



## The Darkness Cannot Overcome the Light

Series: Acts -- Worldwide Witness to the Worth of Jesus Christ

Acts 23:12- 24:27

October 5, 2014

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John wrote of Jesus in the Gospel of John: **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”** (John 1:1–5, ESV) Spiritual darkness cannot overcome the light of Christ. What is true of the Lord Jesus Christ is also true of the good news of His life, death, burial and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins, for the extinguishing of the God’s wrath, for peace with God and the joy of fellowship with Him as His children for all who repent and believe in Jesus of Nazareth as Savior and Lord. The darkness labors tirelessly and violently against the testimony of Christ and the good news of the gospel but the forces of spiritual darkness cannot and will not be victorious. Of course, that does not mean that they will not try. They will and here’s why. Jesus said: **“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.”** (John 3:19, ESV)

It’s this truth we see portrayed in the narrative that is before us today – the continuing battle between darkness and light and the more the light prevails, the more desperate and more wicked spiritual darkness shows itself to be. Make no mistake, the hatred of Paul, the mistrust of Paul, the suspicion of Paul, the rejection and relentless pursuit of Paul’s life was not primarily about him. Oh, I don’t doubt that Paul could be annoying at times, considered to be too harsh or too brash. Sometimes, I’m sure, he said things he shouldn’t have said or did things he shouldn’t have done, but the real issue at hand, what made him so hated, was the gospel and Paul’s faithfulness to it. In the text that we will look at today, Paul is back to being Paul. After his momentary spiritual hiccup in chapter 21 when he agreed, under duress, to follow the human wisdom dispensed by James and the elders in the Jerusalem church and to perform a ritual of purification that would have ultimately confused the gospel and clouded the sufficiency of the blood of Christ to cleanse us from all sin and to establish the new and living way into the blessed presence of the Living God – a mistake from which God rescued Paul and his gospel testimony by means of a riot – Paul is back to his usual bold, uncompromising, unapologetic, Christ-exalting self. And the forces of spiritual darkness hate it and seek to silence Paul once and for all. But, as we will see, all the

power of darkness is no match for the Lord of Light and Life. Let's look at this first section, starting in verse 12 of chapter 23, and I want you to notice that though there is no explicit doctrinal teaching, no explicit exhortations to godliness, no passage of Scripture illustrates more clearly the providence of God. Look at it with me.

***“When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. There were more than forty who made this conspiracy. They went to the chief priests and elders and said, “We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul. Now therefore you, along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near.””*** (Acts 23:12–15, ESV) On the next day, after Christ had come to Paul in the barracks and stood by His side, commanding Him to “Take courage” and to continue fighting the good fight, reminding Paul that He would never leave him or forsake him, we read about this conspiracy.

A group of Jews, who hated Paul with a wicked passion, determine to kill him. They plot together; they conspire together, to murder Paul. So zealous are they that they take a vow not to eat or to drink until Paul was dead. The literal translation of what they say in verse 14 is, “We have anathematized ourselves with an anathema to taste nothing until we have killed Paul.” They pronounced a curse upon their own souls if they ate or drank before they killed Paul. They knew that some of them would die in murdering Paul. If any of them were arrested and taken prisoner during the attack, they knew they would be executed for attacking Roman soldiers who were guarding him. But they were willing to die in order to kill him. That's some serious hatred. It wasn't enough for them that Paul was in custody, and that he was off the streets and he wouldn't have the opportunity to freely preach in Jerusalem at all – they wanted him dead. They knew that they could not depend upon the Roman officials to kill Paul and they couldn't chance another speech from Paul on the fortress steps. Only one thing could satisfy them – Paul's death. They were willing pawns of Satan, glad to be used to smother the saving proclamation of the gospel by killing its most effective preacher.

So they go to the Sanhedrin – well part of them anyway. Notice the scribes, who were Pharisees and who had defended Paul were not a part of the conversation. Anyway, the Sadducees who made up the Sanhedrin were more than happy to receive these guys. It was a gift – they could have Paul killed without getting their hands dirty. All they had to do was call a meeting of the Sanhedrin under the pretext of examining Paul a little more closely and leave it to the more than forty assassins that would take Paul out as he was being escorted through the streets. It ought to work. It's a simple and effective plan. They will have plausible deniability. It's a foolproof plan, right? Not so fast.

Luke says: **“Now the son of Paul’s sister heard of their ambush, so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.” (Acts 23:16, ESV)** Our sanctified response to that should be, “Say what? Paul has a sister? His sister has a son?” This is the first and the last that we will ever hear of any of Paul’s family members. They just pop us in this story. And somehow his nephew hears about the plot to kill Paul and tells him about it? How did he find that out? How in the world does he know all of the details that he will clearly present in a few verses? How do you explain this? One word – God. God is sovereign over the affairs of men, sovereign over everything and in His sovereign providence, He arranges for Paul to hear of the conspiracy from his nephew.

But God isn’t done. It just so happens that the centurion who is guarding Paul is going to do exactly as Paul asks him, without asking any questions. **“Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him.” So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, “Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you.”” (Acts 23:17–18, ESV)** Notice something here. This isn’t a request; it is a command. This is in the imperative. Prisoners don’t give orders and expect them to be followed – unless, of course, God is in it. The centurion does what he is told – not asked, despite the way that he presents it to Claudius– and takes Paul’s nephew to Claudius Lysias. And get this now, despite the fact that he is a young man, between 8 and 14 years old, and we all know how kids that age like to tell stories and usually mess up the details– just come to my house for an afternoon and you can see it first hand – this kid is readily believed. Watch this.

**“The tribune took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, “What is it that you have to tell me?” And he said, “The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him. But do not be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for your consent.” So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, “Tell no one that you have informed me of these things.”” (Acts 23:19–22, ESV)** Get this now, the tribune takes the young man, the boy, aside and the kid spills all the beans. And the tribune is hanging on every word. He hears the details of the plot and clearly he believes it. So much so that he makes a major tactical decision as a result.

**“Then he called two of the centurions and said, “Get ready two hundred soldiers, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night. Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor.”” (Acts 23:23–24, ESV)** Claudius Lysias determines to send Paul to Felix, the Roman governor of Judea – more on this guy in a minute – for Paul’s protection. But look at this really quickly. Claudius gives the command to assemble 470 of his best soldiers – the Roman

garrison at Jerusalem only had 600 men – almost 80% of his troop strength (78.33% to be exact) to take Paul to Felix at Caesarea. Not only that, he determines to get Paul out of Jerusalem ASAP, by 9:00 that night so the Jews bent on killing Paul will have no advance notice. This is an overwhelming response to say that least.

Luke also records for us the substance of the letter that he wrote to Felix regarding the situation. **“And he wrote a letter to this effect: “Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings. This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen. And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment. And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him.””** (Acts 23:25–30, **ESV**) Now, Claudius plays a little fast and loose with the facts in order to present himself in the most favorable light, right? When he rescued Paul, he was really just trying to reestablish order in Jerusalem. He had no clue that he was a Roman citizen until after he had bound him and ordered him to be flogged. He says nothing about Paul’s address to the crowd that further enraged them, right? But no sense spoiling a good story with the facts. At any rate, he sends Paul to Felix and announces his intentions to send Paul’s accusers there to make their case before him.

**“So the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. Antipatris would have been the halfway point, somewhere around 30-35 miles into the trip. And on the next day they returned to the barracks, letting the horsemen go on with him. When they had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they presented Paul also before him. On reading the letter, he asked what province he was from. And when he learned that he was from Cilicia, he said, “I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive.” And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod’s praetorium.”** (Acts 23:31–35, **ESV**) So Felix receives Paul and places him under protective custody.

Now, can you imagine the fury of the conspirators? The Sanhedrin and especially the conspirators in murder had to be hacked. No food and drink for a while boys! Paul had slipped the noose again and with the help of the Romans, Gentiles, no less. He has more lives than a cat. How do we explain all of this? I suppose we could argue that Claudius was somewhat of a decent man or that Paul was winsome and had won the trust and respect of the centurion, but let’s be honest –this is really all about the providential care of God.

Proverbs 21:1 says, **“The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.” (Proverbs 21:1, ESV)** God is sovereign over the heart of every man – king, tribune, centurion, or commoner, even over a heretofore-unmentioned nephew. God orchestrated all of this. He is sovereign over the affairs of all men and particularly His own. Here is the truth about Paul, about all of us who belong to Christ – we are invincible until the day that our work in glorifying God on this earth is through. We are invincible until every single day that God has written for us comes to completion. As Isaiah wrote: **“no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication from me, declares the Lord.” (Isaiah 54:17, ESV)** That does not mean that we will never die, that we will never suffer for the sake of Christ. But what it does mean is this. Our place as God’s people is eternally secure – God will vindicate His own. He will ultimately protect and deliver his own and will refute every tongue set afire by Satan, every accusation, everything determined to destroy his people. Look, Satan is the accuser of the brethren and he will accuse and attack believers. He’ll use the world; he’ll even use other professing Christians if he can but God will ultimately vindicate his people. He will deliver us from the enemy’s attempts to destroy and from every false accusation. That’s what he did for Paul and it is what he does for His own. None of this can affect Paul’s standing with God. Nothing can affect our eternal standing with God. The worst that Satan can do is no match for God. God’s heart is set upon His people, His protection and His verdict regarding His people stands for eternity against every lie of the devil. Forgiven, redeemed, adopted child of God, blessed servant of the Most High, the reward of Christ’s suffering, precious possession, holy, righteous and beloved of God – this is the declaration of heaven’s court about you, believer, and no weapon of Satan can undo that .

What boldness, what confidence, what security, what fearlessness, what faith, what love that ought to fire in our souls. That was exactly the result in Paul. Watch what happens.

**“And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul.” (Acts 24:1, ESV)** When I read this, I just have to chuckle. Their conspiracy having fallen apart, Ananias and some of the elders – again no mention of Pharisees – lawyer up and make their way to Caesarea after about five days. Do you see that? They get some lawyer, someone who has had nothing to do with this at all, who isn’t involved in the situation at all, who has no firsthand knowledge of the situation, someone we have never heard of, a guy named Tertullus, to present the case against Paul and the guy is a real sleaze-ball. Just watch.

Paul is brought in and the trial begins. **“And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying: “Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, in every way and everywhere we**

**accept this with all gratitude. But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly.” (Acts 24:2–4, ESV)** Even Felix had to know that this guy was full of garbage. His opening statement is nothing but empty flattery and smooth talking rubbish. Let me tell you a little about Felix so you understand. Felix had been a slave in the house of Antonia, the mother of another Claudius, not the guy in our story, who would later become the Roman emperor. He and his brother, Palla, had been freed by Antonia from slavery because of their friendship with her son. When Claudius became the emperor, he eventually made Felix the governor of Judea.

The historian, Tacitus, described Felix as worthless man who reveled in cruelty and lust and greed, and who wielded the power of a king with the mind of a slave. Unrest and turmoil and brutal governance marked his rule over Palestine. The way that he brought the “peace” to which Tertullus refers, was by crucifying hundreds of rebels. As far as reforms – umm, there were none. And as far as the Jews being grateful for him... they weren’t. They hated the guy. He was a truly evil man. I can imagine him laughing to himself during this opening statement and wanting the lawyer to simply get to the case and quit trying to schmooze him. Finally the lawyer comes to the point. “Oh there is more we could say of your sterling reputation and fabulosity, but let me come to the point...”

**“For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him.” The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so.” (Acts 24:5–9, ESV)**

Let’s look at these charges for a moment, ok? It really breaks down into three distinct accusations. Let me show you. First, Tertullus, as the mouthpiece of Ananias and the elders, accuses Paul of being an insurrectionist, a rebel, a disturber of the peace. He uses the worst word that he can think of to use – a plague, pestilence, a disease that threatened to destroy the Roman peace and that must be stopped. “All he does is stir up riots.” Do you see what he does here? Two things. First, he absolves the Jews who actually rioted against Paul and against the gospel of any responsibility at all. I mean, what else were they supposed to do, just peaceably disagree with him? They had no choice but to become enraged and act out like that. Sure they had some responsibility in this, sin if you will, but they had no choice. After all, Paul is so intimidating.” (SARCASM) Second, I want you to notice that there are no specifics given, no specific incidents of which Paul was guilty. There is absolutely no evidence offered, no testimony given, which would validate this charge against Paul. There were riots in Jerusalem because of Paul, but it was the Jews who initiated them. Tertullus’ first charge amounts to a blanket declaration of Paul’s character - there is just something deeply wrong with this guy – without any supporting evidence.

Then the mouthpiece accuses Paul of being a false teacher. “He is a ringleader of this sect, the Greek word “haireseos” from which we get the word heresy, of the Nazarenes. They cannot even bring themselves to say the name “Jesus of Nazareth” or the word “gospel.” Paul, according to them is the ringleader of a heretical sect, a false teacher who has departed from the truth about the Jewish religion and should not be protected. Now that should be enough, right? But they have to add one more charge.

The mouthpiece then says that Paul was apprehended in the act of attempting to profane the temple. Again they say it with no evidence at all, just a hunch. Now why add that? Why would Felix care? Here’s why they said this. Under Roman law, if someone did something that was worthy of death under the religious laws of one of the nations they had conquered, Roman officials had the option of turning them over to that religious group for punishment. Now, of course, Paul didn’t try to profane the temple, that was a lie, but Felix didn’t know that. What these guys were hoping was that knowing Felix’ propensity for cruelty and violence and hopefully anticipating that he wouldn’t want to have to deal with this, Felix would turn Paul over to them for execution. In essence they were saying, “Just give him back to us and we will make this problem go away for you. No sweat. Just examine him and remember he’s a plague and a false teacher who cannot be trusted and after he offers some lame defense, we can make this problem disappear.” As Tertullus is wrapping up what he is sure is a slam dunk case the Jewish “amen corner” starts popping off, joining in the attack, piling on and testifying that the charges were true. High fives all around. It’s looking bad for Paul... or it seems that way.

What can Paul do? Let me ask you, beloved, what do you do when you are falsely accused, either privately or publically? What do you do? Do you trade insults? Do you go on the offensive and look to discredit your accusers? No. There is only one option open to a man or woman with integrity and that is to tell the truth. Now listen, Paul’s integrity was no shield from false accusations. In a perfect world, a person with real integrity would never be falsely accused but this isn’t a perfect world is it? It is filled with sinners and sinners often slander the man or woman of integrity because a life of integrity exposes their sin and hypocrisy. Don’t be naïve and think that if you labor to live a life of integrity that you will be immune from slander and false accusations, you won’t. But if you are falsely accused, you do not stoop to the level of your accusers, you tell the truth. You let your integrity be your defense. That’s what Paul did here.

***“And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied: “Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense.” (Acts 24:10, ESV)*** Paul is absent the effusive and overdone praise of Tertullus, but he does say one thing of note. He is glad to make his defense before Felix because had been the judge over Judea for

several years and for that reason he would know these guys and their character very well. He would now know how they operate. Then, Paul takes their accusations apart piece by piece. To the first charge of insurrection and rebellion, Paul says:

***“You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem, and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me.” (Acts 24:11–13, ESV)*** Paul plainly states the facts. If you do the math, considering that Paul had been in Caesarea for the last five days and had spent 1 day in custody in Jerusalem, his point is that in six days there was no way that he could have stirred up such problems of which they accuse him. Moreover, he had done no public preaching, no public disputing, either in the temple or any of the synagogues at all. The only time he had spoken to them was by permission from the tribune and then only after they had attacked and beaten him on their own accord. They have no proof of anything and therefore no case.

On the charge of being a false teacher, Paul is even more adamant. ***“But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.” (Acts 24:14–16, ESV)*** Now follow Paul’s line of thought in his defense. Paul doesn’t deny that he is a follower of “the Way,” a follower of Jesus the Nazarene, but he refuses completely the thought that “the Way” is in any way not in keeping with the faithful and true worship of the Living God. Do you see it? Paul will not agree that it is a sect or a heresy. Instead he says, “I worship the God of our fathers.” This is no generic declaration of spirituality. Paul is not worshipping a god of his own making, a god of his own understanding, nor a reference to some “higher power.” Paul states clearly that His worship stands in direct lineage of the worship of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Elijah, Isaiah and all of the prophets of old. He had not departed from the ancient faith and Jesus had not come to start some new religion absent any foundation. Paul was not guilty of idolatry or of creating some new religion that was not rooted in the faithful worship of the True God. He worshipped the Creator of the World, the God of Israel, the God of the Exodus, the God of Mount Sinai, the God who had revealed Himself fully and finally in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the elect, the Savior of sinners. He worshipped the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As a contrast to these men who stood there accusing him, Paul could say with integrity, “I believe everything laid down by the Law and written by the Prophets.” He believed all that the Word of God taught and what the Word of God points to on every page is Christ the Lord – His glory, His Lordship, His saving grace, His sinless substitution, His redeeming love.



That is the faith that honors God, that worships Christ, and that saves the human soul. His was faith rooted in God's Word.

Then Paul says, "I have a hope in God." Not the frail and fragile hope in circumstances that so abounds in this world, but hope in God, confidence in God because of His trustworthiness, because of His past faithfulness, because He is the God who keeps all His promises. And what was the content of Paul's hope; what should have been the content of the hope of those men standing there accusing him? Just this: that there will be a resurrection from the dead of both the just and the unjust – a resurrection of those justified by faith in Christ to eternal fellowship and joy in heaven with God the Father and Christ the Son and there will be a resurrection of the unjust, those who have rejected the Lord's Christ, to eternal judgment and eternal wrath in hell. God had raised Christ as the firstfruits of the resurrection from the dead, as the proof that God will raise all men from the dead for judgment – those who are just by faith in Christ and the unjust who are still in their sins. And for that reason, Paul says, ***"I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man."***

In essence, what Paul is saying is this: "In the light of my faith in Jesus Christ, in light of the testimony and instruction and exhortation of Scripture and in light of the coming judgment of God, I continuously strive to examine the desires and motives of my heart and confess and turn away from every sin of thought, word, or deed against the holiness of God and against love for my fellow man and bring my life, by the power of the Holy Spirit, into conformity to the character of Christ my Lord." That is what it means that he "took pains" to have a clear conscience. Paul is no false teacher, no idolater, no worshipper of an invented God – he worships the One True God who has made Himself known in His Word and ultimately in Christ and he lives his life like it.

Then last, Paul deals with accusation that he was attempting to profane the temple. ***"Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia—they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me. Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: 'It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.'"*** (Acts 24:17–21, ESV) As to this charge that he was seeking to profane the temple, Paul says, "On the contrary, I was in Jerusalem on a mission of mercy. And when I was attacked in the temple I was following Jewish customs and was in the process of purification and there was no trouble at all until some Jews from Asia showed up. And, oh, by the way, where are they? Of what can these men accuse me, except that I testified to the resurrection from the dead, from their own Scriptures?" Paul knocks it out of the park. Felix

should have released him and declared the charges false, but that's not what happens and according to God's providence, for good reason. If Paul had been released, it would have been open season on him. Instead we read:

***“But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, “When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case.” Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.” (Acts 24:22–23, ESV)*** Now this isn't some expression of magnanimity on Felix's part. By God's providence, he puts off a decision. He knows something about Christianity and so he is not inclined to release Paul immediately. Instead he puts him into protective custody and allows his friends to care for and minister to Paul while keeping him safe from harm. There are underlying motives, as we will see in a moment, but from God's perspective, he uses Felix to keep Paul safe.

***“After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.” (Acts 24:24, ESV)*** You know about Felix already but let me tell you about Drusilla. Drusilla was a piece of work. She was breathtakingly physically beautiful by all accounts, but she was a wicked woman. She got it honestly I guess. She was the great granddaughter of Herod the Great – the Herod who killed one of his wives, killed three of his sons, and had the infant baby boys of Bethlehem killed trying to kill the newborn Jesus. You know her father. He was the Herod that killed James the Apostle and who was struck down in Acts chapter 12 and eaten by worms for his arrogance toward God. That was her dad. And her uncle was the Herod who killed John the Baptist. She came from a long line of sinners. As for her, Drusilla had been married to some lesser and boring king of a place called Emesa in the Roman empire when she was 16 and she and Felix first met when Felix traveled out there. She was bored with her life in Emesa, bored with her husband and so Felix easily seduced her, committed adultery with her and ditched his own wife and brought her back to Judea. Drusilla was, by all accounts, sexually immoral, a gold-digger, and equally as brutal as Felix. They were a match made in hell. Well, her being a Jewess and Felix knowing a little about Christianity, they called for Paul to come and speak to them about it.

So Paul did. He came and he spoke with them about faith in Christ. Now I want you to think about this for a moment. These two had the power of life and death over Paul. From a human perspective, we would say that they were going to “decide his fate” and so you can imagine that there would have been a very strong temptation for Paul to soft-peddle the gospel, to tone it down a little bit, to offer a positive, uplifting, non-judgmental, non-preachy promise of a better life now. Or he may have been tempted to persuade them to release him and say little about the Christian faith. But, of course, that isn't what Paul does.

**“And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, “Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.”” (Acts 24:25, ESV)** Do you remember what Jesus said the Holy Spirit would do when He came? Jesus said: **““But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.” (John 15:26, ESV) “And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:” (John 16:8, ESV)** Paul was a man filled with the Holy Spirit and that is just what he did.

He spoke words regarding righteousness – the absolute holiness and righteousness of God and the absolute righteousness that God commands from every person. He spoke words about self-control – and here he lay open the sins of this couple to their clear view: adultery, greed, brutality, fleshly indulgence. And then he declared the judgment to come – that everyone would be judged by the Holy God of the universe and the only refuge, the only salvation from the wrath to come is to be found in Christ, in the salvation and righteousness of Christ that comes by faith.

This was no sterile lecture on religion but the gospel of God’s Son, preached in the power of the Holy Spirit and Felix was terrified – that’s word for it – terrified. He was shaken to his soul. But rather than humble himself, rather than cry out for forgiveness, he ignored the truth, seeking to escape it and he sent Paul away for a better time, a more convenient time that never came. In fact, we read of the motive that replaced gospel fear in his heart – fleshly greed.

**“At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him. When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.” (Acts 24:26–27, ESV)** Felix hoped for a bribe and he wanted to curry favor with the Jews so he kept Paul confined to prison. For two years he conversed with Paul, but having blown through the conviction of the truth, having ignored the general call of the gospel and having suppressed his rightful gospel fear, he was never moved by the Word of God again. Never again. How sad. He ignored his only chance for eternal life. That’s what happens when you resist the voice of a gospel and bible-pierced conscience, when you fail to heed it and respond when it accuses you. Do that long enough, make that a habit, then that voice will grow quieter and quieter until finally it’s silenced. That’s what happened to Felix. And he forfeited his own soul.

Why did Paul do this? Why risk offending this powerful couple with the gospel? Why not at least give them a more pleasant version of things? Why focus on righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come? Here's why. Because Paul's priority was to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, to proclaim the gospel and to keep his conscience clear before the Lord. Paul was more concerned for souls than for his comfort.

What do we need to take away from this text? Much. Let me do it by way of proposing some questions in light of this text, sort of going all the way back to the beginning of this text, which we need to answer.

Some questions in light of this text:

1) Do you, do I, really trust in the providence of God? Do we believe, are we convinced that God is truly at work in our lives as His people on every level for our eternal good, for our eternal joy, for our eternal satisfaction in Him and ultimately for his glory? Do I believe that? If so, why? If not, why not?

2) Do we live lives that can be characterized by boldness, by confidence, by security, by fearlessness, by faith, and by love as a result of our trust in the providence of God? Or are our lives more often not characterized by fear, anxiety or worry? Which one best describes us and why?

3) Do we pursue integrity, a clean conscience before the Lord? Is that a priority in our lives? Can we with Paul say: "In the light of my faith in Jesus Christ, in light of the testimony and instruction and exhortation of Scripture and in light of the coming judgment of God, I continuously strive to examine the desires and motives of my heart and confess and turn away from every sin of thought, word, or deed against the holiness and against the love of God and against love for my fellow man and bring my life, by the power of the Holy Spirit, into conformity to the character of Christ my Lord." Is our conscience sensitive to the conviction of the Spirit through the Word of God? Why or why not?

4) Do we give faithful witness to the gospel, regardless of what the outcome may be, regardless of how it may affect us or what others may think of us or do to us? Do we have that kind of commitment to the Lord and to the souls of other people? Are we determined to be a faithful and clear gospel witness in every way? Why or why not?

5) For those of us today who are putting off Christ until a more convenient time? Why? The greatest of hopes is offered to you today – forgiveness, eternal life, peace with God, the death of sin’s mastery over your soul, redemption, real fellowship with God, real blessing, true abundant life. All of these are yours for the taking if...

Brothers and sisters, if these questions find you wanting, if they weigh you and find you wanting, remember what I said to you earlier. Isaiah wrote: **“no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication from me, declares the Lord.”** (Isaiah 54:17, ESV) Our place as God’s people is eternally secure – God will vindicate His own. He will ultimately protect and deliver and perfect His own and will destroy everything that is determined to destroy his people. God’s heart is set upon you and His verdict regarding you stands for eternity – Forgiven, redeemed, adopted child of God, blessed servant of the Most High, the reward of Christ’s suffering, precious possession, holy and beloved of God – these are the words that God speaks over you, blessed brother and sister. That is the declaration of who you are and God is for you. Every single one of these questions, by the power and grace and faithfulness of God, you can answer with a yes and amen. Believe it. Everything that you need for this kind of life has been given to you in Christ. Lay hold of Christ and the power of His Spirit and seek for Him to do in you what He did in Paul and you will never be put to shame. This truth stands forever – the darkness cannot overcome the light.

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