

~ Lesson 86 ACTS~

Paul's Appeal to Caesar

Acts 25

We begin our study in Acts 25 after Paul has been in prison for two years in Caesarea as a result of the pride and greed of Felix the governor. And during this time Paul has been hanging onto the words that Jesus spoke to him in Jerusalem... Take courage Paul... for you must also bear witness in Rome, Acts 23:11. Paul had no idea how or when he would go to Rome, but today in chapter 25 we will see God's providence at work, orchestrating circumstances for His humble ambassador to preach the Gospel and be brought to Rome to stand before Nero.

Let's begin with verse 1...

Acts 25:1) Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

- It is the year 60AD, and Festus arrives in Caesarea having come from Rome after Nero recalled Felix from the governorship of Judea.
- Being governor of Judea, he makes it his duty to visit the capital city of Jerusalem after only being in office three days.
- Festus arrives in Jerusalem and begins by meeting with the leaders within his new province: the high priest and the Sanhedrists
 - His first order of business was to get acquainted with the affairs of the city
 - He quickly realizes the struggles of Jewish politics.
 - The Jews were a demanding group always using political means to accomplish their plots
 - Working with pagans to do their dirty work
 - and immediately use this as an opportunity to their advantage.
- For two years, Paul was held in prison by Felix, "wanting to do the Jews a favor." Acts 24:24
 - But now because of the change in office, the Jews see this as an opportunity to kill the Apostle Paul.

Acts 25:2-3) ² Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him, ³ asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem—while they lay in ambush along the road to kill him.

- Even after two years, the Jews hatred for Paul was still burning hotter than ever.
- During these two years, the Jews had been persecuting Jewish Christians
 - plundering their houses and goods because they had identified with Paul,
 - had compassion on him in his chains, and visited him in Caesarea, Hebrews 10:32-34.
- Now that Festus had taken office, he had no idea of the plot two years ago to assassinate Paul
 - Neither did he know about Lysias commanding 470 soldiers to escort Paul safely to Caesarea
 - If the Jews can get Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem, they could easily assassinate him on the way having only a small group escorting him.
- But Festus is more levelheaded than Felix and proceeds with Roman law

Acts 25:4-5) ⁴ But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going there shortly. ⁵ "Therefore," he said, "let those who have authority among you go down with me and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him."

- He doesn't know this man Paul and he isn't ready to release a prisoner without knowing more details.
- Festus isn't planning to stay in Jerusalem that long, so he tells the Jews to come to Caesarea to hold

a formal trial.

- Festus says, “to see if there is any fault- ἄτοπος- anything out of place.”
 - If there is anything amiss with this man, make your accusation.
- The Jews have no other option, so they travel with Festus to Caesarea.

Acts 25:6) And when he had remained among them more than ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought.

- Festus stays in Jerusalem 10 days, probably getting acquainted with the land and the people
 - Then travels back to Caesarea with the Jews.
- The very next day, Festus calls the trial
 - Festus on his judgment seat; Paul standing before him; and the Jews waiting to make their accusations.
 - Paul had been in prison for two years, but then one day Paul gets the call to present his testimony. I think about what Peter said in his epistle...

1 Peter 3:15- ...always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you...

Acts 25:7) When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove,

- Basically, a repeat from two years previous, yet without Tertullus, their prosecuting attorney.
 - They have no new accusations and no evidence to their claims.
 - Just the hopes that this new governor might give them what they want.
 - But Festus seems to be more strait laced and by the books than Felix
- Then Paul again answers for himself...

Acts 25:8) while he answered for himself, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all.”

- Luke doesn't list the exact accusations against Paul, but they were probably the same from the first trial two years ago, Acts 24:5-6
 - A plague; one who causes dissention; a heretic; and one who tried to profane the temple.
 - They are trying to make Paul out to be an enemy of Rome, but Festus easily sees this is a matter not even worthy of a Roman court.
- Notice Paul's response is the same. Which is probably why Luke keeps the narrative short, but he retains this last statement because it ties in with his appeal to Caesar, **nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all.**
 - The Jews are trying to pronounce Paul an enemy of Rome which Paul says I haven't done anything to offend Caesar
 - We know that Paul used this opportunity to preach the Gospel and the resurrection of the dead as he always did because of something Festus says to Agrippa later in **verses 18-19.**
- At this point Festus should have decreed Paul innocent and walked away just as Gallio did, **Acts 18:12-17.**
 - But the Jews are so persistent and demanding that Festus being new felt an obligation to placate the Jews in his new province.

Acts 25:9) But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?”

- What did Festus think would be different if they held a trial in Jerusalem?
- Festus isn't thinking clearly and as a result gets himself into a big mess.

Acts 25:10-11) ¹⁰ So Paul said, “I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. ¹¹ For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar.”

- Paul says, as a Roman citizen, this is where I ought to be judged, in Caesarea before the judgement seat of Rome. Not before the Jews who have nothing against me.
 - Paul knew the dangers of going back to Jerusalem
- Paul knows his rights as an un-condemned Roman citizen, and he enforces two of his rights here in verse 11.
 - He says, **no one can deliver me to them.**
 - Notice Festus always asks Paul if he is willing to go to Jerusalem, Acts 25:9, 20. Festus couldn't force Paul to go against his will.
- Paul, seeing Festus waiver trying to placate the Jews, uses his trump card that every Roman citizen had a right to... his appeal to Caesar. He says, *Καίσαρα ἐπικαλοῦμαι*, Caesar I call upon.
 - Not just anyone could appeal to Caesar. Only a Roman citizen had this right, but even then, the case had to be approved to be elevated to Caesar.
 - Festus now has to make a decision... ... does he allow this appeal to Caesar, or does he just end this trial by setting Paul free?

Acts 25:12) Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, “You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!”

- After Paul makes this appeal, Festus confers with the council. This is his council, not the Sanhedrin council.
 - Being new to the governorship, he decides to talk this through with his council members
- This is probably so frustrating and disheartening to Festus. Within three days of taking office, the Jews have been all over him. And his first case happens to be the Apostle Paul.
 - An un-condemned Roman citizen; a prisoner for two years; the Jews hate him and want him dead, but yet there is nothing he has done wrong.
- Festus has just been given authority over these Jews, but they are so overbearing and demanding, they seem to be guilting Festus into giving them favor.
 - Festus comes away from meeting with his council, his head probably spinning, and he decides to grant Paul his appeal saying, “You have called upon Caesar, upon Caesar you shall go!”
- Now Festus has a big problem on his hands. He has granted this appeal, but what will Caesar say if this un-condemned Roman shows up in Rome without any legitimate charge against him?
 - Festus doesn't send Paul to Rome right away. He needs something to send with him before he stands in front of Caesar.
 - So Festus keeps Paul in prison until he can figure something out.
- In the meantime, Festus gets a visitor in Caesarea...

Acts 25:13) And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus.

- This is Herod Agrippa II, son of Herod Agrippa I who killed the Apostle James and had Peter arrested, Acts 12:1-3.
 - Herod Agrippa II arrives in Caesarea to honor Festus as the new governor of Judea.

- Unlike his father, who had the largest kingdom of all the Herod's, Agrippa II was only given control of the northern regions.
 - Probably because of the young age of 17 when his father died in 44ad. Now 16 years later, 60ad, he is 33 years old, but was never given all the authority his father had. Only granted to be king of the northern territories.
 - However, he did maintain jurisdiction over the Jewish Temple.
 - He was in charge of appointing the high priest and other religious affairs concerning the Temple.
 - Which is why he had an interest in coming to Jerusalem to meet Festus.
- Coming with Agrippa was Bernice, who also happens to be the daughter of Herod Agrippa I, making her Agrippa II's sister
 - Agrippa II and Bernice were known to be having an incestuous relationship.
- In the process of discussing business, Festus brings up Paul's case to Agrippa in hopes that he might find a solution to this predicament.

Acts 25:14-21) When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king...

- Festus begins from the beginning describing all the happenings with the Apostle Paul since he took office.
 - These next 8 verses are a recap of everything we have been discussing as Festus relays this to Agrippa. So we will read through this next section as a whole, **Acts 25:14-21**.
- Festus can't send Paul to Nero until he has some type of legitimate case. So in the meantime Paul has been kept in prison, probably for a few weeks.
 - Festus is hoping Agrippa can shed some wisdom on the situation.

Acts 25:22) Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him."

- Festus jumps on this. Notice how fast he sets this meeting up, the next day...

Acts 25:23) So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus' command Paul was brought in.

- This wasn't just any trial, this was a show. Festus has gotten himself in trouble and he's looking for a way out. So he gathers all the prominent people of the city together to hear Paul's case.
- This is astounding. Notice how Luke describes this ensemble. It's an elaborate gathering
 - first with the king and his sister/lover.
 - Luke says they came in with great pomp- φαντασία, fantasy.
 - Then the χιλιάρχους, commanders of 1,000. There were five in the city of Caesarea.
 - Then the prominent men of the city and then everyone else who wanted to come
- After everyone has gathered in the auditorium with their pomp and grand display, they have all come for one person. Someone completely different than all of them. They have come to hear the words of a humble servant.
 - To the world he was a prisoner, bound in chains, dressed in ragged clothes and dirty.
 - But to God this is His royal ambassador; His faithful servant sent to preach the Gospel before Gentiles, Jews, kings and governors, Acts 9:15.
 - This is God's providence arranging this gathering
 - God orchestrating these events so that His Gospel might go to world

- Before Paul begins to speak, Festus stands in front of king Agrippa and these prominent people and makes a shocking confession of humility...

Acts 25:24-27) And Festus said: “King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man...

- I think Festus knew he made a mistake by not acquitting Paul immediately. But now its too late. He has to live with his mistake so he just pours out his heart and confesses that this man is not deserving of death, but yet he has appealed to Augustus, Σεβαστός, the one we stand in awe of and worship.
 - The Caesars considered themselves to be deity and demanded they be worshipped.
 - Festus goes on to confess “he has nothing to write to my lord,” τῷ κυρίῳ.
 - Festus’ lord was Nero, but soon he will be given the opportunity to receive Jesus as his Lord.
 - Many Christians died as martyrs because they would not claim Caesar as lord.
 - Festus is putting his hope in some off chance that this meeting will generate something he can write to Nero to explain why he is sending Paul to him in Rome, Acts 25:26.

Acts 25:26 I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore, I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place, I may have something to write.

I think it was these words that prompted Luke to write the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. These books became the trial documents for the Apostle Paul so that Festus could present a written explanation to Nero about this great man. The one we know as the Apostle Paul.

God’s providential hand moving on wicked hearts so that they would be accepting of the written account of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.