

If Not Now

Acts 24

In acts chapter 24, we have an account of the Apostle Paul standing before Felix and Drusilla. And the Bible tells us that while in their presence he reasoned with them about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment. Now Luke tells us that after having heard the gospel, that Felix was afraid, and then instructed Paul with these words, he said, go your way.

And he said, when I have a more convenient time, I'll call for you. The Bible is silent as to whether or not Felix ever reached out to the Apostle Paul. But here's what's clear that having heard the gospel, for whatever reason, Felix deferred wouldn't obey, wouldn't submit to the King of kings and Lord of Lords. We might ask this question.

Why? You know, there are a lot of people that have had the opportunity and days gone by to hear the gospel. It might be that you're watching this program today, and through the years, you've had the opportunity to hear the story of the cross, to realize that sin is a real problem. As Paul said, there's none righteous. No.

Not one. All have sinned. All have come short of the glory of God. That's found in Romans chapter three. You understand that as John pointed out, that sin is a transgression of the law. First John chapter three at verse four, and that the wages of sin is death. Romans six, verse 23. You understand those things. You know something about the great love of God, the fact that God wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

You're well aware that Peter said in the long ago that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Peter chapter three and verse nine. You understand those facts, but like Felix and Drusilla, you've deferred over time. You have not taken the opportunity to obey the gospel. And so let me just ask some questions that I think might be relevant to your situation now.

The title of our lesson today is titled If Not. So here's my question. If not now, if not now, why? In other words, you have yet to submit to the teaching of the gospel. So if not now. Wow, what's holding you back? Now, I do not know what was holding Felix and Drusilla back from obeying the gospel. I do know that the Bible says that he was afraid.

And I can read in Hebrews chapter ten, verse 31, where the Bible says it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God. Hebrews 10:31. Well, what the Hebrew writer was saying in the long ago was simply this to die unprepared, to meet God. I think fearful beyond belief. You don't want to do that.

So what's holding you back? Why is it that you have yet to obey the gospel of Christ? I mean, what's keeping you back? Is it possible that one of the things that's holding you back is the feeling that you just don't know enough? It's a competency issue. In other words, you don't feel like you know enough to become a child of God.

Well, let me just answer that with these thoughts. Number one, when we talk about living the Christian life and learning the Bible, it's a lifelong process to learn the teaching of Scripture. But now the fundamentals of the faith. We can understand those. You might think, well, I just don't know enough. Well, do you know that you're a sinner?

The Bible says all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. If you know that. And you

know that the remedy for sin is the blood of Jesus. And you understand that if you're going to become a child of God, you've got to submit your life to the Lord. You've got to be willing, in your heart of hearts to say, I'm going to make him the Lord of my life.

And so, based upon that understanding that he's the Son of God, I'm going to repent of my sins. I'm going to confess his name, and then I'm going to be buried with Christ in baptism, so all my sins can be washed away. If you know that you know enough to become a child of God. Because, see, once you know that once you understand you're a sinner in need of the blood of Christ and you're willing to obey the gospel, then the Lord will put you in the church.

Now the church is the accuracy of the community of the saved. In other words, the saved, the redeemed, the cleansed. They're all in one place. Well, where is that? The church on Pentecost day, when those people heard the gospel in all of its fullness for the very first time, the instructions were to repent, be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.

Some 3000 people did that based on acts two, verse 41, in verse 47. The Bible says, the Lord added to the church daily those who are being saved. Well, who were the saved? Well, the saved were those who were in the church. Well, who then was the church? The church were people that had obeyed the gospel. They comprised the saved.

So if you know that, then you know enough to obey the gospel. Now, I know that there are a lot of folks in the world today. They have this idea again that they just don't know enough. But we're not talking about mastering the scriptures. Think about what Jesus said in Matthew 28 verse 19. The Lord said, go, therefore make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit.

Now look at verse 20, teaching them to observe all things. You see, once we become a child of God, the next step is to be taught be grounded, to grow, as Peter said, in grace and knowledge. In First Peter chapter two, in verse two, Peter said, as a newborn baby desire the sincere milk of the word. Listen to him that you might grow thereby.

Well, again, when we obey the gospel, the comparison is that of an infant. We're a babe in Christ. But the goal is just like a newborn baby. The goal is to grow, to mature, to reach a state of adulthood or spiritual maturity. Again, that's what Peter said in Second Peter chapter three, verse 18. Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

So it might be one of the things that's keeping you back from obeying the gospel is this idea that you just don't know enough. Again, it's a competency issue. Let me side for you another problem sometimes in the minds of people. Sometimes there is a commitment issue. We're just not willing to pull the trigger and do what we know we need to do, because there are maybe fears in our mind.

Maybe we're fearful that we can't live up to the expectations of a child of God, that we're not at a point in our life when we can live, as the Bible talks about. Well, what we have to do is to understand that in becoming a child of God, there is a transformation process that occurs. We're leaving the world.

We're entering a state of redemption, reconciliation. We're a member of the church. We're a babe in Christ. But again, the goal is to grow. To grow in my consecration to the Lord. You remember in Second Corinthians chapter five, Paul tells us the love of Christ constrains us. And he said, wait, judge thus that if one died for all, then all died, and he died for all,

that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died and rose again.

So I have to understand that when I decide to become a child of God, number one, I've got to be well. I've got to be willing to deny herself. Now, that's not always easy to do. In other words, to put the Lord first in my life. That's the requirement. Jesus said, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Matthew 633 now the Lord also said in Matthew chapter 16, verse 24, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself. So that's a prerequisite to entering the kingdom. I've got to be willing to commit my life to the Lord Jesus Christ. I've got to be, as we might say, from time to time. I've got to be all in.

It is. And it's an all in proposition. And that is, I am giving my life fully to the Lord. You remember Paul in Galatians two, in verse 20, when Paul said that he had been crucified with Christ, and he said, it's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. So I've got to be willing to commit my life to the Lord.

I'm going to think sometimes their fears well, how how are my family members and friends going to react? It might be that I've had the opportunity to hear the gospel, and maybe I have friends and family members who are not members of the Church of Christ, and maybe they are prejudicial in their thinking towards the Church of Christ.

And so there is this fear that if I obey the gospel, they're going to ostracize me. Well, that possibly could happen. But you remember what Jesus said in Matthew chapter ten. The Lord said, A man's foes shall be those of his own household. He said in the long ago, he that love, son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

He who loves father or mother more than me, not worthy of me. You see, I've got to be willing to forsake all I said that we have to deny self, but not just in ourself, but die to self. To take up our cross and follow him. Now it's a lot of obligation, isn't it? Sure it is. But you know what?

With the Lord's help, we can do anything Paul said in Philippians chapter four. On one occasion I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I understand sometimes we're hesitant. We're hesitant to commit our lives to the Lord. Fears we can't live up to the expectation. Fears that family and friends might ostracize us, might become prejudicial in their thinking towards us.

If we obey the gospel. But here's the thing if we understand that this is what the truth teaches, and we genuinely love the Lord, and we want to do what he says, wouldn't it stand to reason that we would be willing to submit our lives to him? That once we come to understand that this is the only hope that I have to live eternally in the presence of God?

Once we understand that, it's incumbent on us to do it. Now again, I know that there are a lot of folks in the world today, and many people have been thinking about obeying the gospel, and they're on that proverbial fence post, just haven't pulled the trigger. So I want to ask you, if not now, why? What is it that is holding you back from obeying the gospel?

Now, there's a second consideration here.

If not now, when? Now we just ask the question. If not now, why? What if not now? When? Okay, you know the truth. You know that God wants you to be saved. You've read time and again the great love story of the cross, and you understand the conditions set forth in

Scripture to become a child of God. You know that, but you just haven't done it.

So if not now, when? I mean, when are you planning to obey the gospel of Christ? Let me just maybe say some things that might spur you along. If you ever thought about this, that if you continue to delay and refuse to obey the gospel, that death might occur. Now, I know that in this day and time we don't like to talk about death.

We don't like to think about it. Matter of fact, many folks just so not even even have one inkling of a thought about leaving this world. A lot of stand that. But here's what the Hebrew writer said. It is appointed on a man wants to die. And after this comes the judgment. Hebrews 9:27. The Bible compares our life to a vapor.

And the Bible says, it appears for a little while and then vanishes away. The psalmist many, many years ago asked this question. He said, what man can live and not see death? Well, the hard, cold fact of the matter is death is a reality. We are born into this world to die. Job said, man born of woman is a few days and full of trouble.

So it may be you've deferred. You, like Felix, have said. You know what? I'm going to wait till a more convenient time. And then, and only then am I going to obey the gospel. What of how many people are in eternity as we speak? That in their heart of hearts they intended to obey the gospel? I remember many, many years ago when I obey the gospel, I was a teenager.

And like what occurred so many times when people obey the gospel. Once a person is baptized into Christ, there are a lot of well-wishers. I never will forget the day that I was baptized. I was 14 years of age and there was a older, more mature Christian lady came up to me in the parking lot where I'd been baptized in Chattanooga, Tennessee, at the old Ridsdale congregation, and she came up to me and she said, you know, years ago, my brother and a friend were sitting in the pews on a Sunday morning and my brother said, I'm going to be baptized.

And the fellow with him, the friend said, wait till next week. And here's what this little lady told me. She said, my brother drowned that week. He never got to obey the gospel. Now, when we talk about deferring and delaying, one of the dangers is death. Many years ago, I'm just getting started as a young preacher. There was a young lady that came into my office with her daddy.

Time with the time of the year was in December. I never will forget. We sat down and talked about the gospel and talked about him obeying the gospel. And he said, you know what he said? I think after the first of the year, I'll be willing to sit down and and study and commit them. Well, fortunately, his daughter looked at him and she said, daddy, if you'll obey the gospel, she said, that'd be the best Christmas present you could ever give me.

Well, he obeyed the gospel that day. What we didn't know on that day was this he would never live to see the New Year before the New year began. He was killed in an automobile accident. What if he had waited? He'd have been lost. So it might be that you need to think about that. That death can occur.

But then there's a second consideration here. Number one. Death. Number two. What if the Lord were to come? You say, well, why would I even begin to think that the Lord might come in my lifetime? Well why not? You know, the Bible says the day of the Lord will come as a thief on the night in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise.

The elements will melt with fervent heat. The earth and the works therein will be burned up. You know that in Second Peter chapter three. In that context, Peter would say an account

that the long suffering of the Lord is salvation. You know what Peter's saying? The reason the Lord Jesus has yet to come is because God is longsuffering.

God's giving you the opportunity to make things right. He's giving you the opportunity to obey the gospel. And right now you have that opportunity when the Lord Jesus comes. Look, there are no second chances. No. When the Lord comes, it'll be too late. Now, the Lord might come in your lifetime. Maybe not. We don't know. He might not come for another thousand years.

A million years? We don't know. But I know this. He's coming. Jesus said, born of that day and hour knoweth no man, not the angels of heaven, but my father only. And really, the Lord stressed in that context in Matthew chapter 24, Jesus said, watch. Why? Because you don't know the hour or day when the Lord's coming. So it might be that you ought to consider that.

Now again you say, well, I just I just don't think he's going to come in my lifetime. Well, maybe so, maybe not. But then there's a third thought you need to think about. Number one, there's always possibility of death. Number two, there's always possibility the Lord could come. But number three, if you ever stop to think that your conscience could become seared.

In other words, there's no feeling there. You know, in first Timothy chapter four, Peter, or rather, Paul and the long ago said, the spirit speaks expressly, that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, forbidding to Mary commanding to abstain from meats which have been given by the loving God in heaven.

But he talked about those who would have their conscience seared with a hot iron. Now, if you know anything at all about branding, you know that when an animal, say, for example, a cow is branded, that the feeling is no longer there. In other words, those nerve endings have been destroyed. And what Paul is saying is that your conscience over time, can become seared, like being seared or branded with a hot iron.

Just no feeling there. Many years ago, I had shingles in my cornea and not only in my cornea, but also on my forehead and even in my scalp. And one of the consequences of that is I don't have any feeling in my forehead on my left side. It's just numb. Well, imagine if you can you hear the gospel and you hear it over and over and over again, but you're just not moved.

Why? Because that conscience has been seared. Now we talk about the conscience being safely guarded by the word of God. But imagine if you can. You have a conscience that's no longer subject to the gospel. You can't be moved by the gospel. And then you remember in Hebrews chapter three, the Hebrew writer talked about exhorting one another daily, lest you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

What about the heart? Your heart might become so hard and calloused that you could hear the gospel weekend and week out, but just unmoved you. You're not. You're not willing to submit to the commands of the gospel. Why? Because of a hard heart. Didn't Solomon say many years ago? Guard your heart with all diligence, for out of it flow the issues of life.

Let me tell you what. You better guard your heart. You better make sure that your heart doesn't get to a point where you reach that no man's land. As we say from time to time. The point of no return. Now, look, I don't know at what point an individual reaches when he or she can no longer respond to the gospel.

But I do believe that a person can reach a point in life when they're no longer moved by the

gospel of Christ. They have a seared conscience. They have a hard heart, and they'll believe a lie and be condemned. As Paul said in Second Thessalonians chapter two. Well, you need to think about that. So number one, if not now, why?

What's holding you back? Number two. If not now, when? When is that convenient time coming for you? The Bible does doesn't say about Felix. Andrew, silly. Far as I know, that convenient season, that convenient time never rolled around. Don't let that happen to you. But then, number three. If not now, what? What could be said or done that would cause you to obey the gospel?

Now think about that for a minute. What could be said or done that would make a difference in your life right now? Would it be talking again about the love of God? When Jesus said, For God so loved the world. Doesn't that move you that God loves you enough to send his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life?

I mean, doesn't that move you? We read a moment ago Second Corinthians chapter five, where Paul said, the love of Christ constrains us. Well, what about the love of God? I mean, what more could be said about God's love? Paul said, God's rich in mercy for the great love wherewith they loved us. What could be said? What could be done that would prompt you at this good hour to obey the gospel?

Would it be the love of God? Would it be understanding more about the grace of God that where sin abounds, grace abounds much more? That because of God's grace, because of his goodness, because of his tremendous love is reached out, taking steps so that we might spend eternity with him. Would that be enough to push us in the direction of obeying the gospel?

I mean, what more could be said? You know, in acts chapter two, when Peter and the apostles preached the gospel for the very first time in all of its fullness, you remember the text says that with many other words, Did Peter testify and exhort them, saying, be saved from this crooked generation? I just imagine the appeal. The appeal of the gospel.

You remember in Second Corinthians chapter five, Paul said, we must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ, that each 1st May give an account of the deeds done in the body according to what he's done, whether good or bad. Now look at verse 11. Paul said, knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.

In other words, we're trying to push you. We're trying to push you to see the truth of the gospel, to understand that one day we're going to stand in the presence of God, and that on that great and final on that great and final day, the only thing that's going to matter is my relationship with the Lord. Now you think about the judgment to come.

No wonder Felix and herself, when they heard the presentation of the gospel, when the Apostle Paul reasoned with them about righteousness and self-control and the judgment. No wonder he was afraid. Any man or woman in his or her right mind, standing outside of Christ, hearing the gospel, understanding that there is a judgment day coming and we're not ready.

That automaker's afraid or scared to death. And yet, here's the beauty of it. We don't have to die outside of Christ. Now, the theme of our lesson today, if not now, if not now, why? If not now, when? When are you going to obey the gospel? When will be the convenient time in your life to obey? But then, number three.

If not now, what? What could we. That is, those of us in churches of Christ, what could we say or do that would prompt you to do what you know you need to do? Well, what is that? Obey the gospel. I want to close by reminding you of this verse. The Bible says that God would

have all men.

That's males and females. God would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Jesus said in the long ago, you shall know the truth. The truth shall make you free. John eight verse 32. In verse 34 he said that those who commit sin of the bond servants of sin. In verse 36 he said of the son, makes you free.

You're free indeed. You can have freedom in Christ today. As Paul said, there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. God bless.