

Courageous Conviction (Part 4): Integrity Matters - Acts 24:1-27
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

Our story in Acts this week finds Paul giving his third defense speech (of five between Acts 21-27). He had been whisked away in the middle of the night by the Roman Tribunal in Jerusalem after learning of an assassination plot against Paul. Lysias sent Paul to the Roman coastal town of Caesarea which served as the Roman capital in Judea, and also served as the primary residence of the Roman Governor, at this time a man named Felix. Felix was actually as awful ruler, deeply despised by the Jews for his cruelty. In seeking to make a name for himself and maintain peace in the region, Felix had a long line of violent injustices against the Jews. With a strong show of force he had over and over again put down anything that smelled of rebellion leaving both the guilty and innocent dead. Maybe just a year or two before these events he actually put into motion a plot to murder the Jewish High Priest named Jonathan. His activity was so violent and cruel that it even got to Rome and would lead to his removal (referenced at the end of our story), where the Emperor Nero thought this guy was awful. If you know your history, this guy was too cruel for Nero.

So Paul finds himself in front of Felix being prosecuted by the Jewish High Priest, some of the elders, and their legal representative Tertullus. We know nothing of this prosecutor outside of this event in Acts. He has a Roman name, which may point to his being a Gentile (which would be ironic if you have read the whole story. Or he may of have been a Jew who became an expert in Roman law and for credibility's sake took on a Roman name. Regardless, we do see that he is both aware of Jewish custom and laws, and Roman values and laws. While the Romans highest value was to maintain "peace" in order to keep power, the Jews highest value was to enforce their religious way of seeing the world and doing life.

But what is striking in this story is the complete lack of integrity by both sides here. Tertullus schmoozes Felix with words of flattery that completely misrepresent the actual relationship between this ruler and the Jewish leaders. But at this moment their goal was to get Paul handed over to them so they can take him out back of the building and do away with him, so whatever it takes to accomplish their goal. They then present in open court three false and trumped up charges which they cannot offer evidence. We had already seen in the story of Acts that the Sanhedrin violated the principles of the Jewish Law multiple times in their treatment and actions against Paul. They want to use the Law to off Paul, but have no concern for keeping the same Law in the way they treat Paul. The lack of integrity for the Jewish leaders can be traced way further back than the story of Acts, as well. This was also how they acted against Jesus, often breaking the very Law they sought to indict Jesus with, and then holding a completely illegal trial in the middle of the night with false witnesses.

On the other hand, there is the Roman representative Felix. In the story we see him pretty much straight out lie to the Jewish representatives at the end fo the hearing, telling them that he will decide the matter after Lysias shows up. But he already had Lysias's words of Paul's innocence in a letter, and there is no record of the Tribune being called or coming to Caesarea. So he already knows what Lysias would proclaim, which is Paul's innocence. Yet, Felix leaves Paul in chains for two years, knowing full well he hadn't broken any Roman law, and really hadn't broken any Jewish law, but does so to appease the Jews (v. 27). For Felix, Paul is just a pawn being used to manipulate the Jews, even though the story demonstrates Paul's innocence over and over again. Yet, even more disgusting is the attempt to solicit a bribe from Paul. He has friends, and it would be easy for Paul to get some funds, pay the Roman off, and then get on a boat and go anywhere he wants.

In the middle of the story, though, is Paul. First of all, Luke (our author) has spent much of the book developing one of the clear themes of Acts, the innocence of Paul. At

every point Paul has been careful to be a good citizen of both Rome and Jerusalem. He has not broken the Law of God nor has he encouraged any Jewish person to violate God's Commands. He did not take a Gentile into the Temple, nor did he ever incite a riot. What he did was preach the Gospel and point people to the resurrection clearly. He is guilty of being a member of "The Way", and telling people that the whole Old Testament is fulfilled in Jesus. But it is the moment with the bribe that I most want us to see this week. It would have been so easy to do this, and the motivation could have been easy to defend. Pay a bribe, then get on with the mission. But Paul knows what all of us should know, that integrity matters for the believer in Jesus. Inconsistent lives will create a mixed message from the church. So we need Gospel shaped consciences that will lead to lives with deep and beautiful consistency in proclaiming and demonstrating Christ.

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Proverbs 29	Proverbs 30	Proverbs 31	Daniel 1	Daniel 2	Daniel 3	Daniel 4

Reading from this past week: Acts 24:1-27

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Acts 25:1-27

Family Worship

Song - *The Lord My God My Salvation*

<https://youtu.be/RgikQg40ZEw>

Gospel Project

Unit: The People Prepare

Story: Nehemiah Rebuilt the Walls

Big Picture Question: How should we feel when we sin?

Answer: When we sin, we should feel sorry that we have disobeyed God and want to turn from our sin because we love Him.

Scripture: Nehemiah 1-7

New City Catechism

Question #6: How can we glorify God?

Answer: By loving him and by obeying his commands and law.

Verse: Deuteronomy 11:1

Scripture

Acts 24:1-27

- What are some ways the story shows us the lack of integrity by the Jews and Felix?
- Would you have paid the bribe to get your freedom? What are some good reasons for doing this? Why would Luke include this in the story and what might it be saying for us?
- What are some ways Christians in our culture have lacked integrity which has led to the harm of our witness in the world?
- How can and should the Gospel shape our conscience and integrity?

Prayer

*Pray that we would grow to be more like Jesus and live lives of integrity before the unbelieving world.

*Pray for the teachers, leaders, administration, and staff at Blevins Elementary.