

Text: Ac 24.22-27

As we come to the end of Acts 24, we find a tragic biography. The subject of the biography is Felix, at the time the Roman procurator of Judaea, and Paul's judge in his trial.

We find in vv. 22-27 several remarkable statements about the character of Felix and about his interaction with Paul.

Our text starts with "But Felix," which gives us our title. As we look at his story, we are going to work on this theme: "don't be Felix."

There are a lot of ways someone could take that...

Felix, like many Romans in power, led a notorious life. The average relatively decent human being could probably live better than Felix, so I don't mean just don't be Felix *morally*.

What we find is that despite knowledge of Christianity, despite the opportunity to hear the gospel, despite the obvious conviction of the Holy Spirit, Felix resisted God's call.

Don't be Felix — if you aren't a Christian, today you will hear a gospel call. Don't be Felix!

For Christians, there are other matters where God calls us to make spiritual decisions and progress.

In that case, *don't be Felix* in response! Don't resist God's call, God's guidance, God's direction on your life.

But Felix... don't be Felix!

Read Acts 24.22-27

Proposition: The testimony of Felix speaks of unbelief and, ultimately, personal disaster. Unbelief always ends in disaster.

I. Character

A. Mendacity (22)

men•da•cious \men-'dā-shəs\ *adjective*

[Latin *mendac-*, *mendax*—more at AMEND] 1616:

given to or characterized by deception or falsehood or divergence from absolute truth¹

Or, in other words, Felix had only a passing acquaintance with truth...

1. In politics, then, as now, lying and dissembling were the politicians' stock in trade
2. After Paul's trial, Felix set aside a decision
 - a. The language of v. 22 suggests putting the trial in a formal state of "suspended animation" (*amplius*) — he reserved judgement
 - b. Stated Rationale: further testimony from Lysias ("Officer In Charge" of the Jerusalem garrison)
3. Questionable status
 - a. Lysias already rendered his testimony in the letter quoted 23.26-30
 - b. No evidence he ever summoned Lysias to testify
 - c. Ample opportunity: Paul remained in custody for two yrs

Polhill: "Felix wasn't waiting for Lysias's report. There is no indication that Lysias ever came or that Felix even sent for him. Felix was putting the whole matter off. He didn't *want* to pass a verdict, for the verdict would surely have been one of acquittal. ... Like Lysias before him and Festus after him, he must have realized that Paul was guilty of no crime by Roman law."²

B. Drusilla (24)

1. As mentioned earlier, Felix married three times, all to princesses
2. Upwardly mobile former slave: freed either by Claudius or Claudius' mother

¹ Frederick C. Mish, ed., *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

² John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 485.

3. His brother had great influence in Claudius' court, still strong influence under Nero
4. Drusilla, daughter of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12), sister of Herod Agrippa II (Acts 25-26)
 - a. Married off (quite young) to some other king
 - b. Apparently very beautiful, at 16 persuaded to divorce husb. and marry Felix

"Josephus mentioned that Felix promised to make her 'happy,' doubtless a pun on his name *felix*, the Latin word for 'happy.'"³

- c. They eventually had at least two children, one son died at Pompeii when the volcano erupted (AD 79)
- d. At the time of the trial, Drusilla is 19

Some suggest that Drusilla is his source of knowledge about Judaism/Christianity, and stimulates interest about Paul. Others say she was coldly ambitious and antagonistic to Christianity.

In any case, she represents in Felix a moral deficiency in that he wooed her while married to someone else.

C. Greed (26)

1. This detail seems to complete the degraded picture
2. Felix looked to Paul as a potential source of cash

"Roman law demanded exile and confiscation for a magistrate who accepted bribes, but it was lax in the provinces. Felix had doubtless received them before."⁴
3. Perhaps thought Paul, bringing "alms" to Jerusalem had access to large sums
4. In any case, his greed a large part of his reason for delay

³ Polhill, *Acts*, 486.

⁴ Robertson, *Word Pictures*, Ac 24.26.

D. Cravenness (27)

1. At the end of his tenure, he does nothing for Paul
 - a. Knows Paul is innocent
 - b. Has held Paul two years
 - c. Yet leaves Paul in custody
2. Why? To curry favor with the Jews (who hated him)

cra•ven \ 'krā-vən\ *adjective*

lacking the least bit of courage: contemptibly fainthearted⁵

Note: none of these bad character qualities means anything when confronted by the gospel:

1 Cor 6.9-11 ¶ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹ Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

II. Conviction

A. With Drusilla, Felix hears Paul preach a gospel message (24)

1. The positive side of the gospel is: “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved”
2. There is, however, a negative side

B. The gospel includes warnings concerning “righteousness, self-control and the judgement” (25)

1. We will discuss these terms in more detail next week

⁵ Mish, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*.

2. The gospel points out human deficiency (we are not righteous, we are not self-controlled)
3. The gospel warns of the judgement to come

There is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun.

No gospel message is complete that leaves the negative out.

C. Felix “became frightened”

1. Term ἔμφοβος (*emphobos*)
2. More intense than simple fear
3. Remember how Herod Antipas (a grand-uncle) reacted to John the Baptist vs. Herodias
4. Likely one aspect of lack of self-control: Drusilla
5. Preaching of self-control and judgment instills fear

D. But ... postponement

1. Felix postponed a decision in the trial in hopes of personal gain
2. Felix postponed a decision for Christ despite personal conviction

“Felix’s decision to postpone making a decision about his relationship to God is a common one. Often people put off this most important decision until they cannot make it. This is probably why most people who make decisions for Christ do so when they are young. Older people normally get harder to the gospel.”⁶

III. Condemnation (26)

A. Our text simply says, “succeeded by Porcius Festus”

1. Two years later (AD 59) – makes the trial date AD 57, BTW
2. Occasioned by a complaint raised against him by the Jews
 - a. Violence erupted in Caesarea (where Felix lived) between Gentiles and Jews

⁶ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Ac 24.25.

- b. Felix used occasion to bring troops out and brutally suppress conflict, killing many of the Jews
 - c. Jewish officials complained bitterly to Rome (Nero), Felix recalled
- B. Felix escaped Nero's wrath by the intervention of his brother, Pallas, also a former slave
- 1. Under Claudius, Pallas head of imperial civil service
 - 2. Removed from post in AD 55, but still held powerful influence (great wealth)
- C. Felix would not escape God's wrath
- 1. No one to intervene on his behalf
 - 2. Unless he repented and came to Christ
 - 3. No evidence he ever did

“Luke’s portrayal of Felix presents a genuinely tragic plot. There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of his coming to Paul to inquire about faith in Christ (v. 24). Neither was his frequent sending for Paul to converse with him likely to have been based *solely* on greed (v. 26). Felix demonstrated a genuine concern to hear the apostle’s testimony. His alarm at Paul’s message was real (v. 25). A thorough skeptic would have dismissed Paul’s reference to the judgment as sheer fantasy, but not Felix. His fear was genuine. He was at the point of conviction. But he was never willing to go beyond the point and take the leap of faith. In the end his greed, his lust, and his desire to preserve his power carried the day.”⁷

Conclusion:

Proposition: The testimony of Felix speaks of unbelief and, ultimately, personal disaster. Unbelief always ends in disaster.

Faith, on the other hand, always ends in victory.

On which path are you?

⁷ Polhill, Acts, 487.