

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday After Easter, May 4, 2025

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 18 (23:4) 280, 279:1-3, 279:4
Lessons: Psalm 100; Revelation 1:4-18; John 20:19-31
Sermon Text: Acts 24:22-27,
Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear friends in Christ,

When the Gospel of Christ is preached, sometimes there are results to make us rejoice, and sometimes there are results to make us sad. Paul the apostle experienced this on his third missionary journey.

For example, when he came to Ephesus, he found the whole city given over to idol worship. The people worshipped Diana their goddess and many other idols with sorcery, fornication, and drunkenness. In such a wicked city Paul preached the Gospel of Christ. We are told, ***“This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.”*** (Acts 19:10, NIV84)

We are also told that ***“the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds.”*** (Acts 19:17–18, NIV84)

But when Paul concluded his missionary journey and came to Jerusalem and preached in the temple, there were sad results. Paul was arrested after preaching in the temple. When he defended himself and told of his history after his conversion, the crowd ***“raised their voices and shouted, ‘Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!’”*** (Acts 22:22, NIV84)

Later on, when it was made known that Paul was a Roman citizen, he was taken to Caesarea and had the opportunity to speak to the governor. This is the subject matter of our text. Today let us consider:

PAUL’S TESTIMONY TO FELIX AND HIS WIFE ABOUT FAITH IN JESUS

- 1. Two great sinners had the privilege of hearing the Gospel of Christ;**
- 2. They closed the door to heaven by refusing to believe God’s Word.**

In the words before our text we learn what the unbelieving Jews charged Paul with before Governor Felix at Caesarea. ***“We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world.”*** (Acts 24:5, NIV84) They also charged Paul with desecrating the temple. Paul defended himself and said, ***“I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.”*** (Acts 24:15, NIV84) Paul acknowledged that he was on trial because of his preaching about the resurrection. The fact of the matter was that Paul boldly and openly preached the Gospel of Christ, the crucified and resurrected Savior. But the Jews who accused him hated Christ and the Gospel and so they persecuted Paul.

At this point our text begins. ***“Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. ‘When Lysias the commander comes,’ he said, ‘I will decide your case.’”*** Felix was not ignorant about what was called ***“the Way,”*** that is, the Christian movement. He was quite well informed of how the Christians practiced their Christianity. He therefore also knew that Paul was not guilty of the charges the unbelieving Jews made against him, but he made an excuse for not hearing Paul further at this time.

There is no record of Lysias discussing this matter with Felix. We have to remember that these things happened in this way for a purpose. God was guiding these matters so that Felix and his wife might have opportunity to hear God’s Word. In the meantime our text tells us that Felix ***“ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.”*** Paul wasn’t

confined to a jail cell, but could not leave the palace grounds at Caesarea. His friends were allowed to supply what he needed.

Then we are told, *“Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus.”* Felix had been away for a while and when he returned he brought his wife Drusilla along with him. Drusilla was a beautiful woman, but also very wicked. She had been married to another man previously, but Felix persuaded her to forsake her husband and marry him. So they were living together in adultery. Felix also had a very bad reputation. He was cruel, greedy and evil. Before these two great sinners Paul was requested to appear and speak of his faith in Christ Jesus. We may be sure that Paul gave a good testimony of his faith in Jesus. He most gladly explained the Christian faith to these two sinners.

Paul however told Felix and his wife more than they wanted to hear. Our text says that Paul spoke about *“righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come.”* Paul preached the Law to these two sinners. He reminded them that God is holy and is not satisfied with anything less than perfect holiness. In many Bible passages this truth is proclaimed. In the Old Testament the Law requires absolute holiness. *“Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.”* (Leviticus 19:2, NIV84) In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus proclaimed the same truth, *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* (Matthew 5:48, NIV84) We know also this Bible teaching, *“There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”* (Romans 3:22–23, NIV84) It is quite evident that there is no way that sinners can of themselves satisfy God’s demand of holiness. In addition, Paul told Felix and his wife about *“self-control,”* the necessity of keeping the evil desires and lusts of the flesh under control. Then Paul spoke of *“the judgment to come,”* on the Last Day when all people will have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

This Law of God surely was what Felix and Drusilla needed to hear so they would know of their sinfulness. But Paul also gave them the good news about Jesus and what he has done for sinners to save them. This is all included in the words of our text that tell us that Paul *“spoke about faith in Christ Jesus.”* Paul gave these two sinners what they needed to hear in order to be saved. This was the greatest opportunity of their lifetime. The hour of grace was at hand. The book of Hebrews quotes the 95th Psalm, *“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”* (Hebrews 4:7, NIV84)

After this preaching of Paul, Felix, our text says, *“was afraid.”* His conscience bothered him greatly because of his sinful life. If only Felix and his wife had fallen down on their knees and repented of their sins. Paul could have given them further instruction from the Gospel of Christ. **But they closed the door to heaven by refusing to believe God’s Word.**

2.

Felix told Paul, *“That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.”* Felix did not make use of the time of grace God offered to him when he heard Paul’s preaching. He wanted to delay the whole matter until a more convenient time. He did not think the matter was so urgent. What a sad mistake! By doing this he closed the door to heaven. But this wasn’t the end of talking with Paul. Our text tells us, *“At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.”* His heart was set in unbelief. Instead of repenting and accepting the Gospel of Christ, he was thinking about bribery money from Paul. When he didn’t receive any bribe from Paul, he also did not render a verdict in Paul’s case. Paul would never try to be released from prison by offering a bribe. He was willing rather to be persecuted. He spoke of his entire ministry when he told the Corinthians, *“When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.”* (1 Corinthians 4:12–13, NIV84)

Our text continues, *“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.”* When Festus became governor in Felix’ place, Paul was left bound in prison. Everything that Felix did was done out of purely selfish motives. He deliberately acted in an unjust and cowardly manner simply to win the favor of the Jews and in this way to further his own selfish ambitions.

Our text relates a matter that occurs many times in our day in a similar manner. Think of the opportunities to hear the Gospel of Christ in our country especially. Our loving Savior, as the one and only Head of his Church on earth, instituted the Holy Ministry and commanded that *“repentance and forgiveness of sins”* (Luke 24:47,

NIV84) be preached all over the world. It is true that in many churches the true Gospel of Christ is no longer heard. But we have had the privilege of hearing such precious truths as these: God our Savior ***“wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”*** (1 Timothy 2:4, NIV84) God ***“has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”*** (2 Timothy 1:9–10, NIV84) The Gospel tells us that Jesus paid for all our sins with his precious blood and innocent suffering and death. ***“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”*** (Romans 4:25, NIV84)

God has done everything possible for our salvation. But there are many people like Felix who wait for a more convenient time to hear the Word of God. Many never find that more convenient time and consequently are lost. Let us all consider this matter earnestly, for we do not know if there will be another opportunity in the future. For all we know, we may not be among the living tomorrow! Let us learn from the sad experience of Felix and his wife how important it is to hear God’s Word when the opportunity is given. The Bible says, ***“They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.’”*** (Acts 16:31, NIV84) When we hear this Gospel of Christ we can come to faith in Jesus. Paul says, ***“it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.”*** (Romans 1:16, NIV84) This is true because, as Paul also says, ***“faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”*** (Romans 10:17, NIV84) And it is all a precious gift of God’s undeserved loving kindness. ***“It is by grace you have been saved.”*** (Ephesians 2:5, NIV84) God grant that we may be able to say with the hymn writer:

“I heard the voice of Jesus say, ‘Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down Thy head upon My breast.’
I came to Jesus as I was, Weary and worn and sad;
I found in Him a resting place, And He has made me glad.” Amen. (The Lutheran Hymnal: 277:1)

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