

Paul's Defense And Appeal

Acts 25

Today we will be covering the full chapter of Acts 25. Last time we did Acts 24 and I think we learned quite a bit from it. As you will notice now as we go through these final chapters that things seem to sort of have a faster pace. Here again we have Paul, whom we know to be a devout man of God, is on trial and sort of making his way through the entire Roman court system. Let's get started...

25 Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem. ² Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, ³ And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.

There is a lot for us to understand here. First of all these verses tell us about a transition in the Roman leadership. In Acts 24 we learned that Felix was the governor over the Roman province. And we learned just how corrupt he was. He had kept Paul in custody for two years waiting on a bribe from him for his freedom. Even though he fully knew that Paul was innocent of all of the charges against him.

Now I have to think that these two years provided Paul with some much needed rest. After all he had been traveling around for nearly ten years teaching the Word of God throughout the Roman Empire. We know that he did this on foot. However, I am sure that Paul really wanted to get this case settled and be done with it. Anyway, as we see here there is a new governor taking the place of Felix and his name is Festus.

Festus was apparently a good man based on what we can find out about him through history. But if you take a look at verse 1 it says, "*after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem.*" This would indicate that he was so interested in administering the province well that he didn't hang out in Caesarea very long after being appointed as governor. He immediately made a trip to Jerusalem to figure out what was going on with Paul's case.

Now, as we can see from verse 2, is that as soon as Festus arrived in Jerusalem the high priest and chief of the Jews met with him. I think they probably sort of rushed at him and they began laying out their case against Paul. Though it had been two years, the case of Paul was still important to these religious leaders. They hoped that by speaking to Festus that they could convince him to have the trial moved back to Jerusalem. However, this was nothing more than a ruse to try and kill Paul as it says in verse 3.

What you have to understand here is that they knew that Paul would be set free at some point because everyone so far said he was innocent. That is why they really didn't want Paul on trial they wanted him dead. If they somehow could get Festus to move the trial back to Jerusalem, then they would have several opportunities to kill Paul along the way. Now just think about this for a moment. These were supposed to be religious men and leaders and they are plotting a murder. I just have to say that if your religion makes you a liar and a murderer then there is something wrong with your religion. Isn't there?

I have no doubt that these Jewish leaders were saying that they were doing these things in the name of God. Which of course morally they are liars, murderers, and blasphemers by their own actions. They are guilty men according to the same law that they are trying to convict Paul under. These men are in no way connected to God or serving Him. We all know that Jesus is for truth and life not murder. This should show us just how dangerous religion can be when it is disconnected from the truth and Jesus Christ.

So, now we can see that Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea was actually a providential provision, from God, of protective custody against the murderous intentions of the religious leaders.

⁴ But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. ⁵ Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him. ^{6a} And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea;

Let's stop there for a minute. Festus tells these Jewish leaders no. He says that Paul will remain in Caesarea. We don't know from scripture if Festus somehow knew of the intentions of the Jewish leaders to kill Paul. Perhaps he knew from

intuition, or he suspected that something just wasn't right. However, one thing is for sure and that is that God had His protective hand in it. In any case, Festus tells them they need to go back to Caesarea with him and bring along some witnesses to prove your case. He says they need to prove it to him that there is wickedness in Paul and anything that he has done. Then Festus gives them ten days to build their case and gather the witnesses before they all are to head back to Caesarea. So, not only after having twelve days before going before Felix, they now have ten days before going before Festus to present their case against Paul.

^{6b} and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought. ⁷ And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove. ⁸ While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all.

Here they are, back in Caesarea, and in the courtroom. Festus is setting in the judgement seat, or on the bench if you look at it in modern terms. He is elevated above everyone else to show his authority over them. Once again Paul is on trial and being accused by the religious leaders. As before, Paul's life was in danger should he be found guilty. However, it says in verse 7 that they laid out their case against Paul but they couldn't prove anything. When they are done Paul speaks and says he has not done any of the things he is being accused of nor have I even offended Caesar. Why would he say that? Let's find out ...

⁹ But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me? ¹⁰ Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. ¹¹ For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar. ¹² Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.

After Paul is done speaking Festus asks him if he would be willing to go back to Jerusalem to be judged. He tells Paul that the Jewish leaders will not be the ones judging him but he will. I think that at this point Festus knew that the leaders were up to no good and he wasn't going to leave Paul in their hands. But here is the

interesting part. Paul says, no I am not going back to Jerusalem, I want to be judged before Caesar. This is why Paul had mentioned him earlier. He could see that things weren't going his way yet again. Festus wanted to gain favor with the Jews so he was willing to take the trial back to Jerusalem. Paul says you know I am guilty of nothing yet you wont free me so take me to Caesar. If he finds me guilty of anything and thinks I should die then so be it. I will gladly die. Then Festus says, "if it is Caesar you want them Caesar you will get.

Paul appealed specifically to Caesar Nero, who was later an notorious enemy of Christians. But the first five years of his reign, under the influence of good men around him, Nero was regarded as a wise and just ruler. Paul had no reason at this time to believe that Nero would be anti-Christian. Paul also knew that it was his right as a Roman citizen to have his case heard before Caesar.

¹³ And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus. ¹⁴ And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix:

So now we have two new people on the scene. King Agrippa and Bernice, which were from another province of Rome, had come to visit Festus. They came from the east and the king was known to be an expert in Jewish customs, laws, and religious matters. The king had no jurisdiction over Paul's case but Festus thought since he was an expert I am going to get his opinion on the matter. Notice the kings name here, Agrippa, which means that he is connected to Harrod in some way. So his great grandfather is the man that tried to kill Jesus as a baby. His grandfather is the man that had John the Baptist beheaded. His father had murdered the first apostle, James. Now Festus is consulting with him about Paul. Considering his family history, I don't think that would bode very well for Paul. Do You?

Not only that but who was with the king Bernice. Who is Bernice? She was Agrippas sister with whom he was living with as his wife. Their incestuous relationship was a huge scandal throughout the Roman Empire. So here these people are being consulted on Paul's case and Festus is quick to tell them that he had been left with this mess by Felix. He then presents the facts to them.

¹⁵ About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. ¹⁶ To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him. ¹⁷ Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. ¹⁸ Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: ¹⁹ But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. ²⁰ And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. ²¹ But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar. ²² Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.

Festus lays out the facts of the case in great detail from beginning to end. He says that when he was in Jerusalem I met with all of Paul's accusers and they wanted him to judge Paul. He says I told them that it was not my job to put anyone to death unless they have had a chance to face their accusers. Then I have to give Paul the opportunity to defend himself against the charges. Festus goes on to say that when we all got into court and I heard what his accusers had to say there was not a single charge brought against Paul. He said that Paul's accusers simply did not like him because he spoke about the resurrection of this man named Jesus. Then I asked Paul if he wanted me to hear his case in Jerusalem and he said no, I want to be heard by Caesar. Then I put him back in his cell until I am able to send him to Rome. Agrippa said he would hear the case and Festus said ok, we will do it tomorrow.

²³ And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth. ²⁴ And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. ²⁵ But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. ²⁶ Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially

before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. ²⁷ For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.

So the next day the king and Bernice show up at the courthouse. This was more than a hearing of evidence; it was an event. It had a lot of pomp and pageantry about it. Paul, being surrounded by all the important and powerful people of Caesarea and beyond, was brought into court. This was meant to communicate who was important, and who wasn't. However, everyone present was wrong in their estimation of who was important and who was not. Paul had an authority and a dignity greater than any of the important people at this hearing.

Festus then gets up and asks, "do you all see this man before you"? This is the man that the Jewish leaders want to be killed. They don't think that he should be allowed to live any longer. But I found no guilt in him and he does not deserve to be put to death. His accusers did not substantiate their charges against him in any way. He has asked me to send him before Caesar so that is what I intend to do. I bring this man before you today so that I might have something to put in a letter to send with him. It seems unreasonable to me to send him to Caesar without some evidence against him for the crimes he is being accused of. Please hear this man out O king Agrippa and then give me something to say against this man.

Festus wanted to use this trial to prepare an official brief for Paul's upcoming trial before Caesar. He simply could not send Paul to Caesar with a letter that said, "I really don't know what this man is accused of and he is probably innocent of any wrongdoing, but I thought I should send him to you anyway." That was no way to be popular with Caesar. Paul was so innocent that Festus could not actually describe or specify the charges against him.

This story made me think about how someday we all will have to stand before the judgement seat of God. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says; ¹⁰ *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*

Just like Paul standing before Festus, we will have to stand before God. We will have to answer for everything we have done in this mortal body. Whether it is good or bad. If our moral compass is off like these Jewish leaders, if we hold

grudges against people, if we are drunkards, if we are sexually un-pure, if we do good works, whatever the case may be we will answer for it.

Let me tell you that just like Paul you will be falsely accused. Do you know that we are being accused on a daily basis. Revelation 12:10 says; ¹⁰ *And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.*

Satan is constantly reminding God just how un-worthy we are. But let me remind you that Jesus paid for it all.

Romans 8:33-39

³³ *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.*

³⁴ *Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.* ³⁵ *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or*

persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ *As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.*

³⁷ *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

³⁸ *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, ³⁹ Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Only God can accuse us for what we have done wrong and only Jesus can save us from it.