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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A1760 ~ Paul before Felix.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

A large number of Roman soldiers had taken the Apostle Paul to Roman Governor Felix in Caesarea for his safety. The Jews in Jerusalem were planning to kill Paul and it was a risk that the commander of the Roman fort in Jerusalem didn't want to take, especially as Paul was a naturally born Roman citizen and there was no real reason for the death charges that the Jews had brought against him. On the way, Paul must have wondered what Felix was like.

Felix was the younger brother of a Greek man who served as a secretary of the Roman treasury during the reign of Emperor Claudius. Through the influence of his older brother, Felix was appointed Roman governor of Judea province from 52 AD to 58 AD. He lived a cruel and immoral lifestyle, and this coupled with his keen interest in being bribed, led to a great increase in crime within the province. His rule was marked by internal feuds and disturbances, which he responded to by suppressing the people ruthlessly.

When the Jewish leaders of the Sanhedrin travelled down to Paul's trial before Felix in Caesarea five days later, they took with them a lawyer named Tertullus. He addressed the court on behalf of the chief priests and elders.

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The lawyer named Tertullus began his speech before Felix's court by praising Felix. This was the custom in New Testament times. But Felix wasn't worthy of such praise. Tertullus first charged that Paul was a troublemaker who was stirring up riots among Jews all over the world. He said this because in those times, the Jews were always bringing this charge against Christians everywhere.

In fact, one of the main reasons Luke wrote his Gospel and the book of Acts was to show that the Christians had not committed any of the crimes they'd been accused of. The Christians hadn't caused disturbances or revolted against the Roman Government. Whenever they were brought into court, no one could prove that they'd been guilty of breaking any Roman law.

Tertullus' second charge against Paul was that he was a ringleader of a Nazarene sect. Jesus was called a 'Nazarene' because He had been brought up in the town of Nazareth, in Israel. This reference is the only place in the New Testament where Jesus' followers are ever called members of the 'Nazarene sect.'

The next charge against Paul was that he'd tried to desecrate the temple. The Jews knew that there was no proof that Paul had actually desecrated the temple, so they couldn't charge him with that. So they only charged him with 'trying' to desecrate it! Tertullus' point was that if the Jews had not first seized Paul, he would have indeed desecrated the temple. How hard it would be for Paul to disprove that charge!

Tertullus was very clever. A crafty and skilful lawyer can make even an innocent man look guilty!

Tertullus twisted the truth when describing Paul's arrest. He said that the Jews had seized Paul 'according to our law,' but that the commander had snatched Paul out of the Jews' hands 'with the use of much force.' By the account in Scripture, this wasn't true. Rather, it was the Jews who 'with the use of much force' almost succeeded in murdering Paul right in the courtyard of the temple, and it was only the arrival of the Roman soldiers that saved his life!

What should Paul do when faced with a lot of untrue accusations? Firstly, he remained calm. He had a vision from the Lord Jesus saying that he, Paul, would be a witness for God in Rome. That was very comforting. He knew that he wasn't going to die that day or the day after. However he had to make good use of the skills he had learnt in his days sitting at the feet of Israel's greatest teacher, Gamaliel.

In some countries, anyone bringing false accusations to court against another person while knowing they are innocent of those charges, can be punished by imprisonment. Yet the chief priests and elders knew they couldn't be charged with anything – they'd gotten away with many things in the past, the worst one being the murder of the greatest man to ever walk on earth, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We often think someone has got away with some wrongdoing because there seems to be no immediate punishment. But it's often true that we don't notice the punishment that is received is a punishment. If you see another person getting away with doing something wrong, including false testimony in court, and not being caught by the laws of the land at that time, you might start thinking that life isn't fair! Someone should step up and give the missing punishment! It's right to stand up for the innocent, but it is also right to leave vengeance in God's hands. Remember, no one, not a single person, will ever escape the court of God on Judgment Day even if it seems they have in this life!

Often it's proven better that a guilty person be penalised with earthly imprisonment for their more serious offences. People in jail have time to think about the past, how they got to where they are and where they'd like to go in the future. There are often others who come to the jails to help prisoners get their life back on track. Some of those who give their life to the Lord Jesus while in jail have a dramatic change in their thinking and behaviour. They determine to move forward while trusting in the Lord, no matter the cost either in or outside of jail.

One such man was a petty criminal living in Sydney Australia in the first half of the 20th Century. His name was Arthur Stace and he was born as the youngest child to a family of five in 1884. His father was an alcoholic and his mother ran a brothel. With his two brothers and two sisters, he often slept on old bags under the house to escape the anger of his father when drunken and violent. The family lived in pitiful poverty and had a daily battle to survive. Arthur received no schooling and he was taken away and made a 'Ward of the State' by the government when he was 12 years old. He'd never grown much more than 5 feet tall.

Arthur went to work in a coal mine for two years and it was the year after that he served his first jail sentence. Even by then, Arthur was a heavy drinker; he lost a number of jobs and so he turned to stealing.

Arthur enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force early in 1916 when World War I was half-way through. After serving in France and London headquarters in England, Arthur returned to Australia in 1919 and he was discharged as being medically unfit. He'd seen the horrors of warfare in the trenches and he received injuries that had impaired his sight to one eye. He was suffering from shell shock and mustard gas poisoning.

Back home, Arthur found it easy to renew old friendships and soon he slipped into his old life of alcohol, gambling and crime. He wandered the streets feeding out of rubbish bins. He soon found the cheapest way of feeding his addiction by drinking methylated spirits, which was very harmful to his health.

Arthur started to realise that alcohol was now controlling him and would destroy him, just as it had done so with his father. In time, a preacher who helped down-and-out men persuaded Arthur to give up the grog.

By 1930, the world was in the grip of the Great Depression. Unemployed men walked the streets searching for help wherever it might be found. One church ran a meeting for needy men. The preacher was a strong evangelical with a great concern for people. In his meetings, the preacher presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the only solution for man's need; and afterwards, supplied each man with a cup of tea and a rock cake.

One winter's day, Arthur wandered into this meeting and found 300 men seated in the hall. Arthur looked at the well-dressed Christians and he decided he'd have a go at what they had. After the Gospel had been presented and each man had received his cake and tea, Arthur left the hall and he crossed into a park. Under a big tree, he fell on his knees and with tears of repentance streaming down his face, he cried out, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!"

God heard his cry and Arthur became a child of God. For the next 37 years, his life was a living testimony to God's saving and keeping power. In the 1930s, he'd heard an evangelist tell a congregation: "Eternity! Eternity! I wish I could sound or shout that word to everyone in the streets of Sydney. Eternity! You have to meet it ... Where will you spend eternity?" Arthur was inspired! He said: "I felt a powerful call from the Lord to write 'Eternity'. I had a piece of chalk in my pocket, and I bent down right there and I wrote it; I've been writing it at least 50 times a day ever since."

When Arthur Stace turned to God and found mercy from his life of sin, he realised that every other person needed to do the same. That's why, for 33 years, he walked the streets of Sydney from the early hours of the morning preaching his one word sermon, 'Eternity', by writing it on the pavements. He used yellow waterproof chalk, which lasted from 3 to 6 months, and depending on where it was written, sometimes the word lasted up to 12 months. It was estimated that Arthur wrote the same word more than 500,000 times.

At first, no one knew who was writing the word in 20-centimetre-high copperplate writing but it seemed obvious that the words were all the work of one person. It was done on footpaths where people had to step over the words and no one could predict where it would appear the next day. For 24 years, it remained a mystery who was writing it. Journalists referred to the person as 'Mr Eternity'. And people would comment when they saw it and for a while Arthur tried writing 'Obey God', but it wasn't as good. As he said, 'eternity' makes them think.

Poor and uneducated though he was, Arthur became famous. He gave his life to Christ at 46 years and married when 57. He still couldn't read and write anything much apart from his name and that one word 'Eternity'. His good wife would read him his mail and he would tell her what to write in reply. Arthur had a Bible that he couldn't read but he learnt much of its contents by memory. He didn't need a hymn book, as he already knew all the words to the songs. But nevertheless, Arthur became known as 'Mr Eternity'.

This is the very real difference the Lord Jesus can make in a person's life. Both of Arthur's brothers died early of alcoholism and if he hadn't given himself to Christ, Arthur would probably have died that same way too. Yet he passed away in 1967, aged 83. Do you have faith that the Lord Jesus can do miracles in your life like that too? Don't wait for a better or more convenient time to ask the Lord Jesus to take over control of your life. What you do with Jesus Christ now determines your eternal future.

In John Chapter 1 Verse 12 it says of Jesus Christ: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name."

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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