Unconscious of their perilous condition.
4. So we are reminded once again that the gospel even when preached by an inspired apostle doesn’t always succeed in converting those who hear it.
5. But we, like Paul, should never faint or lose heart, but keep preaching it, and searching for those who will hear and obey it!