

- **Hello everyone! Today is Sunday May 22, 2022, and this is week 3 of Part 12 of our Journey through the book of Acts. Thanks for joining with me.**
- **Last week we left Paul imprisoned in Caesarea after his trial before Felix, Roman Governor of Palestine. Felix has kept Paul under guard for two years, all the while hoping Paul would offer him a bribe for his release.**
- **Paul does not do this, and as we enter chapter 25 Felix has been recalled to Rome, leaving Paul in prison. Felix's replacement as the Roman Governor is a man named Porcius Festus, and he will be soon joined by the Jewish King, Herod Agrippa the second.**
- **It's now 59 AD- we pick up the drama as Festus arrives in the province, and goes to Jerusalem to meet the Jewish leaders of the city, men with whom he needs to have a good working relationship.**
- **This passage is primarily narrative, and it contains a crucial detail of the entire Acts narrative, Paul's appeal to Caesar. But this isn't just historical information. In these details we'll see several important observations that relate to us today.**
- **We're going to read this entire section, verses 1-22, and then we'll press into it.**

† The drama continues: Paul's trial before Festus

**Acts 25:1-22** Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> where the chief priests and the Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul. <sup>3</sup> They requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way. <sup>4</sup> Festus answered, "Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. <sup>5</sup> Let some of your leaders come with me, and if the man has done anything wrong, they can press charges against him there." <sup>6</sup> After spending eight or ten days with them, Festus went down to Caesarea. The next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him. <sup>7</sup> When Paul came in, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him. They brought many serious charges against him, but they could not prove them. <sup>8</sup> Then Paul made his defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar." <sup>9</sup> Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?" <sup>10</sup> Paul answered: "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. <sup>11</sup> If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!" <sup>12</sup> After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!" <sup>13</sup> A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. <sup>14</sup> Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. He said: "There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner. <sup>15</sup> When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him and asked that he be condemned. <sup>16</sup> "I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over anyone before they have faced their accusers and have had an opportunity to defend themselves against the charges. <sup>17</sup> When they came here with me, I did not delay the case, but convened the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in. <sup>18</sup> When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. <sup>19</sup> Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive. <sup>20</sup> I was at a loss how to investigate such matters; so I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. <sup>21</sup> But when Paul made his appeal to be held over for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him held until I could send him to Caesar." <sup>22</sup> Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear this man myself." He replied, "Tomorrow you will hear him."

- Okay- Lets start into this by looking at our characters.
- First of all, there is FESTUS.
  - Festus
- All we know about Festus comes from Acts and a few notes from the historian Josephus. Festus had a better reputation for fairness than Felix, but his image here is of a somewhat naïve administrator primarily concerned with political expediency.
- Festus knows he will have to deal with the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem, and he wants to do them a favor, which would mean turning over Paul. At the same time he understands he needs to play by Rome's rules, and so he tries to walk a line between his Roman obligations and his desire to please Paul's adversaries.
- He seems completely oblivious to the Jerusalem leaders plot to kill Paul, and he unwittingly ends up protecting Paul, and even advancing God's cause.
- BUT from where Paul stood, Festus was just another Roman ruler primarily interested in protecting himself, who would happily turn Paul over if it served his purposes.
- Then we have Paul's accusers.

- Paul's accusers

- These are the same High Priests, Elders, and religious rulers of Jerusalem who tried and failed to have Felix condemn Paul.
- When Festus visits them in Jerusalem, these men try a little political power play. I'm reading between the lines here just a bit, but the conversation might have gone.... "So, Festus, you're new guy in town! Listen, if you're going to be more successful than Felix, you need us. And we're happy to help you out, if you'll do us a favor. Let's call it your welcome gift to us. GIVE US PAUL."
- The tragic irony for Paul's accusers is that while they claim to represent God and God's law, in fact they are violating that very law, and they've placed themselves in opposition to what God is doing. As a result, God will use the processes of a pagan state- Rome- to accomplish his purposes, rather than these men who claim to be the gatekeepers of God's purposes.
- This dynamic is a call to humility for those of us who may assume that we always possess God's moral high ground, and that government and secular culture are always God's enemy. May not always be the case.
- IN ANY CASE, from where Paul stood that day, his accusers lacked any integrity, they saw him as a traitor and threat to their power, and if he fell into their hands he would be as good as dead.
- NEXT, we have another new addition to our story,

- King Agrippa II

- So, the overlapping rulers and jurisdictions here are confusing, as they often were in the Roman empire. When Rome conquered a new nation or region, it often would leave the indigenous rulers, religions, and kings in place, as long as they would play nice with Rome, which mainly meant paying taxes, producing soldiers if Rome called for them, and most importantly keeping the peace. SO, Agrippa was the current- and last- descendant of the Herodian dynasty that had ruled Judea and the surrounding region as a client state of Rome.
- Agrippa's father was Herod Agrippa the 1<sup>st</sup>, who, if you remember, died and was consumed by worms in Acts chapter 12. Our Agrippa's great grandfather was Herod the great, who ruled alongside Pilate during the time of Jesus. This Herod was the king who ordered the

**death of all the male children under two years old in the vicinity of Bethlehem. SO, our Agrippa comes from a dubious family line.**

- **Agrippa was part Jewish, and he was considered an expert in the Jewish religion, but he also sided with Rome in the war of AD 70 that led to Jerusalem's- and the temples- destruction. The image is that Agrippa used his Jewish heritage for his own political purposes, but was no friend of the Jewish people.**
- **Bernice was Agrippa's sister. She would go on to be a mistress to the Roman Emperors Vespasian and Titus. The worse detail of this family is that it was rumored in Rome- we know this from another ancient text- that Agrippa and Bernice were incestuous.**
- **THIS is who will come alongside Festus to decide Paul's fate, and from where Paul stood, Agrippa was certainly not a friend.**
- **One last interesting detail- Luke tells us Agrippa said to Festus... "I would like to hear this man myself"... you could also translate this as "I've been longing to hear this man". SO, whatever Agrippa's motivation, he knew who Paul was, and was interested in hearing from him.**
- **Finally, facing the three most powerful forces in Judea at the time, we have Paul.**

- **Paul**

- **Remember, Paul unjustly imprisoned for at least two years! He has every reason to be angry, resentful of political maneuvering that's held him captive.**
- **And yet, before Festus, Agrippa, and Jerusalem's religious authorities, Paul is calm, respectful, and at peace. In response to the barrage of charges against him, he simply says "I am innocent." Vs 8...**

<sup>8</sup> Then Paul made his defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar."

- **This should have been enough. It is clear that Paul is telling the truth, both Festus and Agrippa will admit this in the coming days. He should have been declared innocent and released right here.**
- **Instead, Festus treats Paul as a political pawn, hoping to curry favor with the Jerusalem leaders. VS 9...**

<sup>9</sup> Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?"

- **In other words, "if you're innocent, won't you be willing to prove that back in Jerusalem?"**
- **Festus is borrowing a page from Pilate's playbook here. He doesn't want to find Paul guilty himself, but he's happy to turn Paul over his accusers, which would be a death sentence.**
- **In Pilate's case Jesus remained silent, and Pilate turned him over to be crucified.**
- **But for PAUL, it's not yet his time to die, and he does not remain silent. HERE WE SEE how Paul fully understands the political dynamics that are against him, but he also understand the Roman system, and he outmaneuvers Festus by using this system to his advantage. HE APPEALS HIS CASE TO CAESAR.**

<sup>10</sup> Paul answered: "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. <sup>11</sup> If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!" <sup>12</sup> After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!"

- *Paul isn't afraid to die, but he also isn't just going to roll over. Throughout all of Acts, this is the closest Paul comes to claiming his rights. AND UNLIKE EVERYONE ELSE IN THE ROOM, he does so without compromising his INTEGRITY.*

#### ✠ A matter of integrity

- *Integrity is a powerful concept. When Paul wrote his second letter to the church in Corinth, he said this:*

**1 Corinthians 1:12** *Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with **integrity** and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace.*

- *This could sum up Paul's ministry, and particularly how he conducted himself while on trial in Caesarea.*
- *He proclaimed to Felix that his conscience was clear, before God and man.*
- *Paul also exemplified the kind of integrity- which from 1 Cor. can also translate as a 'simple holiness'... of valuing people. Even when these people were themselves profoundly lacking integrity, Paul never slipped into anger, contempt, or condemnation- rather, he treated them with respect, and as we will see next week, never stopped bringing the truth and hope of Jesus before them.*
- *As I considered this text over past week, I found myself wondering... "Going through this experience, how did Paul keep his cool? How did he continue to sincerely stand there with simple and wise honesty- with integrity- when his situation was so profoundly unfair.*
- *Two thoughts came to mind.*
- *First, Paul meant it when he told Felix he believed everything written in the law and the prophets.*
- *Jesus once summed up the law and prophets... do you remember what he said?*

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Matthew 22:37-39)*

- *Paul never forgot the greatest expression of Loving and worshipping God was how he loved and respected people- even the people arrayed against him that day.*
- *Second, & most importantly, PAUL TRUSTED GOD. He trusted God's presence in that moment, and he trusted God's purposes for the outcome of his situation.*
- *CONSIDER THIS. From any human perspective, looking at Paul's situation, we could only conclude that he was done. The three most powerful institutions of this part of the world were there to judge him.*
  - *For Festus and Agrippa Paul is a pawn who could be easily sacrificed in the name of politics*
  - *Religious leaders of Jerusalem just want him dead.*
- *In the wisdom of man, Paul is toast. AND YET, in the wisdom of God, Paul ISN'T the pawn here- rather, it is the people around him. God's purpose is for Paul to testify to the Gospel in Rome, and he uses Festus, Agrippa, and the religious rulers to make that happen.*
- *In first Corinthians 3 we hear Paul saying...*

*For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile."*

- ***This describes exactly what is happening here in our story. AND HERE'S THE THING...***
- ***It's easy for us to see this with 2k years of hindsight. But for Paul, caught in an impossible situation, he simply TRUSTED GOD, and this made all the difference. He could stand in peace, courage, and integrity because his hope was in the Lord.***
- ***In 1 Peter 4:14-16 we see the nature of Christ that was at work in Paul, and that through the Spirit may be at work in us as well.***

**1 Peter 4:14-16** *If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.*

- ***Paul never stopped bearing the name of Christ, both in what he said and how he lived. He did so with a clear conscience and with integrity, even when it brought him difficulty and suffering.***
- ***Last thought. When Festus was bringing Agrippa up to speed on Paul's case, he said this about accusations Religious rulers were making against Paul...***

*..they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive.*

- ***That's a clue as to the dialog that happened between Paul and his accusers before Festus. No matter what accusations were made, Paul always brought it back to the resurrection.***

✠ **It's still about the resurrection**

- ***For Paul, the heart – and hope- of the matter always was that Jesus is Alive TODAY, 2000 years later, the heart of the matter is still about the resurrection. AND WE'LL TALK MORE ABOUT THAT, NEXT WEEK***