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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A2136 ~ Defence before Felix.

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

The Apostle Paul was going through a series of court trials. He'd been examined by the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, where he had skilfully divided the ruling leaders of Israel by showing that he had once been one of them as a Pharisee. From then on, the Pharisee party supported his innocence and so there was a great disagreement among the Sanhedrin rulers about Paul.

For his own safety, Paul had been escorted to Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast and was now on trial before Felix the Roman governor for Judea, in southern Israel. The trial started with an important lawyer starting the case for the chief priests and now it was Paul's turn to respond.

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At the time of Paul's trial, Felix had already been governor for several years and he knew a great deal about Jewish customs. This made Paul happy to make his defence before him, as Paul adapted his defence at each hearing so that the Jews couldn't predict what he was going to say.

In Acts, Chapter 24, Paul denied all the charges the lawyer Tertullus brought against him. The charges were vague and the lawyer didn't accuse Paul of any specific crime. It was easy to accuse Paul as being a troublemaker, but such accusations were proving nothing but slander. In contrast, Paul didn't answer in a vague way but in fact, very specifically, to the points Tertullus had made.

Paul said that he hadn't been arguing with anyone in the temple or stirring up a crowd anywhere in the city. He challenged his accusers to prove even one specific charge that they were making against him. Having finished answering such things, Paul went on to say what he was actually doing. He worshipped the true God and followed the true Way, which is Christ. He agreed with everything written in the Law and the Prophets in the Old Testament. He was a true Jew, just as Jesus Christ Himself was a true Jew.

Even more than that, like most Jews, Paul believed in the resurrection of the dead and eternal life. This resurrection of the body, together with eternal life, was the chief hope of the Jews. Only the Sadducees party refused to believe in the resurrection and life after death. Paul declared to everyone present that there will one day be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

In John, Chapter 5, Jesus said: "A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear (Jesus') voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned." It's vital that we respond to this statement now, while there is still time to change. Is our goodness from Christ's forgiveness and grace or are we living good lives without Jesus that can never be counted good by God the Father? We need to ask ourselves the question: where will our resurrection take place – in the kingdom of God or the kingdom of Satan?

For each follower and disciple of Christ, living by a clean conscience under the leading of the Holy Spirit is essential. Our conscience becomes unclean when we sin and then refuse or are slow to confess and repent. God will not draw near to us when our hearts are not right with Him. If we continue to live in sin, we grieve the Holy Spirit and He withdraws from us. Our spiritual connection with Jesus dries up and our faith in turn becomes shipwrecked. If anyone listening to this has an unclean conscience, let him or her confess their sin and repent without delay. God promises forgiveness and cleansing if we humble ourselves under His mighty hand and resist the Devil.

Paul told Felix that the main reason for his coming to Jerusalem this time was to deliver a large sum of money raised by the Gentile churches to the poor and needy in the Jerusalem church. Paul again explained that he was presenting his offerings in the temple in a proper manner at the time of his arrest and doing nothing against Jewish custom. Paul in fact was speaking to a priest in the temple when he was seized by some Jews from the province of Asia. Paul stated a very important principle – if those Jews had anything against him, they should come and accuse him of such in person.

If ever it becomes necessary to accuse someone of wrongdoing, it must be done face-to-face. Those whose accusations are false or only half-true always prefer to make their accusations behind a person's back. They usually don't dare to accuse a person to his face, because if they did, their falsehood would immediately be revealed. If we have something to say against someone but we don't want to say it to the person, we need to keep quiet about the matter.

In Matthew, Chapter 18, the Lord Jesus said: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen or a tax collector."

As there were no Jews from Asia present, Paul challenged the members of the Sanhedrin present to show the court what crime he had committed. Of course, they had nothing against him except that the Christian Way was spreading further and further across the Roman Empire. People who followed Christ didn't any longer need to come to the temple to buy costly temple animals to offer as sacrifices for their sins. Jesus had already washed them clean through their faith in Him. Deep down, the chief priests knew that they were losing money because Paul was turning people away from the temple rituals to instead trust in Jesus Christ.

However, Felix the judge in the court, was also a politician. He wanted to please the Jews even though he knew Paul was innocent. It must have been a frustration to Paul that although there were no charges against him, he wasn't set free so he could start on his journey to Rome. God sometimes brings a period of rest into our lives so we will be ready for the next stage. Paul had spent over 10 years on the road in Asia and Greece preaching, teaching and working to provide for himself carrying his luggage everywhere he walked.

God brought a time of stillness into Paul's life. Paul couldn't preach to the crowds or even write a few letters to the churches that he had helped to start. Someone else had to bring his food to him. But all this was God's will for Paul and he accepted this change of pace in his life graciously. But not everyone placed in this type of situation would humbly accept God's change of plan for their life.

A well-known American Christian writer named Catherine Marshall contracted tuberculosis in 1940, when she was only 26 years old. At that time, there was no antibiotic treatment available but only bed rest. She spent month after month in bed wishing she could be healed so she could get up to write another book. All told, she wrote 95 books in her lifetime and a couple have been made into films. But whenever her medical test came back each month and showed no improvement, she was often frustrated and in despair.

Eventually in her prayers to God, Catherine came to the position of trust, where she would get out of bed for a short time each day. She hoped that when the next monthly test was done, she would be no worse from spending some time out of bed. And this proved to be the truth. Gradually, Catherine became stronger again but it took nearly three years for her to recover completely.

In her novel entitled *Christy*, Catherine wrote: "My father always told us that if we will let God, He can use even our disappointments, even our annoyances to bring us a blessing. There's a practical way to start the process too: by thanking Him for whatever happens, no matter how disagreeable it seems."

Dutch watchmaker Corrie Ten Boom discovered this to be the truth too, when she and her sister Betsy were in a prisoner-of-war camp during World War II. Their shared room was overrun by fleas and Betsy wanted Corrie to thank God for them. Corrie wondered how she'd be able to live in such a place but her sister had already set to pray to God and ask how they could cope. The sisters took out their Bible and turned to 1st Thessalonians, Chapter 5, where they had been reading that morning. Corrie started reading: "Comfort the frightened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all ... Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus."

Betsy wanted Corrie to give thanks that they were together, that they had a Bible, and that there had been no inspections in this overcrowded and dimly lit room. Betsy continued by thanking God for the fleas. But Corrie protested: "There's no way even God can make me grateful for a flea."

"Give thanks in all circumstances," Betsy quoted. It doesn't say "in pleasant circumstances." Fleas were part of the place where God had put them. So the women stood between the rows of bunks and they gave thanks for fleas together. But Corrie was sure this time that Betsy was wrong.

The women soon started small church services when no guards were anywhere near the large room. Before long, so many fellow prisoners wanted to join in, they held a second service after evening roll call. There were plenty of guards in other places but nearly no supervision at all in Corrie's and Betsy's bunkroom. They didn't understand why.

One afternoon, there was a dispute about the sizes of socks that some women were knitting and the supervisor was asked to sort it out. But neither she nor any of the guards would set foot in the bunkroom because of the fleas in there. What an amazing blessing it was for Corrie and Betsy to share the Word of God with so many women because of those very fleas! Let us not forget to always live in gratitude, praising the Lord.

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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