

Monday - Week Thirty-nine

Acts Twenty-four: The Trial before Felix

Summary: Paul's trial before Felix was marked by witnessing, corruption and indecision.

Background and Comments

- The lawyer Tertullus employed a common debating technique at the beginning of his speech: he said a bunch of nice things about the judge! He then accused Paul of being a ringleader of a dangerous sect that threatened Jewish peace all over the world. For his part Paul said that the charges were groundless. It's also noteworthy that Paul spoke about the Lord. His defense turned into a sermon to Felix!
- Paul was permitted to have some freedom while he waited for the decision of the case. Felix obviously didn't consider Paul a ringleader of a dangerous sect trying to disrupt the peace of the Jewish nation. In fact, the only reason he didn't release Paul was that he thought Paul (as a leader in the Christian church) would be able to offer him a large bribe. We are not the only ones who struggle with corruption in government!

Lessons for Today

- Felix became afraid when Paul preached to him. Perhaps Paul had touched Felix's conscience with his words about sin and grace. Poor Felix stopped listening! It appears that he never became a Christian even though the world's greatest missionary was his "personal pastor" for a time. Do you ever find that some people back off when you touch a nerve in spiritual discussions? Often it's good to back off for a short time ... but not for too long. If you simply quit talking about something you might never get back to it. We never know how much time God will give us to continue our dialogue with individuals.
- Paul spent two years in jail! Couldn't Paul have been doing mission work in far-away lands? Couldn't he have visited the congregations he founded? Why did God allow him to be locked up for so long? We simply don't know ... although we know that God had His reasons. God still has His reasons when we go through long periods of time that we might consider "wastes" of our time.

Read: Psalm 20; 1 Thessalonians 4

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, give me patience as You guide my life. As You direct the affairs of my life remind me that You are wise and loving. Help me to be satisfied and even excited about whatever You put in front of me. I pray in Jesus' name; Amen.

Tuesday - Week Thirty-nine

Acts Twenty-five: Paul before Festus and Agrippa

Summary: God had prophesied that Paul would preach before world leaders; now he got his chance.

Background and Comments

- Paul saw through the Jew's efforts to have the trial moved to Jerusalem. The Jews had already plotted to kill him on the way to a new trial (23:12-23). God used all of this to get Paul to Rome.
- As a Roman citizen Paul had the right to appeal to Caesar; this was the final court of appeal. If Paul were to win this case it would mean that Christianity would become a legal religion. The Jews must have hated to hear that Paul's appeal was granted.
- Festus had a problem. He was about to send Paul to Caesar but he didn't have a charge against Paul. This would have made Festus look bad. Part of the reason Festus wanted Paul to speak to Agrippa was to have some help in writing a letter to Caesar.

Lessons for Today

- The Jewish leaders lied to Festus (about wanting Paul to stand trial in Jerusalem) and were willing to kill in cold blood. They thought that it was OK to break God's law in order to do what they considered to be God's will (killing St. Paul). God doesn't operate like that. He doesn't tell us to break His will (His law) to fulfill His will.
- Bernice was King Agrippa's sister. She has been married to her uncle when she was 13 and had two sons. When he died she lived with her brother. When rumors surfaced that she and her brother were committing incest she married the king of Cilicia. She soon left him to return to her brother's house. Later she became the mistress to the emperor's son. How different Paul was from these people! Jesus and the apostles didn't avoid preaching to and spending time with people whose lives had gotten all mixed up. Are you willing to do the same thing?

Read: Psalm 21; 1 Thessalonians 5.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the friends that You have given me. Let us spend plenty of time together so that we can grow closer to one another. My friends are often a bright spot in my life; let me be a bright spot in their lives as well. I ask this in the name of my best Friend; Amen.

Wednesday - Week Thirty-nine

Catechism Review

Read Questions 296-303.

1. Answer 296 tells us that we prepare for communion so that we don't receive the Lord's Supper in an unworthy way. There is also a positive reason that we prepare for communion. We prepare our hearts so that we are ready to receive the spiritual blessings that the Lord has for us. How exactly can we prepare for the Lord's Supper? Be specific and imaginative.

2. Why don't we allow people we aren't in fellowship with (people who believe different things than we do) to receive communion in our churches?

What if someone would say, 'I do believe everything you believe. I just belong to a different church body'?

3. Why do we wait until after confirmation to have our young people receive communion?

4. How exactly will receiving the Lord's Supper help us to live a God-pleasing life?

Read: Psalm 22; 2 Thessalonians 1.

Prayer: Dear Father, once again I thank You for the Lord's Supper. Amen.

Thursday - Week Thirty-nine

Acts Twenty-six: Paul before Agrippa

Summary: Paul didn't spend his time before Agrippa trying to improve his standing in the court system. He had a bigger goal: he wanted to convert Agrippa!

Background and Comments

- Paul returned to a familiar theme in his sermon. He told the story of his early life and conversion. This was not just a convenient topic for Paul; this was the most important day in Paul's life. Since it changed his life Paul used it to change the lives of his hearers.
- Festus interrupted Paul when he started talking about Jesus' resurrection. He even said that Paul's great learning had made him insane! People still find certain parts of the Bible (especially anything miraculous) to be nonsense. How sad; they are missing the fact that God is powerful and loving.
- Festus and Agrippa agreed that Paul had done nothing to deserve death. His appeal still stood though. He would go to Rome.

Lessons for Today

- God certainly did use the fact that Paul had been a Pharisee in his early life. Paul's Pharisaic training gave him an incredible understanding of the Old Testament. This understanding comes through in almost all of Paul's letters. Paul must have had training in logical reasoning and public speaking in his training as well. This came in handy in his role as a missionary and preacher. God wants to use your life experiences in His service. Can you pick out two things from your past that God has used to give you tools to do His will?
- Agrippa was not turned off by the mention of Jesus' resurrection. He was open to the fact that miracles could happen. At the same time he was not really interested in becoming a Christian. When he walked out of the room he was walking out of the best chance he had to come to faith.
- Paul told Agrippa that he wanted Agrippa to be like him except for his chains. Do you want people to be like you? Is your life peaceful, joyful and loving enough to be imitated?

Read: Psalm 23; 2 Thessalonians 2.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the family that You have given to me. Let me treat them in kind and loving ways instead of taking them for granted. I pray in Jesus' name; Amen.

Friday - Week Thirty-nine

John - Lesson ten: Healing of the official's son (4:43-54)

1. Obviously this royal official had heard about Jesus' miracles. This man's son was near death twenty miles away in Capernaum. The man came to Jesus and begged for his son's life. How is this man like so many people today?
2. Verse 48 seems like a cruel and heartless statement to a man experiencing great sorrow and anxiety. This man had the same attitude that many of the Galileans had: They wanted signs and wonders from Jesus. Jesus was making this man (and the others who were there - Jesus used the plural form of "you") examine himself. Jesus wanted this man to ask these types of questions: Who is Jesus? Have I a right to demand this? Why haven't I come to Jesus before? Why am I praying to Jesus?

When you ask yourself those questions what happens? (Take a few minutes to dwell on each of the above questions).

3. Verse 48 was not an outright refusal. Instead Jesus warned this man that his faith was not in the right place. Jesus was trying to lead this man to place his trust in Jesus Himself instead of simply being amazed at His miracles. Jesus' warning/encouragement stirred the man's heart. Naturally the man prayed. What is touching about the man's prayer? (v 49)

Comment: Christ first works in us then for us.

4. The NIV translation of verse 50 could be better. Really Jesus said, "Your son is better". What huge test of faith did Jesus give to this father? How is our faith often tested in the same way?
5. This man became a missionary - soon his whole household believed in Jesus. Why was that only natural for that man?

Read: Psalm 24; 2 Thessalonians 3.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, please cause my faith to grow stronger just as this man's faith did. I pray in Jesus' name; Amen.