

“PAUL AND THE PROCRASTINATOR.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Texts for the Sermon: Acts 24:22-27

Introduction.

A national survey was conducted revealing 97% of adults have experienced procrastination at one time or another. They are still waiting for the other 3% to turn in their surveys. Did you know National Procrastination Day is tomorrow, maybe.

Procrastination is something best put off until tomorrow.
Procrastinate now and panic later.

Someone has written, "Procrastination is my sin. It brings me nothing but sorrow. I know I should stop it. In fact, I will, tomorrow". (Gloria Pitzer)

OK, enough procrastinating, lets get to this sermon about Paul and the procrastinator, Felix.

Acts 24:22-23, Felix's procrastination on Paul's legal case.

Our text begins with Felix procrastinating making a decision regarding Paul. He defers it until Lysias comes, who doesn't seem to ever come. The Jews didn't get their way with Paul. And Paul didn't get his freedom.

Felix knows Paul is innocent of any charges worthy of death, that this was a trivial matter stirred up by the ill-will of the priests.

This is confirmed by the manner in which Felix treats him, basically a kind of house arrest in which he was freely attended to and helped by his many friends in Caesarea and Judea.

Remember this was where the Roman cohort was stationed under the leadership of the Roman centurion Cornelius. Remember Cornelius and his house had converted to Christianity under the preaching of Peter. One wonders if this centurion was Cornelius.

Philip, the deacon and evangelist, lived in Caesarea with his four unmarried daughters. Paul had stayed in his house on his way to Jerusalem just a few weeks before the events we are reading.

But this is not Felix's most serious procrastinating. That comes in vss. 24-26.

Acts 24:24-26, Felix's procrastination on Paul's spiritual conviction.

I previously said Felix was a sinful, corrupt, immoral, lustful, unjust politician. He was bad to the bone. He was cruel to the point of savagery, there was much blood on his hands. As we see in our text, he is not above being bought.

Drusilla was not much better.

She was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I, the first persecutor of the church, the death of whom Luke recorded in Acts 12 when God struck him down for robbing God of His glory and receiving praise as a god.

She was the great granddaughter of Herod the Great, who tried to kill Jesus in Bethlehem. Her uncle was Herod Antipas, who at the request of his wife, had John the Baptist beheaded.

Her brother Agrippa the Younger (whom we will meet in Acts 25) gave her to be the wife of Azizus, King of the Emesenes, a small kingdom in Syria.

She is later seduced by Felix to commit adultery and become Felix's third wife. She broke her vows and she took up with a pagan Gentile, both against the Law of God. The Roman historian Tacitus tells us Drusilla was one of the worst women in history.

It is suspected Felix's knowledge of the Way may have come through her, and she was behind their interest in hearing more from Paul. Felix's interest may have been to please his wife.

Paul was standing before a ruthless, corrupt governor, who represents a corrupt system and worldview, before a couple living in sin, with his freedom on the line and he doesn't even blink.

Paul has no fear of the governor, no fear of upsetting him, no temptation to say only what he might want to hear.

Paul doesn't see a man from whom he might curry some favor, he sees a man with an eternal soul which is hanging in the balance teetering on the brink of hell. Paul puts the needs of others above himself, and the needs of souls above his physical wellbeing.

Matthew 10:18-20 You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. 19 When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. 20 For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Paul spoke to Felix about righteousness, self-control (temperance) and the coming judgment. In other words, he spoke plainly about Felix and Drusilla's unrighteousness and lack of self-control. The good news of the Gospel is never good news until we know the bad news of our own sin.

He preached the whole Gospel, the holiness of God, the sinfulness of our hearts, the coming judgment of God on all sin, the universal demand of God for righteousness, and the only hope and possibility of righteousness found through faith in Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

If you are thinking preaching on these things is harsh or negative, remember Paul's heart. When he preached such things in Ephesus he taught them with tears. He exhorted his hearers with love and affection, with great warmth and compassion, full of grace and mercy.

The Word of God has great power. It convicts of sin, it enlightens us concerning the truth about God and our world, it compels a response.

Paul plunged the two-edged sword of God's holy Word into Felix's guilty conscience and hardened heart until Felix trembled.

Did that double-edged sword cut to Drusilla's heart, to her scandalous lifestyle, her adultery, unfaithfulness, to her neglect of the truth she had been taught as a young girl?

Felix gains relief by dismissing Paul and talking to him later. "When I get an opportunity." At a more convenient time. When I am in a better frame of mind. Or was it Drusilla who cut the meetings short?

That moment in Felix's life was the *Kairos moment*, the continental divide, the critical decision moment, the crossroads moment. Now or never.

The Romans had a saying, "Carpe diem." Seize the day. Felix failed to do just that. Instead, he hesitated and then procrastinated, and all was lost. At that moment Felix died spiritually.

Hebrews 10:26-27 If we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a fearful expectation of judgment.

Why did Felix procrastinate? Why do we procrastinate? Paul's three point sermon points to the reasons. Felix was caught up in a long life of sin, his sin was comfortable, convenient. He liked his lust, he liked his greed, lust for money. His sin was still sweet to him, he didn't have the spiritual sensibility to hate it. He liked his power and control. He loved himself more than God. He feared losing what he had more than he feared God. He was selfish to the core. He trembled which was good, but he resisted doing what was good and right and necessary.

Their rejection of the Gospel, their neglect of it, their ignoring so great a gift, their holding on to their sin, puts their souls in grave spiritual danger.

Do you know the Gospel can save you or kill you, depending on what you do with it?

II Corinthians 2:15-16 We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, 16 to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.

The Word of God had an effect on Felix, he was alarmed, he trembled with fear, he dreaded the coming judgment. The topics of righteousness and self-control touched sore points with Felix. We know he was a lustful man, given to sexual immorality, living an idolatrous life, given over to injustice and greed. Money, sex and power had a grip on his soul.

You can have an accurate knowledge of Jesus and the Gospel. You can have an interest in learning more about Jesus and the Gospel. You can listen to sermons about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment and even be moved by them, have some trembling response and still be completely outside of the kingdom of God and without hope of salvation or eternal life. And that should be cause for trembling.

Acts 24:27, Felix's two year procrastination on Paul's incarceration in Caesarea.

It was a common practice for governors who were leaving their post in a province to release prisoners, not unlike presidents who grant pardons before they leave office. But Felix does the opposite. He leaves Paul in custody for the next governor, to gain favor with the Jews.

Again, politically motivated, for personal gain, and evidence of his bad conscience as he leaves.

Don't be Felix! Be the Philippians jailer. What did he do? He also trembled and then asked, "What must I do to be saved?"

II Corinthians 6:1-2 We appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2 For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

We may hear the truth of the Gospel again, but it might not come upon us with the same convicting power again. The repetition of it may dull our sensitivity to it. Also truths not acted upon can harden our hearts so we don't hear them anymore.

Seeing we do not see, hearing we do not hear (Matthew 13:13).

Conclusion and application.

About a year ago a man was at home watching our live stream service. He heard me tell the story of a man in my first church who was an avowed agnostic and the husband of a church member. For six years he came every Sunday with his wife hearing but not believing.

I said no one can hear the Word of God and remain unchanged. Either their hearts will be made soft and they will be transformed, or their hearts will become hardened and they will resist submitting to the truth of God's Word and the tenderness of Jesus' love, grace and forgiveness.

Who here is resisting the Holy Spirit, who here will be without excuse before God having heard the truth and not surrendered and submitted to it? Watch your heart. Don't neglect God's grace and mercy, it won't last forever.

One of the most dangerous words in the English language is tomorrow. Tomorrow is one of the easiest words to say, and one of the most dangerous.

II Corinthians 6:2 Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Hebrews 13:7 Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

Don't put off doing business with God.

That evening after hearing that sermon he called a Christian to come to his home and he surrendered his life to Christ.

How many of us have come close, have come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, have had our guilty consciences stirred, have felt some burning within our hearts, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus who said of their encounter with Jesus, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he opened the Word to us on the road?"

How many of us have felt the stirrings of the Holy Spirit over some besetting sin, some hidden sin, some guilt over some action, word or attitude? How many of us have been close and then pulled back saying we will repent or change our ways some other time, soon, but not just yet?

How many of us have postponed repentance for one reason or another, or no good reason? How many of us fear going before the judgment seat of God, but don't want to address what most needs to be addressed just yet? How many of us are waiting for a better time, a better opportunity, when something else changes in our lives? When I am a little older, when my friendships change, when I have more time or energy?

Sin has slain its thousands.

Procrastination has slain its tens of thousands.

Yesterday has slain its thousands.

Tomorrow has slain its tens of thousands.

When it comes to your eternal soul, leave nothing to chance, leave nothing unsettled, leave nothing until tomorrow. Life is fragile and short and no man knows his hour. No one knows when a stroke or heart attack might render us incapable of taking care of spiritual business.

Tomorrow is the Devil's word, today is God's word.

Maybe what you are procrastinating isn't putting your trust in Jesus, but its obeying something God has called you to do, or it is repenting of and killing some sin that has a hook in you. Maybe it is a habit that God has convicted you to break or stop. Maybe it is a relationship that needs to be mended.

Can you think back on your life to a missed opportunity, some regret that you didn't do something or say something or spend time with someone or finish some task? We all have them. Don't make your eternal soul standing before the judgment seat of God, one of your eternal regrets.

We are going to close by singing a hymn written by Philip Bliss. Philip Bliss was a prolific Gospel hymn writer at the height of his career and success traveling and writing hymns for D.L. Moody. At the age of 38 he and his wife were on their way to sing at one of Moody's evangelistic crusades in Chicago when they were tragically killed in a train wreck.

You don't know how much time you have left or what regret you will have if you don't act. Procrastination is the thief that steals life, time, joy and even souls. Make today your day for action, for change, by the power of the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Holy Father, help us. We tremble but we are impotent to change without your Holy Spirit. Save us from ourselves, our lack of self-control, our selfish, foolish, sinful desires, our dullness, our inattentiveness, our wayward wanderings, our wasting of your gifts and our time. Grant us wisdom to see our folly and the power to turn from it. Give us a holy trembling and make it fruitful, working for our good and your glory. Come, Holy Spirit, come, Lord Jesus.