

## **ST. PAUL BEFORE FELIX**

– **OCTOBER 8. – ACTS 24:1-21. –**

ST. PAUL AT CAESAREA, THE ROMAN CAPITAL OF JUDEA – HIS TRIAL BEFORE THE ROMAN GOVERNOR – THE CHARGES BROUGHT AGAINST THE APOSTLE – ST. PAUL'S DEFENSE – THE DOCTRINE OF THE RESURRECTION THE THEME OF HIS PREACHING – THIS DOCTRINE LOST SIGHT OF BY MANY PROFESSED CHRISTIANS OF OUR DAY – THE ROMAN GOVERNOR INTERESTED IN THE APOSTLE'S TEACHINGS – ST. PAUL A PRISONER FOR TWO YEARS.

**"Herein I also exercise myself to have a conscience void of offense toward God and man always." – Verse 16.**

FELIX, the Roman Governor of Judea, received St. Paul as a prisoner. The Apostle's enemies, the high priest and other Jewish rulers, hastened down from Jerusalem to Caesarea, thirsting for his blood. They brought with them a Roman lawyer, named Tertullus, whose knowledge of Roman usage would, they hoped, enable them to prove that St. Paul was a dangerous character – a sort of anarchist. Felix was the judge. There were no jurors. Tertullus, skilled as a pleader, made his charges and confirmed them by witnesses from Jerusalem.

Shrewdly the Roman attorney complimented the Governor along the lines of his hitherto efficiency in preserving the peace, in putting down every form of insurrection and in maintaining quiet and order. This very completely paved the way for the lawyer's request that the Governor should continue this praiseworthy course and rid the land of an obnoxious trouble-maker – the Apostle. Witnesses were produced who testified respecting the first tumult in

the Temple at Jerusalem and also respecting that of the following day, in which the Sanhedrin became divided into two parts and a general uproar ensued. The Apostle was charged with being a ringleader of a sect called Nazarenes; and the claim was made that he had caused trouble amongst both Jews and Greeks the world over.

This was Tertullus' case. He charged that the prisoner was guilty of sacrilege – that St. Paul had defiled the Temple; and the inference was deducible that the Apostle had caused rioting within the holy sanctuary. Witnesses were procured to prove that these charges were true.

Governor Felix motioned to the Apostle that he was at liberty to answer the charges. Then St. Paul opened his defense with the remark that he was gratified that his judge had been on the bench for some time and was well acquainted with Jewish customs; that he would therefore understand what a novice could not – why the Apostle had come to Jerusalem to worship after the manner of the Jews, to celebrate one of their religious festivals. He had come, not to raise an insurrection, but to worship God after the Jewish custom; and no witness had testified that he was found in the Temple either disputing or gathering a crowd. The charge was untrue. He did not do these things in the synagogues or anywhere else; and his enemies could not prove the things whereof they accused him.

The Apostle's answer was both logical and complete. Still the Governor could not understand why, under the circumstances, there should be a commotion. Hence it was necessary for St. Paul to explain that the Jews had an antipathy against him because of his different religious belief, not because of any wrong-doing on his part.

## **THE DOCTRINE OF THE RESURRECTION**

St. Paul avowed that he had experienced no change in his Jewish belief – that he still believed the teachings of the Law and

the writings of the Prophets; that he still held to the fundamental Jewish doctrine of the necessity of a resurrection of the dead; and that he still had faith in the Promise that through the resurrection of the dead God's blessing should ultimately come to Israel, and through Israel to all the families of the earth. Furthermore, he exercised himself, trained himself, disciplined himself, to keep his conscience pure, free from violation of Divine and human laws.

This was a grand testimony. Its force should have had weight, not only with the Governor, but also with the Jews, who murderously sought the Apostle's life because of a little difference of opinion on religious questions. What a lesson we have here! A Roman Governor and judge of not too savory a reputation; a prosecuting attorney willing to sell his talents for money, regardless of the principles of justice; the Jewish high priest, typical of the great Messiah, associating himself with those who were endeavoring to pervert justice and to destroy one of "the salt of the earth"!

Our Lord had foretold that some of His disciples would stand before kings and princes, but that they should not be dismayed. He would stand by them to give them assistance. (Matthew 10:17-22.) How literally this was fulfilled in St. Paul's case! How evidently the Lord stood by him and gave him the suitable words!

The Apostle proceeded to explain that he had brought alms to his nation, the offerings of Gentiles who had heard his Message of the grace of God. Certain Jews from Asia Minor had found him purified in the Temple, but without cry or tumult. These Jews should have been brought forward as witnesses. Or those who were making the charges against him should have been specific; they should have said on the day following the attack by the mob – the day when he was brought before the Sanhedrin – what he did tumultuously in the Temple or what wrong-doing they had found in him. Only one charge could they make; namely, that while standing amongst them he had cried out, "Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called

into question this day!" Surely the Governor could not think that in this there was anything akin to rioting or anarchy! The prisoner had been in the right; but those who were accusing him had been in the wrong.

## **A DOCTRINE LOST SIGHT OF**

The Apostle's testimony shows us that in all of his preaching he laid special stress upon the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust. Alas, that in our day this doctrine has been measurably **page 269** lost sight of! Few Christians ever think of the resurrection. Few have ever heard a sermon upon this subject. Why is this?

We reply that it is because a great error has come in amongst Christian people in respect to the condition of the dead. According to both Catholics and Protestants, only the saintly are fit for Heaven at death. Both agree that only finished characters could properly be admitted there. Both agree to our Lord's words respecting the Kingdom: "Few there be that find it." (Matthew 7:13, 14.) Our Catholic friends tell us that nearly all mankind – heathens, Catholics and Protestants – go to Purgatory, where for centuries they will undergo terrible sufferings, which will purge them from sin and prepare them for Heaven. Many Protestant friends tell us that they do not see even this hope; that from their standpoint only the "little flock" go to Heaven; that all the great mass of mankind, unprepared for the presence of God, must go somewhere; and that the only place for them is a Hell of eternal torture, from which there will be no escape.

We shall not quarrel with either party. Both views are too horrible to be reasonable or just, not to mention loving! We prefer to go back to the words of Jesus and the Apostles, and to note that according to their teachings the dead are really dead, and that their only hope is, as the Apostle expresses it, a resurrection hope – "the

hope of the resurrection," the hope "that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust." – Acts 24:15.

It is not the resurrection of the body that the Bible teaches, but the resurrection of the soul; and "God will give it a body" at the time of the awakening. (1 Corinthians 15:38.) We could wish that all Christian people would arouse themselves to a thorough study of the Scriptures. Then the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead would be given its proper place; and much of the fog of the Dark Ages would thus be gotten rid of – the fog which has troubled us, saddened our hearts and turned many away from God and the Bible into infidelity.

### **THE COMING JUDGMENT DAY**

After having heard both sides of the case, the governor-judge set it aside until Claudius Lysias, the commandant of Fort Antonia, the Roman officer who had made the arrest, should be heard. Meantime, St. Paul was given great liberty, the real status of his case evidently being quite clearly understood by Governor Felix.

Subsequently the governor, apparently much impressed by the Apostle's demeanor, called for him again, at a time when his wife, a Jewess, was present. He wished her to hear the Gospel Message, which seems to have appealed to him as reasonable. St. Paul doubtless reviewed much of his previous testimony, and then reasoned respecting a coming judgment, or trial – that eternal destinies are not fixed as a result of the present life.

Assuredly the Apostle explained that God has appointed a Day of trial, or judgment, for the whole world of mankind – the Millennial Day, a thousand years long. (2 Peter 3:7, 8.) During that period all mankind shall have a full trial as to worthiness or unworthiness of human perfection and life everlasting. The obedient shall be blessed, uplifted, raised up, up, up to perfection. The wilfully disobedient shall be destroyed in the Second Death.

## **"A JUST RECOMPENSE OF REWARD"**

If, then, the trial of the world is to be in the future Age, and if in the present Age God is merely electing, or selecting, the Church to be the Bride of His Son and Joint-heir in the Messianic Kingdom, which is to bless the world, how could these matters have any special influence upon Felix and his wife? We reply, In two ways:

(1) It might influence them to accept Christ and to seek to be of the elect Church;

(2) Knowing of their future trial, they should know that the words and the deeds of the present life have much to do with the status of the individual when he is awakened from the tomb. The vicious, the hypocritical, the self-righteous, the wanton, the profligate, degrade themselves and increase the number of steps which they must retrace during the Millennium. On the contrary, every good deed, every victory gained, every practice of moderation, will make the individual correspondingly the better prepared for the next life. Every generous deed of the present life makes its impress upon the character, and will bring proportionate blessings in that Millennial Judgment Day. On the other hand, every evil deed, every violation of conscience, will receive its "stripes," or just punishment.

As Felix listened to the Apostle, he was conscience-stricken. According to this teaching, he would have much for which to give account as one of the "unjust" in the resurrection. We note that St. Paul said nothing about fiery tortures, which an intelligent mind must repudiate as unreasonable; but his argument was all the stronger without such assertions. His forceful declaration was, "A just recompense of reward both for the just and for the unjust." Finally the governor dismissed him with the memorable words, "Go thy way for this time. When I have a more convenient season I will call for thee."

Time and again Governor Felix called for the Apostle; but apparently never did he find his heart in a sufficiently mellow and humble condition to accept the Apostle's Message and to surrender to the Lord. A lesson in this connection for us all is that we should do promptly whatever we realize to be our duty. For two years St. Paul remained a prisoner at Caesarea, comfortably provided for, preparing for the further services of his life, and writing several epistles to the various Churches.

