

²² 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 favour to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

Last week we saw Tertullus the Sanhedrin's lawyer flatter governor Felix and put the case against Paul, which was that he caused trouble, riots and allegedly desecrated the Temple. Paul refutes the accusations and calls on witnesses to the so-called desecration of the Temple, and then claims the issue for which he is here is about the resurrection of the dead.

Felix has had enough because this is about theology, not law breaking or causing disorder. Resurrection of the dead was a fanciful concept for Romans and most people today, that remains true. However the Sanhedrin seemed to be unaware that Felix knew more about the Way than they did. Remember the Roman Cornelius was a centurion in Caesarea who came to faith after Peter's vision. Felix adjourns the case, and summons Lysias, the commander of the Jerusalem garrison, to come in person, to hear his side of things. The letter written by Lysias was brief and indicated that he had saved a Roman citizen from a mob wanting to kill him, and that there was a plot to assassinate Paul, so he was sent away – with a large escort – to safety in Caesarea for Felix to deal with. Doubtless this was a disappointment to the Sanhedrin. The chief priest Ananias may have thought he had better things to do than hang around waiting for the case to be reopened. We don't hear anything more from him in Acts.

The last verse (verse 27) says Paul was held for two years, because Felix wanted peace with the Jewish leadership. We know he ended his time as governor falling out with the Jews, and had the High Priest Jonathan executed because he threatened to report Felix to Caesar for his handling of Jewish affairs. Ironically Jonathan had recommended Felix to Caesar! Ananias the high priest who gave evidence against Paul was assassinated by Jews shortly after this time for being too pro-Roman. All in all, despite being married to the daughter of King Herod Agrippa (the one eaten by worms for not denying he was a god - Acts 12:23), Felix's connections with the Jewish ruling classes, didn't count for much. Some 10 years later the Romans had enough of continual Jewish insurrections, and Titus besieged Jerusalem, flattened the whole city to rubble, and Josephus claimed a million Jews were killed in a four year war from 66 to 70AD. 70,000 Jews were enslaved to build the Coliseum in Rome. Felix spent much of his time putting down revolts and sending people to catch and punish criminals in an increasingly lawless Judea.

Paul was just another Jew that caused trouble, but an interesting one. But as he was a Roman citizen, verse 23 says that Paul was allowed some freedom under guard and his friends were permitted to take care of his needs. Prisoners were not well looked after, and they had to rely on friends and relatives to provide them with food, clothing, and other essentials. Verse 24 reveals that both he and his wife Drusilla wanted to speak to Paul about his beliefs. Paul would have been guarded in what he said in front of the accusing high priest and his smarmy lawyer, and didn't say anything about Jesus then, but now in a more informal situation Paul did give the Gospel to Felix and his wife. Drusilla had left her first husband (a Syrian king of Emesa) to live with Felix before being actually divorced. Living in sin with a Roman made her a scarlet woman in the eyes of the Sanhedrin and the Jewish elders, but then she was a princess, so all they could do was keep quiet and flatter Felix regardless of their distaste of his and his wife's morals. In this Roman world, the native puppet kings married Roman ladies from great families to keep in with the Romans and hold on to their thrones and wealth, and their daughters married Romans who oversaw their kingdoms. All very cosy... but in the end none of this mattered if the people revolted and the native kings were unable to keep the peace. King Herod Agrippa II, Drusilla's brother was the last native ruler of Judea and that was the end of Herod the Great's family running the country.

Paul spoke about Jesus, but Luke tells us that his emphasis was on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, which was all too much for Felix. A guilty man usually doesn't want to hear about the areas where his guilt was very apparent to others as well as himself. The governor was, as we see in verse 26 unrighteous looking to be bribed. He delayed judgment on Paul out of spite as he could have settled the matter quickly and didn't like the sound of being judged for his sins. Paul as we have seen on many occasions, is no respecter of persons, and gives his account of God's expectations for all men and women, including Felix and Drusilla. But then Paul was as much a Roman citizen as Felix the son of a Greek freedman implying his ancestors were enslaved though he claimed descent from some minor Greek king, and a minority of Romans felt that just because some fellow Romans were in powerful positions didn't mean they were better or superior to themselves. Most Romans worked on the basis that it was unwise to upset people in power and that discretion was the better part of valour. Paul had faith and heard Jesus say he would be in Rome, so he had the assurance that Felix wasn't going to have him executed, and that he could be bold in front of him—far bolder than Tertullus or Ananias dared to be, as they could suffer under the Romans. Paul had the power to make Felix afraid to hear more, which is an unusual reaction from such a hardened sinner as Felix. And yet, Felix had further conversations with Paul over the next couple of years. Paul didn't make a convert.

The final verse of this chapter says Porcius Festus became procurator or governor leaving Paul imprisoned. Apparently Felix was recalled to Rome because of Jewish complaints about him seeking to enrich himself, but luckily his brother was a friend of Nero and the case ended without any punishment. Porcius Festus was handed a job that was nothing but trouble, especially as King Herod Agrippa II was out of favour with the Temple authorities and failed to enforce law and order.

So what do we learn from this passage?

Seeking justice from unjust judges is unlikely to go your way. We have seen that the Sanhedrin made a judgment about Paul based on past animosity and not on factual evidence. They broke the ninth commandment bearing false witness about Paul desecrating the Temple. Claudius Lysias lied in his report saying he rescued Paul because he was a Roman citizen. Felix expected a bribe before bothering to make a judgment having had all the facts. He withheld justice simply because he had the power to do so for personal gain.

Unjust judges are sometimes faced with their own unrighteousness in this world. In this case Felix didn't like hearing about righteousness, self-control and God's final judgment. But he didn't fear God so the final judgment of all men didn't affect him that much. Today many have no fear of God - only fear of fellow man and what men can do. Consequently right and wrong are meaningless concepts when there is no standard to measure them against. In a secular world that increasingly rejects God's standards of right and wrong, what the world considers right or wrong becomes fluid. As Christians we must proclaim the Truth, like Paul, when faced with times when our lives and reputations depend on it.

Going to law to seek justice is costly and may not go the way that is just. The innocent often do not get justice and the wicked often go unpunished. In the Roman world this was commonplace because it was a society where fear of divine justice wasn't high on the agenda of the rich and powerful whose only aims were survival of themselves and their families, using whatever means were available. As for the common people, pretty much all justice was beyond their reach. Does that sound familiar

What does Jesus say?

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ 'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Let's look at righteousness. What does it mean? It is the quality of being right in the eyes of God. It is based on God's standard, not that of man. As human beings we cannot attain God's righteousness, as before God we are all sinners and like filthy rags. Isaiah 64:6 *All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.*

We have no righteousness of our own, but that of Jesus who covers our sins by what He did on the cross. However, by faith Abraham was counted righteous and rewarded for it by being blessed materially and spiritually. His descendants benefit from the covenant God made with Abraham that they would be blessed through him and be as numerous as the stars. Righteousness comes from believing in Jesus Romans 10:1-13 *Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. ² For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. ³ **Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.** ⁴ **Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.** ⁵ **Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: 'The person who does these things will live by them.'** ⁶ **But the righteousness that is by faith says: 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?"' (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ or "Who will descend into the deep?"' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).** ⁸ **But what does it say? 'The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,' that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: ⁹ if you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. ¹¹ As Scripture says, 'Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.'** ¹² **For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'***

Praise the name of Jesus, who forgives our sins and allows us to come before Him on the last day clothed in His righteousness and be given an eternal gift of life.