

✠ Paul's trial before Felix...

- **Acts 24:1-16 (recap)**
 - **Paul is on trial before the Roman Governor of Palestine, region of Israel- Felix. Chief priests and religious rulers have accused him of being a plague on the entire Roman world, by disturbing peace**
 - **Paul: I was minding my own business!**
 - **I am a follower of the WAY, and have same hope as these Jewish leaders- this resurrection of ALL PEOPLE, righteous and un-righteous alike.**
 - **I have a clear conscience before God.**
 - **PAUL CONTINUES... speaking to Felix**

Acts 24:17-21 “After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings.

- **Small observation here- Paul had access to money. Earlier in Acts and in several of his letters Paul describes a collection being taken – across his missionary journey's- to support the struggling people of the church in Jerusalem. This was evidence of Paul's sincere love for the Jewish people, but as we'll see, Felix heard something different.**

¹⁸I was ceremonially clean when they – **accusers**-found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance.

¹⁹But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me.

- **These were principally enemies of Paul from his 3rd missionary journey, who had been pursuing him for some time. Paul's point is that he is being set up, that his accusers before Felix weren't even the people who had originally accused him back in Jerusalem.**
- **And then he turns to the religious leaders before him...**

²⁰Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin—²¹ unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: ‘It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.’”

- **If you remember, just days earlier, Lysias, the Roman authority over Jerusalem demanded for Paul's accusers to hear him in their own religious high council- the Sanhedrin. SO Paul tells Felix- ‘Even in their own court they didn't bring any evidence of a crime against me- unless it was this- AND HERE Paul cuts to the heart of what really was going on--- I AM ON TRIAL because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead!’**
- **Paul had been accused of many things.**
 - **Of desecrating the temple. Of inciting riots.**
 - **Of seeking to undermine the tradition and law of his people- Of teaching people not to circumcise their children.**
- **But really, these were all just excuses to shut Paul up.**
- **The real offense- the great sin that constantly put his life in danger- was his tireless proclamation of RESURRECTION- Christ's resurrection from the dead, and that through faith in Jesus Christ any person- regardless of ethnicity, social status, gender, or moral deservedness- could share in that Resurrection.**
- **But why was the Resurrection of Jesus so offensive?**

† The offense of the Resurrection

- Resurrection was a divisive topic between Israel's religious leaders

- *Luke tells us that while the Pharisees did believe there would be an ultimate resurrection of the dead on Judgement day, the Sadducees did not believe this- and this disagreement was so severe it led to animosity and even violence between these two factions.*
- *At this time in Jerusalem's history the Sadducees held power in the Sanhedrin, and so when spoke of the resurrection of the dead, he was proclaiming a hope they believed didn't exist.*
- *But the real offense of the resurrection for the Sanhedrin- and people today...*

- If Jesus was indeed raised from the dead, this authenticated His identity as God.

- *If Jesus truly was raised from the dead, this means the person they had opposed and put to death was in fact the very God they claimed to worship.*
- *Even more, this would mean that Jesus was LORD- and this would call them to humble themselves, believe, and surrender to his teaching. TO KNOW THIS, and continue to live in opposition to him, would make their lives one giant experience of spiritual cognitive dissonance. (You know what cogdis is... it's not pleasant) SAME is true of us today.*
- *But the resurrection didn't just confront Paul's accusers with the authenticity of Jesus- it demanded they recognize the genuine work God was doing through the CHURCH. You see, FROM DAY ONE...*

- Jesus' resurrection was a foundational and essential teaching of the new Christian movement.

- *About 4 years earlier Paul had written his first letter to the church in Corinth, and in what we know as chap 15 he makes an impassioned case for the absolute reality and centrality of Christ's resurrection, and the broader Christian hope of the resurrection of all people.*
- *Same is true today! Of course, we know that over the centuries and generations Christianity has been distorted in many ways. ONE distortion is how the suffering and death of Jesus became the central image and focus of Christianity, often as a means of manipulating people through guilt and shame rather than redemption and freedom.*
- *TRUE- without the sacrifice of Christ's death there is not hope for forgiveness of sin- but apart from Christ's resurrection, there is NO HOPE OF LIFE!*
- *To those who would use the message of the cross to support legalism, moral performance, and guilt based religion, the Resurrection stands as a great offense, instead proclaiming the great hope of new life and FREEDOM from guilt and performance based religion.*
- *But there's one more offense of the Resurrection, one that might just be the bottom line issue.*

† The resurrection of Jesus Christ- and what it meant- dealt a devastating blow to the religious ruler's PRIDE.

- *Think about this. For all their piety and devotion to the law, the religious identity of Paul's accusers was all about THEM.*
- *THEY were the chosen ones. They were those who protected the traditions and the law. They were the moral ones who kept all the rules.*

- **THEY** were the gatekeepers of the temple and access to God.
- In the moral pyramid of first century religious life, they were at the top, at the bottom were those who the law declared morally and ceremonially unclean, and the GENTILES- well, they were the dirt under the pyramid.
- And yet the Resurrection declared that **NONE** of this now mattered. To the lowest of society to the highest, from the blind and lame to the most decorated priest, the Resurrection proclaims that **IN CHRIST ALL** are accepted, **ALL** are set free from the bondage of sin and shame, **ALL** are made right with God, and **ALL** are New Creations. **YOU SEE...**

To those who think 'It's all about me', the resurrection proclaims 'It's NOT about YOU!'

- **Jesus powerfully pointed toward this in one of his most challenging parables, which we find in Matthew 20. It's the parable of the landowner who hired workers for his vineyard.**

Matthew 20:1-16 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ “About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went. “He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. ⁶ About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’” ⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ ⁹ “The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’” ¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?’ ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

- **WOW. This story is so powerful because it offends our sensibilities! If I had been one of the workers who had labored all day, I would have been angry as well.**
- **If I put on my amateur economist hat, I would say that this is horrible economic policy! If you pay the people who only work one hour the same as those that work 8, no one will want to work! Everyone will all just show up at the end expecting to be paid for a full day!**
- **But Jesus point is way bigger than economics. To everyone who would compare themselves to others and say “I am better” “My life has greater value”, or especially “I am more valuable to God”... THE RESURRECTION REPLIES... IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU!**
- **RATHER, your value, your acceptance, your rightness with God, is COMPLETELY a matter of God's mercy and generosity. It is a matter of God's Grace!**
- **This is why the unfettered message of God's Grace is so offensive to some people who are extremely religious, and any sense of moral superiority.**

- **You see- TO THAT PERSON we might look down upon, who we think is the problem and deserving of God’s wrath- this truth reminds us that apart from God’s Grace, we ALL- equally- are lost, all are deserving of wrath... but IN CHRIST ALL have the hope of redemption, righteousness, acceptance, freedom, fullness, and newness.**
- **A tragic thread through Christian history is the efforts of some to put limits on God’s love, mercy and Grace. But the resurrection will have none of this.**
- **Because of the resurrection any person may receive the goodness of Jesus when he says ““Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.**
- **CHURCH! This is why - when By God’s Grace we let go of our pride and stop measuring ourselves by our own performance, religious or otherwise... we will see the reality that..**

† Reality! The resurrection’s great offense is also its great HOPE.

Ephesians 2:1-5 *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.*

- **And church, this salvation- the grace into which we have born and now live and stand- this is NOT just about heaven when we die... this is our hope, our reality, and our life- RIGHT NOW, today.**
- **OKAY... one more part to the story. Luke is about to paint a very unflattering image of Felix. It turns out he was not the greatest guy. But before we get all judgy, we need to recognize that Felix’s response to Paul just might strike a bit close to home in describing our relationship to God.**
- **Thinking of this text, there are times when we honestly may have to say... Hi...**

† Hi, my name is Felix...

Acts 24:22-27 *Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. “When Lysias the commander comes,” he said, “I will decide your case.” ²³ He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.*

²⁴ *Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁵ As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, “That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.” ²⁶ At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.*

²⁷ *When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.*

- **Okay- first of all, we’re never told that Lysias ever showed up. There’s a strong sense here that Felix is using Lysias as an excuse to keep Paul for his own purposes. Paul had mentioned how he had brought financial support to the struggling church in Jerusalem,**

- and given his actions here, its likely Felix thought “aha... Paul has access to money. If I keep him here long enough, he just might offer me a bribe to let him go.”
- So Felix is an interesting case. He often invites Paul to share with him about faith in Christ, but is doing so, at least partially, for selfish reasons.
 - Luke gives us an interesting detail about Felix’s wife. She is Jewish. Moreover, we know from other ancient sources that Drusilla was Felix’s third wife, and he was her second husband. Josephus tells us Drusilla was beautiful, originally married at 14, and was the daughter of Herod Agrippa. EVIDENTLY, seeing Drusilla as physically desirable and a political power play, Felix convinces her to leave her husband and marry him.
 - UPSHOT is that Felix’s marriage to Drusilla is very morally problematic. Felix may be treating Paul fairly well, but he has some real issues of integrity. SO, WHEN PAUL starts to talk about righteousness, self control, and judgment, FELIX IS FRIGHTENED! He is troubled, and sends Paul away.
 - Evidently, Felix was happy to hear Paul talk about Jesus as long as things didn’t get too real, too ethically practical, and too close to home.
 - At the end of the story, we see that Felix keeps Paul in his custody for two years, and when he is deposed, leaves Paul in prison for political reasons.
 - OKAY.. what is the parallel here for us? We always need to be carefully when we make application from stories like this... make sure we are being honest with the text. That said, I can’t help but see that the way Felix treated Paul is the way we – as believers- all too easily can treat God.
 - We’re happy to be around God, to listen to him, learn about him... as long as things don’t get too close to home. If God starts to really bring conviction- starts to open the door in my heart I really want to keep closed, where I want to stay in control, something I really don’t want to hear... lead me in a direction I don’t want to go... THAT’S ENOUGH FOR NOW GOD... that’s far enough... I’ll come back to you again when it’s convenient for me... when things are on my terms.
 - Likewise, we may want to keep God around so he can do something for us. “God, I’ll worship you, I’ll believe you are good, I’ll be your disciple if you do what I ask you to do. Here’s my list...”
 - FRIENDS! Don’t hear what I’m not saying. YES, God invites us to bring all of our life to him in trust. Jesus said “Cast your cares upon me!” The writers of Hebrews tells us we can come before the throne of Grace with confidence to find help in our time of need!
 - AND YET, if you do an honest and thorough study of all the NT teaching about prayer, the resounding message is that the primary and overwhelming purpose of prayer is NOT ABOUT TELLING GOD OUR NEEDS. Prayer is God’s gift for us to know him, worship him, engage with him, learn from him, trust him, be renewed, and experience His presence.
 - WE DON’T KNOW if Felix ever responded to Paul’s teaching. The sense is that he never got past his need to keep things on his terms- and that is tragic.
 - SO... thinking of this story... CHURCH

- *May we not be like Felix, MISSING the goodness of God because we keep Jesus at arms length, only looking to him on our terms, when it's convenient to us.*
- *May we never place limits on God's mercy and Grace, and the great hope of the Resurrection to bring redemption, hope, and new life.. to ANYONE.*
- *RATHER, may we be those who recognize that because of HIS GREAT LOVE FOR US, God, who is RICH in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead.*
- *Church- we WERE DEAD- and we HAVE BEEN MADE ALIVE. That statement is in the past tense. It is something that has ALREADY HAPPENED and BEEN MADE COMPLETE. WE ARE- RIGHT NOW- PEOPLE OF RESURRECTION.*
- *May this great gift, this great hope, be made manifest in who we are, and how we live, humbly living in and loving this world, just as Christ is present and at work in this world which He also loves*