

Acts 24:24

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 April 2013

Preacher: Basil Howlett

[0 : 00] This is a message which Graham read to us from Acts 24, in particular, verse 24 onwards, Acts 24, verse 24, the story of Felix and Drusilla and the Apostle Paul.

Drusilla was 19 years old, a stunning beauty and very flighty. She came from a terrible family by the name of Herod.

Her father had murdered James, one of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. Her great-uncle had beheaded John the Baptist.

Her great-grandfather had massacred hundreds of babies in Bethlehem at the time of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Herods were a cruel lot, and part of that cruel streak ran through Drusilla.

She got engaged to the crown prince Epiphanes when she was 14, and he was mad about her. As I say, she was a stunning beauty.

[1 : 16] But she ditched the crown prince and married the king of Emesa when she was about 16, and he was besotted with her, although she was always carrying on with other men.

One night, she was with the king of Emesa at a party, and there at the party was a fellow called Felix, and she began to flirt with him.

He was a handsome Roman. He and his twin brother had been born as slaves, but with great cunning, they had managed to gain the favor of the Roman emperor, and Felix became the Roman governor of Judea.

Sadly, he had the morals of a sewer rat. He was cruel, corrupt, unjust, immoral. When Drusilla flirted with him at the party, he should have known better.

He was a much older man, but as the soaps put it, he fell in love with her. Or to be more accurate, although he knew he was a married man, although he knew Drusilla was married, he fancied her and lusted after her, he'd be the envy of all his mates if he could have a beauty like her on his arm.

[2 : 43] And the two of them began to live together and eventually got married. Why am I telling you all that? Because it's a Bible story.

You may have got the impression that the Bible is a boring, dull, useless, old-fashioned book that has got nothing to say to us in this 21st century.

But nothing could be further from the truth. In describing Felix and Drusilla, I'm describing the lives lived by hundreds of people today.

People living for sex, flirting, having a fling, husbands walking out on their wives, wives walking out on their husbands, getting a new live-in lover.

That's just the kind of life that many people read about in the sun on Sunday today, or the sun tomorrow morning. That's just the kind of life that Felix and Drusilla were living there in the Bible.

[3 : 47] There's no greater mistake than to think that the Bible is out of date. It's more up to date than tomorrow morning's newspaper. One day Felix and Drusilla heard a Christian preacher.

His name was Paul, a very famous church leader. He was in prison in Caesarea for no other crime than preaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first part of Acts 24 tells us of his trial before Felix when he was falsely accused of stirring up a rebellion in Jerusalem.

Following that farce of a trial, Paul was being held prisoner nearby. So one day Felix and Drusilla sent for him.

Some old Greek texts say it was Drusilla who wanted to meet Paul. You see, life can be a bit boring even for people like Drusilla.

[4 : 50] She probably thought it would be a bit of a giggle to hear this famous preacher and to take the mickey at him. So they sent for him. Sort of have a bit of a laugh at his expense.

But they got more than they bargained for. That afternoon, they heard something that shook them. We're actually told that Felix trembled that afternoon.

We're told that Paul preached about three things. He didn't entertain them. He preached to them about three things.

He discoursed, we're told. On righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come. And we all need to hear those same truths.

So let's look at the story of this flighty teenager and the faithful preacher. Paul spoke about righteousness. He would have told them, Felix and Drusilla, you need to know that Almighty God is the maker and ruler of the whole world.

[6 : 00] And he is righteous. He is perfect. He never does anything sinful. He is perfect. And you need to know that he demands that men and women also live righteously.

The righteous life that God expects us to live is summed up in some simple commands he gave at the beginning of the Bible. He demands that we put him first at all times.

That we mustn't make a God of our money or a God of our pleasure or a God of our sport and live for them but we must live for God and put him first at all times.

That is righteousness. Putting God first. He demands that we never use his name as a curse or a blasphemy. He tells us not to kill or steal or commit adultery.

Felix and Drusilla. What about that? That's righteousness. He tells us not to lie, Felix. Not to your wife or your family or friends or to anyone else.

[7 : 26] He tells us not to be greedy or covetous. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

What about that, Felix? You knew that Drusilla was married to another man but you coveted her and wanted her.

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. The Ten Commandments are God's standard for us. His standard of righteousness.

And he expects us to live up to them. Putting him first. Never taking his name in vain. Obeying, observing his day.

Never lying, never cheating, never stealing, never committing adultery and so on. Under this heading of righteousness Paul would have made it clear that Felix and Drusilla and all men and women have failed to live up to God's standard.

[8 : 31] None of us have got anywhere near the pass mark. Very soon young people will be taking exams at school of one sort or another.

and they'll be anxious to get a very good pass mark. They don't just want a pass mark. They want a distinction. They want to get a high grade.

But as far as God's standard of righteousness is concerned none of us have got anywhere near the pass mark. We've all failed. We've all sinned.

The Bible says this there is no unrighteous not one. There is no unrighteous not one. You say whatever do you mean? Fancy putting me in the same category as Felix and Drusilla.

I've never committed adultery like that. I've never stolen. Fancy putting me in the same category. Well you may not have done the things that Felix and Drusilla did.

[9 : 35] But we've all failed. There is no unrighteous not one. That was the first heading of Paul's son.

Righteousness. And we've all failed. The second heading was this about self-control. He discoursed about righteousness and self-control. Paul would have told Felix and Drusilla that God created men and women with certain desires.

The desire for food. The desire for pleasure. The desire to get on in life. Even the desire for sex. We have these various desires and appetites.

They were given by God. But when God gave us these desires he intended us to control them. self-control.

We have a desire to eat. Excellent. We wouldn't survive if we didn't have a desire to eat. But God never intended men and women to be gluttonous and to eat like pigs when half the world is starving.

[10 : 53] God wants us to have self-control. We have a desire for sleep. Excellent. Wonderful. We couldn't do without sleep. But God never intended men and women to be lazy and indolent.

To lie in bed all day long loafing life away. God gave us these desires but he intended us to control them. And when God made Adam and Eve these desires were under perfect control. Adam and Eve had a desire to eat but that was under perfect control. But something has gone wrong. Sin came into the world and these desires have now got out of control. That is one of the biggest problems. That is the biggest problem in the world at the present time. People are no longer in control of these desires. They are being controlled by them. We see people dominated by a desire for money. We need money but we see people dominated by a desire for money.

[12:02] There is nothing wrong with desiring a decent living but we see people mastered by this no longer in the control. We see people mastered by a desire for food.

There is nothing wrong with a desire for food. It has been built into addressed by God. But people live for whining and dining now don't they? They are always on about it. We notice that. People are always talking about the posh restaurants. They visited how they have been out for a meal and they boast how much it cost them. I have heard people do that. We went to such and such restaurants and it set me back so many pounds for a meal. They are boasting of how much it cost. When there are people people in Ethiopia and India who are living on rubbish tips.

They are boasting and bragging about how much a meal cost them. This desire for food you see has got out of control. We see other people controlled by a desire for possessions.

[13:07] They've got nice possessions already but they're always lusting and craving for more. That's the world in which we live. We see others mastered by a desire for pleasure.

desire. Desire for sport. There's nothing wrong with sport. But when you see people fighting over sport and spending millions and millions of pounds on sport something has gone wrong. This desire for pleasure has got out of control. Think of the sexual desire. Everybody else is talking about it. Let us do so from a Christian point of view.

There's nothing wrong with the sexual desire. It was implanted in us by Almighty God to be enjoyed in the sacred relationship of marriage and only there.

But it's got out of control. And so we have this awful business of pornography and people living dreadful lives.

[14:15] These desires you see have got out of control. And that was the problem with Felix and Lucilla. Paul preached on self control. You see how relevant his message was.

Maybe there's someone here this morning. If you were honest you would have to confess that you were mastered and enslaved by one or the other of these desires.

The desire for money has mastered you and it grips you. The desire for pleasure has mastered you. The desire for more possessions you are green with envy because someone next door has got more than you got.

And it's mastered you. God intends us to have self control. That was the second heading of Paul's son.

The third heading. Righteousness, self control, and judgment to come. And if Felix and Drusilla needed to hear one truth above all others, it was the truth of judgment to come.

[15:32] they'd forgotten all about that. And if there's one truth that people in Great Britain today need to be reminded of more than any other, it's the truth of judgment to come.

They've forgotten all about that. And if there's one truth that David Cameron and Ed Miliband need to know more than any other, is the truth about judgment to come.

They seem to have forgotten that, that one day they'll have to stand before God and be judged by him. You see, this life is not all.

Death is not the end. Many people think it is, that when we die, we snuff it, and that's it. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The funeral is not the finale. When we die, when the end of the world comes, whichever comes first, we go on, and we go on to meet with God our maker, to be judged by him.

[16:45] The Bible says it is appointed unto men once to die, and after that, the judgment. the Bible says we must all stand before the judgment seat of God.

The Bible says God now commands all men everywhere to repent. Why? Because he's appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness. The Bible is clear about this, that when we die, or when the end of the world comes, all of us will be summoned to stand before God and he will

judge our lives.

And if we have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, if we have turned to the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, God will then announce our destiny, heaven, my eternal kingdom forever and ever.

But if we have turned our backs on the Lord Jesus Christ, and if we live for ourselves, God will also announce our destiny, eternal hell, a place of punishment forever and forever and forever.

Paul put all of this to Felix and to Scylla. Judgment to come, is there any wonder that Felix trembled? If we realized that there is a judgment to come and what that will entail, we would all tremble if we're not Christians.

[18 : 34] Paul reasoned, Paul discoursed about righteousness, self-control and judgment to come. But that wasn't all that Paul said.

Thank God for that. If Paul had stopped there with three points, he would not have preached the gospel. But Paul didn't stop there. He went on to say something else.

Did you notice that? He went on to tell Felix and Drusilla about the Lord Jesus Christ. We're told in verse 24 that Felix and no doubt Drusilla listened to Paul as he spoke about faith in Christ.

Sure he told them about righteousness and their sin. Sure he told them about self-control and their lack of it. Sure he told them about judgment to come and Felix trembled.

But he also told them about something else. The Lord Jesus Christ. He told them how God had this eternal son who shared with him in the creation of the universe.

[19 : 51] He told them how God sent his son the Lord Jesus Christ into this world and allowed him to die upon a cross and that when he died upon the cross he bore the punishment of sin that guilty sinners might be forgiven and escape hell and go to heaven when they died.

Felix and Drusilla said Paul look I've told you about God's righteous laws and how you've broken them. I've told you about your sin and your bondage and how it's controlling you.

I've warned you of judgment to come but feeding Drusilla. I want to tell you about something else. I want to tell you that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

That is the central theme of the Christian message. God allowed his son to leave heaven and come to this world and become a man. God allowed him to go to the cross and bear the punishment of sin so that poor lost sinners like you Felix and like you Drusilla might be saved.

You say well why did God have to do all that? Couldn't he just smile and say I'll forgive your sins? People think that God is like some benevolent grandfather you know.

[21 : 42] Your grandchildren come along misbehave and you think I can't be bothered to correct them. You sort of smile and pretend you haven't seen it and God isn't like that. God can't smile at our sin.

God is just and before our sin can be forgiven the punishment has to be paid. We demand that the referee on the football ground is just.

If that man fouls a member of my team I want the referee to award a penalty the referee must be just. But people complain when God is just.

They want the football ref to be just but they complain and God is just. And God just can't ignore sin before he can forgive it.

It has to be punished. And Jesus Christ his son came and bore the punishment in our place. Paul told Felix and Gisela all of that.

[22 : 52] And then he went even further. He told them how to experience the salvation there and then we're told you see that they listened to Paul as he spoke about faith in Christ.

Paul told them Felix and Gisela your only hope of ever being forgiven is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Your only hope of ever escaping hell, your only hope of ever arriving in heaven is to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and confess your sin and to plead with him to forgive you and to trust in him to do so.

Felix and Gisela, I've been honest with you. I told you your sin and your danger, your only hope is to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and trust in him and beg him to save you.

and you know the Christian message is still the same, still the same. It tells us no matter who we are that our only hope of ever being forgiven, our only hope of ever escaping hell, our only hope of ever arriving in heaven is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and to plead with God to forgive us because of what he did upon the cross of Calvary.

[24 : 29] And my friend, no matter what you've done, you may have been as bad as Felix and Gisela, no matter what you've done, the moment you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be forgiven.

The vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives. That was the message that Paul preached that day to Felix and Gisela.

What was their reaction? Did they believe? Sadly, no. Felix rejected the message.

He said, did you notice? Paul, that's enough for now. You may leave. When I find it convenient, I'll send for you.

I've seen people go out of church with the same attitude. I've seen people go out of church angry.

[25 : 39] angry. I remember my first Christmas day as a preacher, my first Christmas day as a pastor way back in 1964.

A man in the church, a church member, Christmas day, stormed out of church and swore at me as he went past me at the door because he was so angry about the message preached.

And Felix, go on Paul, get out. Enough for now. I've heard enough. Why did he reject the gospel?

Well, the Bible tells us he was more concerned about money and material things than he was about his soul.

What we're told in verse 26, he hoped that Paul would offer him a bribe. He hoped that if he kept Paul in prison, treated nicely, but kept him in prison, Paul would pay a bribe to get free.

You see, Felix was getting a bit hard up if you have two or three mistresses. It's a bit expensive.

And he was hard up and he wanted money. And he was more concerned about getting money than he was about God and Jesus Christ.

[27 : 03] and his own soul. So he rejected the gospel. I know people who still reject the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ because they're more concerned about money.

But not only that, he also rejected the gospel because he was more concerned about his position and popularity. He wanted to keep in with the Jews.

We're told here, verse 27, he wanted to do the Jews a favor. He wanted to keep in with the Jews.

You see, he was already unpopular with the Jews as the Roman governor.

And he wanted to keep in with them. He knew that if he upset them, they'd go running off to the emperor, they would complain to the emperor, he'd probably lose his job. And so in order to keep in with the Jews, he rejected the gospel, kept Paul in prison.

I know no of people today who to keep him with their friends and to keep him with their mates at school or university, they reject the gospel because they want to keep their friends as though their friends were more important than Almighty God, as though their friends were more important than the eternal destiny of their souls.

[28 : 31] Felix rejected the gospel. What about Drusilla? This flighty slip of a girl, this first century sex symbol, what happened to her?

Well, weep for her. Weep for her. I just mentioned before I mentioned Drusilla, what happened to Felix? First of all, he lost his job.

We're told in the last verse of this chapter, when two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Portius Festus. That's a shorthand way of saying Felix lost his job.

He fell out of favor with the Roman emperor, and he lost his job. Everything he'd put before the Lord Jesus Christ, his job, his palace, his income, everything he put before the Lord Jesus Christ, he lost.

And that's a picture, my friend, if you reject the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, ultimately, you'll lose everything, and you'll lose your own soul. But what about Felix?

[29 : 42] What about Drusilla? What happened to her? Well, we should weep for her. according to some historians, some 20 years later, in AD 79, Drusilla was on holiday in Pompeii with her son and his wife.

They were having a marvelous time amid all the binge drinking and all the immorality of that foul city. she went to bed one night, probably more drunk than silver, and in the early hours of the 24th of August AD 79, something terrible happened.

You know what happened on the 24th of August, AD 79, Mount Vesuvius erupted, one of the greatest catastrophes the world has ever known.

Mount Vesuvius erupted, and the molten lava flowed down over Pompeii. The last historical reference to Drusilla is that she was seen fleeing from Pompeii, but then we hear nothing more of

her.

So we assume that she was lost in the destruction of Pompeii. that's a picture of how it will be when everyone who spurns the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, they'll be lost eternally.

[31 : 29] the story of the flighty teenager and the faithful preacher. The gospel is still the same.

God hates sin. God is righteous. We're all unrighteous. We've all sinned. There's a judgment to come. It's certain. It's absolute. It will determine our final destiny.

But the gospel also says that God so loved this world that he sent his one and only son to die upon the cross.

And if we have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, all our sin will be forgiven. What folly to be like Felix and Drusilla and to reject the gospel.

God save us from that. God. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you that the Bible is so up to date.

[32 : 35] We thank you that the Bible is so clear. We thank you that we're left in no doubt in your word that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is our only hope.

And we thank you that it is the only hope for terrible sinners. We thank you that if we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, all our sin will be washed away and we made your children.

We pray that many people today may turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and trust in him. We ask this in our Savior's name. Amen. Amen. Father, the Lord can■■ can please