

Place: Lurgan Baptist 28:2:2012

## THE CHURCH ABLAZE

Reading: Acts 24:1-27

### 35. PAUL THE WITNESS

John Chrysostom was one of the greatest of the Greek church fathers. He lived in from 347 Ad to 407. As a very young Christina he was brought before the Emperor, who said that if would not give up Christ, he would banished from the country. Chrysostom said, “ *You cannot, for the whole world is my Father’s land. You can’t banish me.*” The Emperor said, “ *Then I will take away all your property.*” “ *You cannot, my treasures are in heaven,*” was the reply. “ *Then I’ll take you to a place where there is not a friend to speak to.*” Chrysostom replied, “ *You cannot, I have a friend who is closer than a brother. I shall have Jesus Christ forever.*” The Emperor finally threatened, “ *Then I’ll take your life.*” The answer was, “ *You cannot for my life is hid with God in Christ.*” And the Emperor said, “ ***What do you do with a man like that ?***” Its easy to be a believer when everything is fine, but when the fire is hot that is different. I wonder are you in the furnace right now ?

Today, there is an escalating hostility toward the gospel throughout the world. In some parts of our world this evening, there is direct persecution of believers, and it is likely that in the coming years Christians everywhere will

face increasing hostility both from civil authorities and from unbelievers at the personal level. Let me share a promise with you that might not be as exciting as some of the others. “ *Yea, and all that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*” ( 2 Tim 3:12 ) You say, “ *I’m a Christian and I’m not being persecuted.*” Well, look at the promise. You make up your mind that you are going to live like Christ and for Christ and you’ll suffer. No man suffered more for the Lord Jesus than the apostle Paul. Indeed he was chosen to suffer. The Lord said to Ananias, “ *I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.*” ( 9:16 ) Now the book of Acts records the history of the church from the Day of Pentecost until it brought its message to the great capital of the world, Rome. During those early years many exciting things happened. Two people dominated. Peter, during the first few years, and Paul during the last years. And this passage takes place in the midst of the story of Paul, the man who took the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul took three tours to Gentile countries and as we come to this chapter, he has just finished his third tour.

He was no longer a free man. He was now a prisoner. Do you recall when Paul arrived at Jerusalem at the end of his third tour, he tried to pacify the Jewish Christians by going to the Temple ? Although he was a Christian, he wanted to show them that he was not anti-Jewish because he still believed in some of the customs of Israel. While he was in the Temple some Jews from Asia Minor saw him and tried to kill him. ( 21:27-30 ) You see, Paul had won so many Jews to Christ, that he upset those who had not come to Christ. So when they saw him in the Temple

they attacked him. Now as we come to ( Ch 24 ) Paul is in Caesarea. His ministry as a prisoner took place in three cities, Jerusalem, Caesarea and Rome. He spent only a few days in Jerusalem, but he spent two years in Caesarea before he was sent to Rome. Now did you notice how this chapter begins ? Look if you will at ( 24:1 ) In the Bible record when people go up to Jerusalem, they always go up, but when they go down from Jerusalem, they always go down. This explains why the official Jewish party “ *descended,*” to Caesarea. Like a flock of vultures descending on their prey they wanted Paul dead.

Now those of you who have been to Israel have visited the costal city of Caesarea. It was built in the last two decades prior to the birth of Christ by Herod the Great, and became a headquarters city for Roman governors of the region. It was built at great expense and included an artificial harbour that protected sailing ships from incoming storms. A massive aqueduct, which is still standing brought fresh water from Mount Carmel some twenty miles away. Caesarea was the home of Cornelius ( 10:1 ) and Philip the evangelist ( 21:8 ) and it was here that Paul was held for two whole years. The story opens with,

### **(1) THE ACCUSATION OF THE JEWS**

Now all of these accusations brought against Paul were lies. But that’s to be expected. If you live a godly life in the face of an ungodly world you’re going to suffer. Paul suffered false accusations, but he could say he was

blameless. Did you notice that these charges were brought against Paul by the Jews,

#### **(a) BEFORE THE POWERFUL GOVERNOR:**

Look at ( 24:1 ) Can you see his name in ( 23:26 ) ? You see, Antonius Felix was the first slave in the history of the Roman Empire to become the Governor of a Roman Province. That would have been quite a distinction had he earned it, but that was not the case. As a child, Felix along with his brother Pallas, had been freed by Antonia, the mother of Prince Claudius a future Caesar. As they grew up, Pallas became a close friend of Claudius so much so, that when Claudius became Emperor, Pallas persuaded him to make Felix a government official in Palestine under Cumanus. When Cumanus was disposed Felix obtained his office through shameful intrigue. My .... *here was a man who was steeped in the blood of private murder and public massacre, a treacherous and unjust man.* ( 24:26 )

Josephus the Jewish historian tells us that he repeatedly crucified the leaders of various uprisings. The Roman historian Tacitus described him as a “ *master of cruelty and lust who exercised the powers of a king with the spirit of a slave.*” Finally, the corruption of Felix’s rule became so great that Nero who was no great model of morality himself recalled the governor. He would have been executed had it not been for his brother who was in Rome at the time and pleaded on his behalf. My .... this is the man before whom now Paul appears to give an account.

(a)

**(b) BY THE PROFESSIONAL LAWYER:**

If you look at ( 24:1 ) you can see the accusers identified. Ananias: He was a corrupt high priest. He saw Paul as threat so he wanted to get rid of him. That's why he was part of the entourage that went to accuse Paul.

**The Elders:** the key leaders of the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Israel.

**Tertullus:** You see, Roman law was as complex as our modern law and it took an expert to understand it and to apply it successfully to his client's case. You can see,

**1. There was Flattery:**

It was common for orators in those days to do what Tertullus did. In ( 24:2-4 ) he lays the flattery on thick. *We might say he's doing a soft soap job. He's buttering up Felix with flattery.* He talked about Felix bringing great peace and doing great deeds and they were marked by great thankfulness. I can almost see the Jewish leaders staring in disbelief. They could never have said what Tertullus did with a straight face. Remember the Jews hated Felix the governor, but you would never know it from the way Tertullus was laying it on thick. Now Felix knew what Tertullus said was not true, but I think he enjoyed listening to the flattery because he knew the Jewish leaders had to stand there and endure what Tertullus said about him. He just liked to hear it. *Do you recall that Herod was the same ?* As he sat on his throne and give a speech, the people said he wasn't a man but a

god. Herod loved receiving praise even though he had to know it wasn't true and it was the same with Felix. Here is a man who is trying to influence Felix with flattery with the hope that the governor would rule in his favour. *It raises the question is flattery acceptable for a Christian ?* Well, when you flatter someone you do or say something which is beyond the truth to elicit something for yourself. People don't flatter those who can't give them anything, they flatter only those who can. And sad to say it works. But it's wrong for the believer. Why ? Well the book of Proverbs says, "*A flattering mouth worketh ruin,*" ( 26:3 ) indeed the Psalmist says, "*The Lord shall cut of all flattering lips.*" ( 12:3 ) What's wrong with flattery ? It's not the truth. Flattery is a means of gaining something for yourself. It is masked self-indulgence and selfishness. Many people think if you want anything in life you have to get it anyway you can. There are some people who think that if the church needs to build a new building, you need to flatter a person who has a lot of money. There are preachers who when they preach love to drop names. My ... is that not a form of flattery ? Tell me, have you ever used flattery to gain your own end ? Do you find that those occasions are frequent or infrequent ? Have you flattered someone recently ?

**2. There was Falsehood:**

I mean all the accusations that were brought against the apostle Paul were lies. Both Tertullus and Felix knew that the things he said were not true. You see, if the introduction was full of falsehood, then the accusations were full of falsehood. Indeed when you compare Luke's

account of Paul's arrest ( 21:27-40 ) with Tertullus's account of Paul's arrest ( 24:6-8 ) you can see the difference. Now Tertullus brought three charges against the apostle Paul. Have a look at them. There was

**(a) A Personal Charge: Paul was Accused of Sedition:**

Look if you will at ( 24:6 ) “ *sedition*,” could be translated “ *treason*.” If they could get that charge to stick, they would get Paul in deep trouble with the Romans. The phrase “ *pestilent fellow*,” can be translated “ *a nuisance*.” They considered Paul to be a pain in the neck. A pest, an irritant, to the Jews everywhere. This is where they hoped to get Felix sympathies, suggesting that Paul could disrupt the Roman peace. They accused Paul of causing Jews to revolt against Rome. Now the Romans were paranoid about revolutions, insurrections and riots in their foreign territories and they placed rulers, soldiers in those areas to keep the peace. Actually, this accusation has some basis in fact. Old Vance Havner used to say, “ *Everywhere Paul went there was either a riot or a revival*.” Paul would preach a sermon, and then someone would get excited and stir up a riot. But Paul himself didn't stir up a riot although he was around when many of them occurred.

The people who created dissension in response to what Paul preached were actually responsible. Isn't it interesting to read what the Roman tribune had to say about Paul ? I mean look at his letter ( 23:26-29 ) In other words, “ *It isn't a legal matter for us to consider, its strictly a theological issue between them*.” Now its

interesting that in the Book of Acts that when Christians were put on trial for preaching Christ that they were not regarded as political insurrectionists. Did you ever think about the number of trials that are described in the book of Acts ? There is Paul before Gallio, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa and Peter and John before the Sanhedrin. Now why did the Lord include the details of those trials ? To show that in every case believers were innocent of any violation of civil law. My .... Christianity is not political treason. Do you recall the words of the Saviour ?

“ *Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's*.” ( Matt 22:21 ) Paul says “ *the powers that be are ordained of God*.” ( Rom 13:1 ) Peter says, “ *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme. Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers and for the praise of them that do well*.” ( 1 Pet 2:13-14 ) My .... we should be law abiding citizens. Only when you live in a society that makes laws that violate the laws of God, do you have the right to choose to obey God or men, and you should choose to obey God. (a)

**(b) A Political Charge: Paul was Accused of Sectarianism:**

“ *And a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes*,” ( 24:6 ) Of course this was a reference to the followers of Jesus the Nazarene. What the Jewish leaders were now doing was this. They were accusing Paul of heresy. That was quite a title. The “ *sect of the Nazarenes*,” Do you recall what Nazareth was in Christ's day ? When Philip was

converted and called his friend Nathanael to come and meet the Lord Jesus, Nathanael said, “ *Can any good thing come out of Nazareth ?*” ( Jn 1:46 ) You see, back in that day Nazareth was a despised and rejected place. It had a mixed population of Jews and Gentiles, the people spoke a very rough dialect, some of the rebels of that day lived in Nazareth. Nazareth as we would say was “ *on the other side of the town, it was an uneducated, backward town.*” So when you called someone a Nazarene that was a slur. The Lord Jesus was called “ *Jesus of Nazareth,*” six times in the book of Acts but this is the only time His disciples were called “ *Nazarenes.*” They looked down upon the Christians, they said, “ *who are these people identified with Jesus of Nazareth ?*” My .... never be ashamed of the Lord Jesus. Don’t be ashamed to identified with Him. Don’t be afraid to take up His cross and follow Him.

### **(c) A Doctrinal Charge: Paul was Accused of Sacrilege:**

“ *Who hath also gone about to profane the temple,*” ( 24:6 ) Do you recall that this is a repetition of the early accusation that Paul had taken a Gentile into the inner court of the Temple. ( 21:28 ) He hadn’t done it, but they accused him of it. They even tried to kill Paul. But that was a ridiculous attempt because the law said that the Gentile who entered was to be killed, not the one who brought him in. So the facts were twisted. Indeed here Tertullus softens the charge. You see, the Asian Jews had accused Paul of *polluting* the temple (21:28 ) here Tertullus accuses Paul of *profaning* the temple. Why the

change ? well, to begin with Paul’s accusers could not prove the charges. But even more the Asian Jews who started the mess have now vanished. If there are no witnesses there could be no evidence or conviction. Now do you see what happened after Tertullus finished his charges ? Look at ( 24:9 ) *One elder after another perjured himself.* They called themselves lovers of God and lovers of the law yet they blatantly lied to preserve their religion and to execute a man they didn’t want around. Now these were the accusations of the Jews and is this not what we should expect ? Do you recall what Christ said ? “ *Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you.*” ( Matt 5:11 ) If you’re going to live a godly life in an ungodly society you will receive some flak. If you’re not receiving any flak, maybe you’re not living a godly life. (1)

### **(2) THE ANSWER OF THE APOSTLE**

Have you ever noticed how useful the persecuted Christians of the first century were ? Their sufferings were the platform from which they declared and demonstrated the power of the gospel. They were ready to give an answer. Peter says, “ *be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. Having a good conscience that whereas they speak evil of you as evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.*” ( 1 Pet 3:15-16 ) Now here we see Paul responding to the charges. Here we have a clear and bold denial and a frank statement of the facts. Notice there is

courtesy but not flattery, truth but not falsehood, fairness but not malice, respect but not contempt, argument but not abuse. Paul's reply was courteous, calm, and challenging.

Now Paul did not have a lawyer like Tertullus who knew about Roman law and Roman courts. But he had someone better than a human lawyer. Do you remember when the Lord Jesus left the earth He told them that He would send them another Comforter ? ( Jn 14:16 ) The Greek word for " Comforter," is parakletos it means " one called alongside." It could be translated, " a lawyer for the defense." My .... Paul didn't have a human lawyer but he had the divine Lawyer handling his case. Now notice what Paul does.

#### ***(a) Paul Denies Being a Troublemaker:***

That was his response to the accusation of sedition. Paul says here there was.

#### **1. No Time:**

Look at ( 24:11 ) Paul had been in the area for twelve days and he spent five of them in Caesarea. ( 24:1 ) The maximum he had spent in Jerusalem was seven days. Paul is saying, " I haven't had time to start a riot. Felix check the chronology where there any riots in Jerusalem the week that I was there." Answer, no.

#### **2. No Riot:**

" And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man ....., " ( 24:12 ) The word translated " disputing," refers to reasoning or arguing. Paul disputed in every place he travelled except Jerusalem. He did not engage in any dialogue in the temple or in the city. Do you know why ? He was the apostle to the Gentiles. ( 22:18-20 ) Paul was not responsible for the gospel in Jerusalem. His only goal in going was to bring the love offering to the needy saints. So Paul had not raised up a crowd anywhere in Jerusalem.

#### **3. No Proof:**

Look at ( 24:13 ) If you don't have any proof you don't have a case. It should have been thrown out of court for that reason alone. Paul had done nothing treasonous.

#### ***(b) Paul Denies Being a Ringleader:***

This was his response to the accusation of sectarianism. Look if you will at ( 24:14-16 ) Tertullus had derisively referred to Christians as Nazarenes ( 24:5 ) but Paul called Christianity the Way. ( 24:14 ) " The way," was a title for Christianity. But where did it come from ? Well, the Lord Jesus said, " I am the way." ( Jn 14:6 ) And Paul admitted being a member of " the way which they call heresy," ( 24:14 ) You see, the Roman government was tolerant of religious movements as long as they were peaceful and did not undermine the authority of Caesar in Rome. And Paul had as much right to follow " the Way," as the Jews had to follow Judaism. Moreover, did the roots of " the Way," not spring from the soil of Judaism ? I mean both

believed in one God, embraced the law and the prophets, and believed in the resurrection. Do you see what Paul was doing ? He was erasing the picture that Tertullus had painted of him as a radical. Far from being a heretic, Paul was more orthodox than his accusers, since he served the God of his fathers, believed in the inspiration of the entire Old Testament and accepted everything it taught. Something, that his accusers the Sadducees didn't.

***(c) Paul Denies Being a Blasphemer:***

This was his response to the accusation of sacrilege. Look if you will at ( 24:17-21 ) You see, the Jewish leaders accused Paul of attempting to profane the sacred temple which was to claim he was blaspheming God. Do you see how Paul responds ? He responds by pointing to

**1. A Practical Issue:**

Why was he in Jerusalem in the first place ? He says “ to bring alms to my nation.” He had collected money from Gentile Christians to offer to Jewish Christians as a sign of love.

**2. A Ceremonial Issue:**

When the Asians saw him in the temple, he was with four men who were fulfilling their Nazarite vows. How could Paul possibly be worshipping God and profaning God's house at the same time ? Paul was simply carrying out his vow when the Jews from Asia seized him.

**3. A Legal Issue:**

“ *Who ought to have been here ....,*” ( 24:19 ) He is asking the Jewish leaders, “ *Where are your witnesses ? You say I was desecrating the temple but who says so ? Where are the eyewitnesses who saw me take a Gentile into the inner court of the temple ?*” My .... there weren't any because he had not done it.

**4. A Theological Issue:**

For he says in ( 24:21 ) That was the only thing they could accuse Paul of. The resurrection and that was not a criminal issue but a theological one and theological issues were not decided by courts. You see, there was no crime with which to try Paul. And when Paul had finished Felix knew he was telling the crime, and that the opposition had no case against him. My .... Felix could have let Paul go but he didn't, for notice,

**(3) THE ACTION OF THE GOVERNOR**

You see, this was the end of the hearing before Felix but only the beginning of Paul's relationship with the governor. My .... if ever a man failed both personally and officially that man was Felix governor of Judea, for notice that Felix acted,

***(a) POLITICALLY:***

I mean what was the only appropriate verdict that could be rendered ? Innocent. But look at ( 24:22 ) You see,

Felix was responsible for keeping order among his Jewish constituency and if they created unrest or if they reported him to Rome Felix could be replaced as governor. Do you remember that Pilate had the same problem with Christ ? Pacifying the Jewish leadership was no easy job, so Felix did what many politicians do, nothing. *He compromised.* I'm not saying that all people in public office do that, but some do. I mean he knew Paul was innocent but he straddled the fence. Let me ask, what Felix did politically are you doing spiritually ? Are you compromising ? Are you giving in to the world, the flesh and the devil ? Things that you would not have tolerated years ago are now embedded in your life.

**(b) LENIENTLY:**

Did you notice that he gave Paul certain privileges ? Paul had limited freedom in the palace, chained to a soldier and ministered unto by his friends. Did you notice the last verse ? Paul remained in prison for two years. *Why ? Why did the Lord allow Paul to remain a prisoner in Caesarea for two years ?* I mean during those two years we have no record of anything Paul preached or of anything he wrote. Can you imagine Paul not preaching or writing for two years ? Why did the Lord allow this ? I wonder was it because that Paul needed to “ *come apart and rest awhile.*” Did you notice ( 24:23 ) ? Philip the evangelist probably came around quite often. There were probably many believers in the area of Caesarea who spent some time with him. Paul had always been ministering to others, now others were ministering to him. My .... do you ever do that ? Do you ever minister to the servants of

the Lord ? Do you refresh them, encourage them, and strengthen their hand in God ? (a) (b)

**(c) CURIOUSLY:**

Look if you will at ( 24:24 ) Felix may have had his exposure to Christianity from Drusilla. You see, Drusilla was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa 1, the Herod named in ( Acts 12:1 ) who would have been familiar with the beginnings of Christianity. Drusilla was originally married to the king of Emesa, which was part of Syria but like so many wives today she did not find Azizus very exciting, and won the affections of Felix, with the help of a magician named Atomas, eventually becoming Felix's illicit lover. *According to historians she was supposed to be a raving beauty barely twenty years of age.* But when they sat before the apostle Paul they got more than they bargained for. Like any good Baptist preacher Paul had three points. He said to them,

**1. Your Past is Unclean: You need Christ's Righteousness Upon you:**

**2. Your Present is Unchaste: You need Christ's Spirit Within you:**

**3. Your Future is Uncertain: need Christ's Promise to you:**

Now is that not bold preaching ? I mean Paul is not “ *pulling any punches,*” he is certainly not “ *beating around the bush.*” Here is the great apostle speaking personally, pointedly, practically, and powerfully. This was not the message this illicit couple wanted to hear.



Hugh Latimer was an English reformer who often preached before King Henry VIII. On one occasion Latimer said something that offended the king and he was commanded to preach the following Sunday and make an apology. The next Sunday after reading his text Latimer began his message this way.

**I am going to speak with myself at the beginning of this message. Hugh Latimer dost thou know before whom thou art this day to speak ? To the High and Mighty Monarch, the kings most excellent majesty who can take away thy life if thou offendest, therefore take heed Hugh Latimer, that thou speakest not a word that may displease. But then, consider well, this Hugh, dost thou not know from whence thou comest, upon whose message thou art sent ? Even by, the great and mighty God. Who is all present, and who is all present, and who beholds all thy ways, and is able to cast thy soul into hell. Therefore take care that thou deliverest thy message faithfully.**

He then gave King Henry the same message he had preached the week before, but this time with more energy. My .... is this not the need of the hour ? Do we not need preachers who come from the presence of God with the Word of God in their minds,, the fire of God in their souls, the power of God on their spirits and the fear of God in their hearts ? Brethren, are you following in the mould of the apostle Paul ? Are you faithful, fearless, and forthright in your declaration of the truth ? Now do you see what happened ? “ *Felix trembled and answered .....*,”

#### ***(d) Felix Acted Foolishly:***

This was no doubt a defining moment in Felix’s life. He had come under conviction by the Holy Spirit but he put it off. My .... as long as Felix was shaking from conviction, he still was open to the gospel. But it wasn’t long before he stopped trembling, and when he heard Paul it didn’t mean a thing to him. A habit that starts out as small as a thread that a child can break soon becomes a cord that a giant can’t sever. My .... when someone continues to resist, it becomes harder and harder for him to change. That’s why Paul told the Corinthians, “ *Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation.*” ( 2 Cor 6:2 ) My .... there are multitudes in hell this .... with Felix and they are there and do you know why ? They put it off. Some of you here .... have been putting off the matter of your soul’s salvation for a long time. Are you going to put this matter off again this .... ? Are you going to let the Devil deceive you, delude you, and damn your soul in everlasting fire ? Can you see Felix now ?

#### ***(e) Felix Acted Selfishly:***

Luke gives some insight into the character of Felix when he said “ *He hoped also .....*,” ( 24:26 ) Felix wanted a bribe out of Paul. He was so materialistic that he would do for money what he wouldn’t do for justice. Now what would make Felix think that Paul had money ? Well, he knew that Paul had arrived in Jerusalem with a large sum of money from the Gentile churches, ( 24:17 ) he knew he was the leader of the Nazarenes. Or he might have thought

that the Christians could have pooled their money and bought Paul off. Do you recall Paul's words to Timothy? "*The love of money is the root of all evil.*" ( 1 Tim 6:10 ) Could it be like that Felix you as a believer are more interested in the material, than the spiritual, the temporal than the eternal ? Did you notice how it all ended ?

***(f) Felix Acted Indecisively:***

Look at ( 24:27 ) What happened was this. There was a big riot in Caesarea and Felix dealt with it so harshly that the Jews got him sent back to Rome. He had lost his job but the Jews were so incensed he was afraid he might lose his life. So he attempted to pacify the Jewish leaders by leaving Paul a prisoner. So for two years Paul had to remain a prisoner.

My .... this has to be one of the saddest accounts of lost opportunity in the Bible. If we could hear from Felix this .... I believe he would say, "*I missed the opportunity. I wish I could do it all over again.*" Dr. Clarence McCartney tells a story about a meeting in hell. Satan called his four leading demons together and commanded them to think up a new lie that would trap more souls. "*I have it,*" one demon said. "*I'll go to earth and tell people there is no God.*" "*It will never work,*" said Satan. "*People can look around them and see that there is a God.*" "*I'll go and tell them there is no heaven,*" suggested a second demon, but Satan rejected that idea. "*Everybody knows there is a life after death and they want to go to heaven.*" "*Let's tell them there is no hell,*" said a third demon.

"*No conscience tells them their sins will be judged,*" said the devil, "*we need a better lie than that.*" Quietly the fourth demon spoke, "*I think I've solved your problem,*" he said. "*I'll go to earth and tell everybody there is no hurry.*" And they sent him. My .... the best time to trust Jesus Christ is now. And the best time to tell others about the Saviour is now.