



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

A Tale of Two Politicians (Acts 13 and Acts 24)

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It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way. . . .

When Charles Dickens began his famous novel “A Tale of Two Cities”, he was comparing London and Paris. It’s interesting, though, that his words so appropriately describe two politicians found in the pages of the New Testament. Both were rulers. Both sought to hear the Word of God. Both responded to the Word when they heard it from Paul. And they both teach us lessons as we share the same Scriptures.

I. THE RESPONSE MAY BE ACCEPTANCE

Acts 13:6, 7, 12 - When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. . . Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Sergius Paulus was the governor of Cyprus when Saul (later renamed Paul) and Barnabas began their first missionary journey. Paphos was the capital of the island and the novelty of Paul’s message reached the ears of Sergius. This passage says he sought to hear the Word of God, which Saul was happy to deliver.

The encouraging lesson here is that there are times that God’s Word will penetrate the hearts of leaders and this is a result for which we should all pray. Dickens’ “epoch of belief” was realized here in first-century Cyprus.

"We ought to pray much more than we do for men in high places, because they have many bewitching temptations and less gracious opportunities than even the most humble paupers. There is less likelihood of the gospel ever affecting their hearts, than of its converting the poor and needy. We should make them therefore the special subjects of

supplication, and then we might hope to see consecrated crown far more frequently." – Charles H. Spurgeon

II. THE RESPONSE MAY BE ALARM

Acts 24:24, 25 After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, “Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.”

In this chapter, Paul is under arrest as he appeals his case to higher authorities (eventually to reach Caesar). But even in this circumstance, we see him faithfully ministering just like he did with Sergius Paulus years earlier.

For some background, Felix (procurator of Judea) and Drusilla didn’t have the purest of relationships. She was married to someone else when she started seeing Felix, then Felix abducted Drusilla to take her as a wife, even though she wasn’t divorced or a widow.

With these two as his audience, what topics does Paul cover from Scripture? Was it time for some soft acceptance of this couple’s strange marriage – who are we to judge if they were right or wrong? No – Paul spoke to them about being righteous and having self-control and that everyone will give an account to God at the end of their lives when there will be judgment. Felix responded to this teaching with unbelief and fear.

There will be times when people will respond to the Bible like Felix, running from God. Even anger toward hearing the Word is a form of showing fear – fear of facing what has been heard and being accountable for sin. Prepare to lose popularity with some people when you tell them the truth from God’s Word.

IMPLICATIONS FOR US

The implications from these two accounts are stark and clear. Paul’s example of steadfastly teaching the Scriptures should motivate us to depend on the power of the truth of God’s Word and share it with others consistently.

Also, we must realize that the message may be accepted or rejected, but we are not in control of the results. This reality should keep us in humble reliance on the moving of God’s Spirit in the hearts of leaders who come under the truth of the Bible.