

Acts 24:22-27

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[0:00] Well, good morning. As you who I don't know, my name is Dave. I'm one of Shoreline's elders or pastors. And it's my joy to open up God's word with you to Acts chapter 24 today.

As we continue our series in the book of Acts. And to sort of remind ourselves to relocate ourselves where we are.

I'll let a pagan tell us where we are in the book of Acts. Paul is under arrest. He is in Caesarea Maritima on the Mediterranean coast of Israel.

Just north of modern day Tel Aviv. He is in Felix's possession, so to speak. In his custody. He has been sent there by Claudius Lysias. And Lysias explains why Paul is there. And as we look back in chapter 23, he sent a letter along with this prisoner to Felix.

[1:04] Lysias put sort of a positive spin for himself on this letter, as we recall. But it is a fair summary of where we've come and why Paul is here before Felix.

And so, Acts chapter 23, beginning in 26, Lysias essentially explains how we've gotten where we are today. His letter reads, Claudius Lysias, to his excellency, the governor, Felix.

Greetings. This man, Paul, 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 Felix didn't 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 in prison.

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.

[2:10] And last week, we saw Felix examine Paul. His accusers brought a lawyer to accuse him.

They didn't have anything of real substance. They had accusation, not evidence. Paul pointed that out, made his defense for himself. It looked very similar to the defense he had to make before Lysias.

And by Roman law, that should have been the end of the matter. There was no evidence. Paul should be free. And that's where we pick up today. And the first word of our passage, verse 22, is, But.

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. And he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody, but have some liberty.

That none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs. After some days, Felix came with his wife, Priscilla, who was Jewish, and sent for Paul, and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.

[3:20] And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed. And said, Go away from the present. When I get an opportunity, I will summon you.

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 Portius Hephaestus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison. This is God's word to his people. Let us pray. Lord, in these next moments, may the words of my mouth, the invitation of all our hearts, be acceptable in your sight.

O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen. It's interesting, the excuse that Felix makes, isn't it?

He says, verse 22, that he is going to wait for Lysias to come and give his counsel on the matter. We already know.

[4:41] He already knows. But how Lysias has judged the matter? Remember, back in the letter, Paul arrived with a letter from Lysias to Felix.

Chapter 23, verse 29, he gives his judgment. He says, I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing, deserving death, or imprisonment.

Lysias has already given his wisdom on the matter. Yet Felix says, I'm going to wait for that guy to come. There's no indication that he's coming at all. We have no record that he ever did. Go and see Felix there.

And so Felix, holding that letter in his hand, everyone in the court knows that Lysias has already given his statement on this.

And so it's not like Felix is waiting for more information. He's not getting new, wise counsel. He already has gotten it. Felix is stalling.

[5:43] And he's stalling for, verse 27, two years. And what is he stalling for?

Well, actually, we see that he has more than one reason. First, and perhaps most nobly, he has, at least to some extent, an interest in the message of Jesus Christ.

We see at the beginning, verse 22, that Felix had a rather accurate knowledge of the way. Now, as we saw from Lysias back in Jerusalem before Paul got to Felix, Roman officials did not typically have a robust understanding of Jewish faith and practice, let alone the beliefs of what at this point seemed to be just like a small splinter cell sect.

And so Felix's knowledge of the way would be like, you know, the governor here in Connecticut having an accurate knowledge of what distinguishes, you know, Presbyterians and Baptists.

You would not expect that. That's not a normal thing. How many people in this room could accurately explain that difference, right? Then, verse 24, again we see his intrigue into the things of Christ, at least a little.

[7:04] 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. As a reason about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment.

And so, at least he has some interest in the things of Christ. That's one thing he's stalling on. But he's also stalling for money. Right?

Verse 26. At the same time, he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he's sent for him often and conversed with him. And third, he was stalling because Paul was useful to him politically. He was interested in what Paul could do, specifically having Paul as a prisoner, could do for him and his reputation as a leader. Verse 27.

When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. We'll revisit that in a minute. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison. And so he did it for his political imaginations.

[8:12] And so we see a picture of a man who is here interested, one, in Jesus, at least to some extent. It might be an academic interest. We're not sure right now. Two in money.

And three in reputation. And the question of the day is, which one of those interests will win out? That's a question for Felix, certainly. That's a question also for you and for me. You might not sit in a seat of power like Felix.

But you and everyone you've ever known stands just where Felix stands. You are confronted with interests that vie for your attention, for your value, for your allegiance.

And the same question confronts you. Which interests will win out? And as we'll see, that question is relevant for those, certainly for those who have not yet come to faith in Jesus Christ.

[9:27] But also for those who have. We'll follow him day by day. Because day by day, those same interests still come at us.

Still vie for our attention. And would knock us off the cause of Christ. But in the meantime, let's keep considering the case of Felix.

I'd like to suggest that his story here is a playing out of Christ's parable of the buried treasure.

We see in Matthew chapter 13. Where actually, it's exact inverse. In Matthew chapter 13, verse 44, Jesus gave this very brief parable.

It's actually one of a series of similar parables. We'll look at just this one today. I think it has much to do with Felix. Jesus said, And like I said, I believe that Felix is living out this parable in reverse.

[10:51] Just like the man in the field. He wasn't exactly looking for this great treasure on his own. The treasure fell into that man's lap as he was working in the field. Paul arrived on Felix's doorstep, bearing the testimony of an empty tomb.

He happened upon this great treasure. And that's where their paths now diverge. The man in the parable takes action and seeks out the great treasure.

Felix delays for two years. It would be easy for us to say that their paths split in the way that they responded, the way they acted upon the treasure.

But that would be, you know, that one grabbed it, and one held off. But that would be premature. That would be a little too surface level to simply look at that outward action.

That would be a mistake for us because the Bible is a deep and a rich thing. It dies beneath the surface, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, discerning the thoughts and the intentions of our hearts.

[12:03] And that's what we see, actually, even in that very brief parable, two sentences long, right? We actually see some of the heart of that man in the parable.

Because in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys a field. He's found something, and he knows it. Something worth rejoicing over.

And certainly Luke shows for us Felix's intentions. Some of his heart as well.

He has other concerns. Luke's already laid them out for us, their money, his reputation, things like that. And that's why they acted differently.

Both find treasures that will just land in their lap. But the difference between them is how they evaluate and weigh that treasure against other treasures.

[13:02] If he looks at other considerations, we've already mentioned money and reputation, but there's actually a hidden consideration in this text as well. And it's sex.

Look at verse 24. 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.

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.

Why was he alarmed? Paul came and preached about faith in Christ Jesus, and he also spoke about discipleship. That's the self-control.

He talked about not only discipleship, he talked about the coming judgment. Historians tell us that Drusilla was Felix's third wife. She was a member of Herod's family, and Felix wasn't her first husband either.

[14:07] Now, she wasn't a widow, and she wasn't actually even really divorced. He had seduced her. She ran away from her husband at night and ran to him.

And so here we have a scene where Paul is echoing John the Baptist. He's in a Roman official's custody, declaring to him, you know, it is not lawful for you to have her repent and believe the gospel.

Many think that that's the sharp end, the pointy end of the spear. Paul is saying, see, you are a sinner. You need atonement before a holy God. And here is the evidence of that.

Repent and believe on Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And again, let's consider that next thing, that money thing. That's probably the easiest thing for us to consider in Felix's case.

Verse 26, at that time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul, so he sent for him often and conversed with him. It's so sad that when Felix looked at Paul and evaluated the opportunity that Paul presented him, what he saw was a treasure, but just the wrong one.

[15:38] The lesser treasure. Now, it's not quite certainly why he thought he could get a bribe from Paul. Perhaps he thought that Paul, as a Roman citizen, was from a family of meat.

That's quite possible. In his testimony to Felix, if you look back to verse 17, Paul talks about bringing alms from the other churches that he supported and preached to to Jerusalem. Perhaps he thought, oh, he's got a pot of money. It could be, verse 23, Felix talked about not inhibiting Paul from having visitors attending to his needs.

Roman prison is very different than American prison. In American prison, you're fed by the prison. That's not the case. You're in custody.

You're on your own. People have to bring you support. And Felix says, don't hinder any of his friends from doing that. It's very likely that Paul had lots of visitors during this time.

[16:48] Caesarea, I remember, is where Philip was right before he got, went to, to Jerusalem and, you know, having his last days as a free man. And so it could be that he sees all of these friends coming to him.

Wow, this guy's really important. He must have means. And just as an aside, if Paul has lots of visitors, what does that attest to about the church?

The many Christians visiting and supporting Paul would have made him look important and wealthy, et cetera, et cetera. But isn't that in itself, Christian fellowship, a wonderful treasure itself? If you want to feel wealthy in the things that really make you feel wealthy, invest yourself in your church family and find yourself having the things that money can't buy in your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Now, in any event, Felix might have thought that Paul could provide a bribe for many reasons. And like now, a cartoon character, they see a pile of cash, their eyeballs turn to dollar signs, they can't see anything else.

[18:16] He sees now in Paul an opportunity for cash. He can't see anything else. And here's that sad truth, Paul was an opportunity for wealth.

he was a truer, better wealth. We recently spent four weeks talking about Christian contentment. Everything that billionaires possess is dust. The treasure that Felix thought he could get, perhaps by a bribe from Paul, was no treasure at all.

But Paul was the opportunity, the bearer of the news of an everlasting treasure in Jesus Christ. It is so sad that Felix saw in Paul the opportunity for wealth and missed the mark so widely.

he just couldn't see it. It's as if the man in the parable in Matthew 13 was working in the field, found the great treasure, bought the field, and decided to farm it instead of dig out the treasure.

[19:35] I guess there's some money to be made in selling your crops, but nothing like the treasure that was there, and that's what Felix is doing. And the question is, is that what you're doing?

Is that what I'm doing? Without a question. And that last concern, that last thing that Felix weighed more heavily as a better thing than the message of the resurrection that Paul was bringing him, had to do with his fame, had to do with his reputation.

Verse 27, when two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, desiring to do the Jews in favor, Felix left Paul in prison. Why, you ask, you might ask, would Felix do a favor for people he was no longer governing?

Well, Luke, in the way he wrote this verse, was quite kind to Felix. In saying that he was succeeded by Porcius Festus, Felix was being removed for cause, for incompetence.

And so his future was very much in doubt. And so he needed every friend that he could get. And who better to be a supporter of him?

[21:00] The vote of confidence than of the people he had just governed over. That is the bargaining trip that Paul is to him in this sense.

And so he thinks, well, the Jewish leaders want Paul in prison. That is politically helpful to me, so that's what they're going to get. And so unlike the man in the field who leaves with joy, Felix, leaves with nothing.

He thought that Paul was his ticket to wealth, and he was, but it was the wrong wealth that Felix was considering. He thought Paul was useful to his reputation, perhaps it helped him.

He left only by the skin of his teeth, nothing to show for himself. And the question then, we can't do anything for Felix today, but I can ask you the question.

Say, what about you? Right? These same things sex, money, reputation.

[22:20] These are like the biggest drivers of human behavior. Are they not? What about you? First, Felix had what we saw there in verse 22, an accurate knowledge of the way.

And we must start there. Do you have an accurate knowledge of the way? The way is Christianity. Do you know and understand that you were made by a God who is incomprehensibly glorious and holy and merciful?

Who made you for himself? He is the great treasure. You were meant to behold him, be known by him and loved by him forever.

and that we are all separated from him by our own sins, choosing our way, not his, seeking after these lesser things, not him.

And sinning against so great a God incurs so great a guilt, guilt that you and I cannot possibly hope to have overcome on our own.

[23:36] And so he sent his son to die in our place to pay that penalty on our behalf. That is the cross.

Which is not the end of the story though, because he rose from the grave. That's what Paul's message has of Ben. This king broke death. So all who repent and believe and have trusted on him, share in all that he has done his atonement for our sins, so that we can stand justified before our great and only God and in his everlasting life.

The tomb is empty and it will be for us as well. That is the rather accurate knowledge of the way.

And how will you evaluate that against the other things in your life?

Felix, deferred because his conscience was locked. And he sought money over salvation. And he sought favor over this great treasure.

Favor among men. And we look at him and we say, you fool. Don't delay. You don't even know if you have tomorrow. Don't hold him there in prison.

[25:01] Bring him there. fall on your knees and repent. We say that to Felix. What about you? What about you? We look at Felix and say, you fool.

No amount of money is worth your soul. And then we have to ask, what about me? What about you? We look at Felix and say, you fool. No amount of reputation is worth your soul.

And we have to ask, what about me? And what about you? What's holding you back? If you've never come to Christ, what is holding you back?

Might it be one of these things? Knowing, right, sex, money, reputation. Knowing that coming to Christ means that you'll have a king means that you have to play by his rules.

St. Augustine was, before he came to Christ, a notorious sexual sinner. And in his confessions, he said, on letting go of that, those pleasures, for the greater pleasures of Christ, he said, what I once feared to lose, I found it was now a joy to me, to put away.

[26:35] Perhaps you'll consider that. Sex, money. Like I said, we've been talking a lot lately about how all billionaires that billionaires possess is but dust.

All that I possess that you possess likewise is dust. But even if it was lasting, even if it was something that could endure, even if you could somehow extend your life indefinitely to continue enjoying it.

Everything that you have, that I have, that we've achieved, that we hope to gain in this world, wealth, respect, relationships, possessions, security, it is so small when it is set next to the kingdom of heaven.

That when we see what's in store for us, friends, we would heavily, gladly, give it up in an instant if we could but see.

And we would consider ourselves overwhelmingly blessed to have the opportunity to make that exchange. Sex, money, reputation.

[28:16] In Matthew 13, this hypothetical farmer, his hypothetical friends, must have thought he was quite crazy, liquidating all his assets to go buy a field. but he gladly traded his reputation in their eyes for the much greater smile of God.

And so we ask first, if you've never come to Christ, would you look again at this king?

One pastor that I greatly admire put it this way. He said, here is one, Jesus, here is one who has riches money cannot buy, and who gives them freely, gives himself freely to us, and then he asks, have you ever seen him for what he is.

I would invite you to look at the cross of Christ, and see love to the uttermost, and a treasure beyond anything that you could hope or imagine in this world.

And I would invite you to come to Christ. Because the treasure that he is promising us in the parable, and the treasure that is laid before Felix's feet, the treasure that you and I must consider today.

[30:08] It is worth all we could give and more, and yet it comes to us for free. how great is that?

The great Puritan Thomas Watson said, of the treasure that is offered us in the gospel of Jesus Christ is Christ himself.

And he is so super eminent a reward that we cannot set him forth in all his luster and magnificence. Put the whole world on a scale with him, and it is as if you should weigh a feather with a mountain of gold.

God is far better than all other things put together. He is better than the world, better than heaven. He is the original cause of all good things.

[31:10] Nothing is sweet without him. And so what lies in store for God's people? There in the kingdom of heaven you shall tread upon stars, be companions with angels and fellowship with the blessed trinity.

Let the saints then be glad in the Lord. In God are treasures which can never be emptied and pleasures which can never be emptied.

treasure. So if you've not come to Christ, come get treasure at no cost.

A treasure you could never hope to get. You didn't dare to dream could be real offered to you for faith.

and then friends, let us live like we have it. Because the sad truth is that even after we have come into a possession of a treasure like this, we could live as if we don't even have it.

[32:35] I'm going to do something audacious. I'm going to extend the parable of the buried treasure. Now I'm confident that I can do this because so much of scripture think of Paul, this is Paul before Felix, think so much of Paul's epistles are you have this treasure, now live like it.

Right? You have new life in Christ, you have this inheritance, you have a home in heaven, the king himself is with you this moment, so live like that's true. That's Paul's message in his epistles.

So if he extended this parable in Matthew 13, the farmer once he got that field, got the treasure, he didn't stop rejoicing and he didn't live like a farmer anymore, I suspect.

He began living like a wealthy man, because of course he was, right? He rejoiced. He celebrated with his friends, he said, come rejoice with me. He had a feast, he was generous, and he probably relaxed a little bit about his future.

And that is a picture of what our Christian life ought look like. If we have treasure, treasure, let us live like those who have treasure.

[34:09] Now the wealth we have in the gospel is not material wealth, at least not yet. We have mansions in glory, but not today. Right now our treasure in the gospel is a spiritual treasure.

It is God himself with us. The purpose of a wedding is the marriage, right? To spend life with the beloved.

The purpose of coming to Christ is to be with Christ who has said, I will never leave you or forsake you. You cannot be apart from his glory and his love in your life, no matter what.

And so friends, we are spiritually wealthy. We have treasure. we have words from heaven. We have a spiritual family.

And we have the smile of God. But we are tempted every day to live like paupers and to rely on the things of this world just like Felix did.

[35:19] We can have treasure and live as if we're no different. reputation. I'll start with reputation just because it has something, at least something to do with our year-long emphasis on evangelism.

Paul could have used his reputation to get out of prison. As a Roman citizen, he could have petitioned to Caesar and gotten a judgment on that.

All the friends visiting him, he could have had them visit Felix as well. If Felix saw, oh my goodness, look at this guy, he's got so many friends, they keep petitioning me. He was governing by what? What was prudent, what was politically expedient to him. And if in his eyes, Paul could convince, through lobbying, using that reputation to lobby, he could have said, oh, you know what, actually it's more politically expedient to get rid of this guy, kick him out and get him free.

But Paul didn't do that. Instead, what did he see? What was the math in his head? Paul valued sharing the gospel more than his freedom.

[36:40] And so he didn't leverage his reputation for his own advantage, for his own freedom. Now, in this culture today, when I share the gospel, I risk my reputation to some degree, and so do you.

In this culture, when I live in accord with Christian holiness, I risk my reputation, so do you. The question then is, which is more valuable?

Is holding onto Christ, walking in his ways, walking with him, a valuable thing, or is being seen as not weird, a valuable thing?

Things like sex, things like reputation, things like money, will vie for our attention and affection and all our energies. And this world is designed to hold them in front of our eyes and say, this is treasure.

Friends, they're not next to Christ. Now, when I say money, this is not the give more money to the church speech, but that might be the message that some of you used to hear. I don't know.

[38:04] Rather, this is the give more of your life over to God for your joy, because he is treasure speech.

A fixation on money, regardless of where you put that money, saps your attention away from the actual treasure, saps your ability to give your life to the things of God where treasure is found.

We can be drawn to endlessly pursue money, and then say, I don't have time for church life, for community group, for where the treasure is found.

Christians can devote our attention. Do I spend more time looking at my investments and reading about where to put my money than I do praying? I have mixed up my treasure.

It's the holiday season. Which will you devote more of your attention to? Buying gifts? Or loving people?

[39:20] For exactly the same reason that Felix didn't want to go after the treasure, the true treasure, friends, even those of us who have that treasure, we can be drawn away from it day by day and walk as if we were spiritually impoverished.

Don't do it. Don't do it. if you are finding today, the Lord is convicting you today, that there is some other treasure that you are pursuing to the detriment of your joy because it is pulling you away from throwing yourselves into things of God where true treasure is.

grace, he invites you today and every day. Clear out the field and dig out the treasure and rejoice.

So here again the parable of the treasure in the field, Matthew 13, 44. The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up, and in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

And perhaps hear now the parable of Felix. The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which Felix found and covered up.

[40:59] Then in his greed and foolishness did nothing because he desired a lesser fortune. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Let's pray. O Lord our God, there is none like you.

There is none like you. But day by day, we are tempted to see shiny objects in this world and to think of them.

there is treasure. Would you open our eyes, strip us of our illusions, and help us find our joy in you, the fountain of every blessing.

We pray that in the name of Jesus Christ, our King and our Redeemer. Amen. Amen. Amen.