

Be Clear
Acts 24:17-27

aide us in seeing things more clearly whether cognitively or visibly.

The name Johnny Nash may or may not ring a bell with you. If not, maybe his single hit from 1972 will. The song is still heard on the radio, in elevators, and commercials.

I can see clearly now, the rain is gone,
I can see all obstacles in my way
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind
It's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)
Sun-Shiny day.

I think I can make it now, the pain is gone
All of the bad feelings have disappeared
Here is the rainbow I've been prayin for
It's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)
Sun-Shiny day.

Look all around, there's nothing but blue skies
Look straight ahead, nothing but blue skies

I can see clearly now, the rain is gone,
I can see all obstacles in my way
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind
It's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)
Sun-Shiny day

It has been suggested that on a clear day a person can see 71 miles at sea level. That doesn't take into account that with the naked eye an individual can at times see the moon during the day. Others suggest that on any given night that is clear an individual can see clearly without the aid of a telescope the Andromeda galaxy, which is about 2 million light years away, provided you know where to look and what to look for. Still others suggest that it all depends on how good your eye sight is so that as long as your receptors in the eye can detect a photon from the source, you can see it.

From games to eye care products to mental acuity development products have been marketed to help

The apostle Paul is on the witness stand before Felix having been granted the opportunity to defend his position against the accusations that have been alleged by the Sanhedrin through their hired lawyer, Tertullus. Paul has been charged with 1) being a worldwide trouble maker, 2) being the ring leader of the Nazarene sect and 3) attempting to desecrate the Temple in Jerusalem. These charges had serious political and religious ramifications.

Paul has to this point simply but eloquently stated his innocence noting that he has a clear conscience before God and man in his actions and words. They don't have a leg a stand on with these trumped up charges. We turn now to the remainder of his defense. If you have your Bible find your way to Acts 24:17-27.

From our previous messages we have through the example of Paul learned three important truths about how to live the Christian life. Do you remember what they are?

Be Courageous
Be Confident
Be Consistent

Today we find a fourth truth when it comes to living the Christian life. It is how Paul lived and how he gave his testimony. It's also the title of today's message and our challenge - Be Clear.

Notice in verse 17 that Paul's motive was clear.

I. PAUL'S MOTIVE WAS CLEAR – v. 17

Motive has been defined as some inner drive, impulse or intention that causes a person to do something, to work toward some goal. When a person commits a crime of some kind the police look for a motive, the reason behind why they did what they did.

There is a motive behind shopping. If you go to the grocery store, your motive is to buy groceries.

There is a motive behind working. It's to earn a living in order to pay for expenses.

There is a motive behind vacation. It's to get away from daily responsibilities.

Paul had a motive for going to Jerusalem. He continues his defense giving a clear reason why he came to Jerusalem in the first place. He states that he had been away from Jerusalem for a number of years and gives two reasons for returning to Jerusalem.

The first reason or motive for his return was to bring a gift to the believers who were hit hard by the famine. Back in Acts 20:4 it's noted that several church delegates from the Gentile Churches were accompanying Paul on this journey to Jerusalem. Some believe that the offering was a very sizeable gift so having additional men along with Paul would provide greater security for the gift reaching its destination without incident. It was more than just meeting some tangible physical needs of buying food or clothes. It was a way in which Paul hoped to further bring Jewish and Gentile Christians together. There was still some friction in the body of Christ from Jewish Christians who thought Gentiles ought to obey the Jewish Laws. This offering was a way to remind them of their unity in Christ. The offering had far reaching religious implications for the Church.

The second reason he was returning to Jerusalem is also found in verse 17. He states that he came to present offerings at the Temple. It is unclear what Paul is referring to here. Remember that previously as Paul was preparing to return to Jerusalem he hoped to get to the city in time to celebrate the Passover, but because of a plot to assassinate him was discovered, they had to change their travel plans and go by land rather than by boat. This delayed his arrival in Jerusalem so that he would get in town in time for Pentecost. It could be that Paul

was referring to his celebration of the Jewish festival and to give God a thank offering for safety in his many journeys presenting the gospel.

That he came to present offerings could also be referring to his need to go to the Temple to make payment for the vow he had taken with the four other Jewish Christians showing his deference to Jewish laws and customs. Remember from Acts 21:24 that Paul had taken on the responsibility of sponsoring these men in their vow. It's unclear what he meant and either or both could be the right answer. In any case Paul is clear about the motive for his coming to the city.

Now in verse 18 we see that his method was clear.

II. PAUL'S METHOD WAS CLEAR – v. 18

When we speak of method we think of how something is done. There is a procedure for the way it is done.

In a shop you may have had SOP's – standard operating procedures. On any given piece of equipment or any process to complete a task, you had a standard way of doing that task or operating that machine. There may also be policies affixed to them as well. Some of those SOP's are to ensure product quality is met regarding the standard of what the widget is to look like when it comes out of the process so that there is uniformity. Other SOP's include steps that don't necessarily have anything to do with the quality of the product, but rather have everything to do with safety. If you've worked in a shop or a doctor's office or even in the food industry you know about these required methods of doing things. You wear personal protective equipment.

Paul was adhering to a religious SOP. It was the Old Testament Law. Having been a Pharisee he knew the ramifications for not following them. He states that in going up to the Temple he was ceremonially clean. He came to worship God and

he wanted his worship of God to be with a clean and sincere heart, so he took whatever steps were necessary according to the Law to ensure that he was not violating any of the religious laws that would otherwise prohibit him from entering the Temple.

We should pause here a moment and ask that of each of us. When we come together to worship on the Lord's Day, have we taken the appropriate steps to prepare our hearts to worship God? When you have company over you would never think of offering the meal on dishes that are unclean, yet can we say that about offering our worship to God? Is our worship from a clean heart, a heart that has confessed sin and ready to worship the living and Holy God? Paul gave clear instructions to the Corinthians about the method by which we are to approach the communion table. "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself."

(I Corinthians 11:28-29)

Paul was ceremonially clean when entering the Temple to worship God. That's how his accusers found him. He also notes that when he was in the Temple he was alone. There wasn't anyone with him. This was a time of private worship for Paul. There was no crowd around him, he wasn't engaged in any discussion about matters of faith – he was alone. Furthermore, because he was alone he was not involved in any disturbance. He wasn't debating about Christ or the cross or anything religious. He wasn't chiding individuals about their unbelief about who the Messiah was. He wasn't goading them to change their minds about Christianity. He was in the Temple to worship.

Paul's motive was clear.

Paul's method was clear.

Paul's motion was clear.

III. PAUL'S MOTION WAS CLEAR – v. 19-21

In law a motion is an appeal to the court for a ruling. Paul appealed to Felix to consider that the real accusers were not present. His real accusers were from the province of Asia. The Sanhedrin had rightly kept them from traveling to Caesarea because they knew that the charges were fabricated. Any cross examination by Felix of these individuals would find that their accusations were false, they had no case and Felix would likely bring about charges against them for wasting his time. The Sanhedrin had not found him guilty and Tertullus had failed to bring legitimate charges against him.

Additionally Paul challenged the Sanhedrin to state their case against him if in fact they even had any evidence of wrong doing. Paul then motioned Felix to consider that the real reason he was on trial was because of his belief in the resurrection of the dead.

The resurrection is not only one of the themes that courses its way throughout the book of Acts but which along with the cross is at the core of Christianity. That there is a resurrection is taught both in Old and New Testament doctrine.

Old Testament saints believed in the resurrection and taught it.

Job 19:25-27 "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes – I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"

John 11:24 "Martha answered, 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'"

Hebrews 11:39-40 "These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."

The author is supporting the doctrine that Old Testament saints had a faith in the Lord understanding that there would be a resurrection so that they would enter that promised final rest.

The New Testament speaks of both a general or universal and a specific resurrection. By general or universal resurrection I mean that there is a resurrection that will be for everyone. By specific I mean that there will be a resurrection of those who have placed their faith in Christ.

Let's talk for a moment about the specific resurrection.

I Thessalonians 4:16-17

I Corinthians 15:51-52

Who are these that are raised in this specific resurrection? They are the dead in Christ. My Mom will be in that group. The apostle Paul will be in that group along with the other apostles. So will Wycliffe and Zwingli and Hus and Luther and the Wesley brothers and Fanny Crosby and D.L. Moody and people you know. Anyone who has placed their faith in Christ as Savior having repented of their sin and have died before the return of Christ will be in that resurrection of the dead.

How do we know that this resurrection will occur? We not only have the promise etched for eternity in the pages of the infallible, inerrant Word of God, we also have victory over death and the grave because of Christ Himself.

I Corinthians 15:12-21, 54-57

The resurrection is proof that Christ paid for our sins and that His sacrifice was accepted by the Father in atonement for those sins. Friends, if Christ has not been raised from the dead but is still in the grave, then we have our spiritual ladder up against the wrong wall, we are still dead in our sins. Our faith is vain and our hope is dashed. But praise God Jesus did rise from the dead and at least 52 times a year we celebrate His resurrection every

time we gather on this day, Sunday, the Lord's Day to commemorate not His death, but His resurrection. Then when we gather around the Lord's Table we not only show the Lord's death and remember what it was He did for us, we gather around the Lord's Table to show the Lord's death until He comes again. We don't observe communion just because He died, we observe communion because He's coming again and when He does the dead in Christ will rise first then those are alive at His coming will be raised to new life just as the dead in Christ are raised to new life: and everyone said Hallelujah!

The unfortunate thing is that many will not share in this first resurrection. There is another resurrection, a general or universal resurrection for all those who refused and rejected God's gift of salvation in this life who will also be raised again, but raised for a different purpose and a different destination.

Daniel 12:1-2

John 5:25-29

Revelation 20:11-13

There will be a resurrection of all who have died, some to eternal life, others to eternal punishment. There is no annihilation, no purgatory that leads to eventual pardon. The decision you make in this life about Christ will determine your destination in the life to come. That's what Paul believed and taught.

Paul stood before Felix and pressed the point of the resurrection. He firmly believed in it. Do you?

Paul's motive was clear.

Paul's method was clear.

Paul's motion was clear.

Paul's manner was clear.

IV. PAUL'S MANNER WAS CLEAR – v. 22-23

By manner I'm referring to Paul's way of life, his conduct, his character. We talked about his walk, his work and his witness all being consistent. Paul

knew he was innocent. Paul knew Felix knew he was innocent. Paul knew the Sanhedrin knew he was innocent. Furthermore, Felix knew Paul was innocent. Felix knew all about the Way, about Christianity. As governor it was his responsibility to be acquainted with the beliefs and customs of the people in his jurisdiction. Christianity was not a silent movement. It had caused quite a stir not just in Jerusalem, but in Judea and the Roman Empire. There has been debate about how Felix was acquainted with Christianity. It can be any number of reasons or a combination of them. Let me offer two suggestions.

You will recall that back in chapter 21 as Paul was on his way to Jerusalem, he stopped in the city of Caesarea. Verse 8 of that chapter says that when they arrived in town they stayed at the home of Philip the Evangelist. You will remember that he was one of the Spirit filled men chosen as a deacon to help the widows in Jerusalem. Later he was out witnessing and had that experience of being transported by the Spirit to that desert road where he witnessed to and led the Ethiopian Eunuch to Christ. Eventually he got married and settled down in Caesarea where he continued his work as an evangelist. The home of Felix was Caesarea because the city was the seat of Roman government over Judea. Christianity was alive and well in town.

The second way Felix may have been familiar with Christianity is through his wife Drusilla. We learn both from Scripture and from history that she was Jewish. She was the daughter of Herod the Great. He's the one who murdered all the infants in Bethlehem after the birth of Jesus. She would be the niece of Herod Antipas who had John the Baptist beheaded, daughter of Herod Agrippa I who killed James and sister to Herod Agrippa II. Through her family ties in close association to Christianity in Judea she may have helped Felix understand their beliefs.

Notice though that Felix allowed Paul certain privileges while in prison. This supports the idea that Felix knew Paul was innocent. If Paul was guilty of desecrating the Temple, Felix could have handed the Apostle over to the Sanhedrin for instant execution. If he had been guilty of raising up a new religious sect without government approval or of inciting a riot, he could have been handed over to the Roman guards for instant execution. Instead he was given certain liberties that allowed his friends to come and assist in his care. Paul's integrity came shining through and Felix knew this man was different than any others he had tried. Bear again in mind the central theme of this chapter found in verse 16 "So I strive always to keep a clear conscience before God and man."

Is your manner clear?

Paul had a manner about him that reflected the character of Christ. It was truly an intriguing and appealing character that brings us to our final point from these closing verses of the chapter. Keep in mind that everything Paul did revealed a life that was clear. His character gave him a platform to speak and articulate the gospel.

V. PAUL'S MESSAGE WAS CLEAR – v. 24-27

Living a consistent life that is Christ like will eventually create a thirst in others who don't have such a character. Curiosity will cause an individual to begin to ask questions. You're driving along and curiosity brings to mind something you have noticed or have been pondering. Curiosity then leads to ask questions that leads to seeking out those who may have answers. That's what happened for Felix. He called for Paul. Tell me more about the Way. What makes you different from others who say they have religion? I want to hear more.

Paul spoke about three things that day with Felix and his wife, Drusilla.

He spoke about righteousness.

He spoke about self-control.

He spoke about judgment.

Paul shared the gospel with him. The gospel begins with understanding the righteousness of God and that He demands we meet His standard of holiness, but no one can live up to that standard. We have all fallen short because of our sin. There isn't anyone who is righteous in themselves.

Dr. Karl Menniger wrote a book in 1973 titled *Whatever Happened to Sin?* In it he describes how the word and the notion of sin was being replaced with more benign words or was being eliminated from vocabulary altogether. That was 40 years ago and it's only grown worse today. We want to excuse it away as a genetic flaw or a character quirk.

Phyllis McGinley, a noted American writer and poet has said that "people are no longer sinful. They are only immature or underprivileged or frightened or, more particularly, sick."

The gospel includes a standard of righteousness that we cannot meet. So man has created his own standard. But God's standard still exists and only one that matters and we have all fallen short of it so He sent someone who could meet that standard of perfection, His Son. He died for the sins of mankind and those who accept and believe and receive will have eternal life. If not, there is only judgment to come.

Paul spoke so clearly and plainly that our text tells us that Felix trembled. He was afraid. He was brought under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and at that moment had an opportunity to repent and become saved, clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

But what was his response? Did he repent? Did he fall on his knees as did the tax collector in the gospels who begged for God's mercy on one who was a sinner? Like the Philippian jailer did he cry out to know what he must do to be saved? Did he request to be baptized right away?

The Bible tells us he sent Paul away until it was a more convenient time. He procrastinated.

Procrastination is defined as replacing something of high priority with tasks of low priority, putting off something to a later time, delaying something that requires immediate attention.

Felix was under heavy conviction and if Paul was right and he made a decision for Christ that day, it meant that a drastic change would have to take place in his character. He knew he was a sinner and instead of getting the antidote for his sinfulness he delayed making a decision.

There is a story that one day Satan met with four of his top demons. He commanded that they think up new lies that would trap more souls to the same doom they faced. The first demon came forward with an idea and said he would go to earth and convince people that there is no God. Satan laughed it off and said that all people needed to do was look around and they could see evidence that God existed.

The second stepped forward with his plan and indicated that he would get people to believe that there was no heaven. Satan sneered at that stating that everyone believes in life after death and that they all want to go to heaven.

The third offered his suggestion that he would convince people that there is no hell, but Satan shot that down too noting that because of their conscience, people knew their sins would be judged.

After some time of contemplation, the fourth demon spoke up stating that he had the solution. He would tell people that there is no hurry.

How about you? Has the Lord spoken to you about some decision whether for salvation or otherwise that you need to make? Have you procrastinated?

Felix was convicted of sin, but put off taking care of it. You will notice that on other occasions Felix met with Paul, but there was no conviction.

Motivated not to hear the truth, but rather hoping that Paul would bribe him with money he regularly called for Paul. A rich man one night sat back on his porch contemplating that he was well taken care of because his barns were filled full. He had no needs whatsoever. He could live it up now and retire well off. That night the Lord of all heaven and earth sent him to his death. The Lord says what good is it to gain the whole world and yet forfeit your soul to hell. That's what Felix had done.

My college theology professor told of a man in his congregation who had never been saved but regularly attended services. Week after week he could see the man agonizing over the decision to trust Christ. Each week the professor could see how determined he was to resist going forward to receive Christ. Always sitting near the front he could see the man gripping the pew in front of him, even to the point of observing his knuckles turning white. One Sunday the man was so gripped by conviction that with clenched fists and resolute grimace on his face he stamped around in a small circle where he stood at the invitation resisting the prompting of the Holy Spirit to repent. I wish I could stand here and tell you that the professor shared how he finally gave in, but he went on to say that from that Sunday on the man always sat in the front and when the invitation was given just stood with no more conviction.

Felix was moved by the accusations of his sin, but he was unmoved to action because of it. As far as we know, he died just as he lived immersed in sin. Felix has become a type of those who are stirred by the Word of God but don't want to give up their sin. Someone has rightly said that the two sworn enemies of sin are yesterday and tomorrow. Too many people think about their past and think that what they have done could never be forgiven by God. Others think that they have plenty of time to live it up and do what they want before they need to make a decision for Christ. They think they're a

long way from dying. But who knows really if the angel of death is coming right now.

Hebrews 3:7-8a "So, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts...'"

For two years Paul witnessed to Felix, but eventually time became an enemy and Felix was replaced by another governor.

Righteousness is God's absolute standard. We cannot get to heaven without it.

Sin is man's inability to meet that standard. But God provided a righteousness that is not our own by our faith in the only righteous man who ever lived – Jesus Christ through whom by faith in Him we can meet this standard of righteousness.

Judgment is the result if man does not live up to God's standard.

At some point Felix the judge became the one on trial standing before a just judge: one who knows the truth, one who will not accept bribes, one whose standard is the same for everyone.

A survey was conducted some time ago by the Barna group. Only 4% between the ages of 14-18 and 6% over the age of 19 made a decision to trust Christ for salvation. They also concluded from their research that a person who is unsaved at age 14 has only a 10% chance of being saved. Please bear in mind that salvation is not by chance but by choice so don't misunderstand the use of the word. The point is the longer a person procrastinates making a personal decision to trust Christ as Savior, the less likely he is to make that decision.

There is a resurrection coming for each of us. Paul's message was clear about how you can know for sure which one you will be a part of. The question remains for you alone to answer: are you clear about which one?