

Scripture Reading:

[Acts 24:27: After two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.]

Acts 25:1 “Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem. **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. **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." **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. **7** When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about & laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove, **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." **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?" **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." **12** Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, "You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!"

"Paul Appeals to Caesar"

When Paul was first in Roman custody, before his transfer to Caesarea, Jesus came to him one evening with some very comforting words: "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome." *[Acts 23:11]*

This morning we will consider how Paul uses his own Roman citizenship to facilitate the final leg of this journey to Rome & also review our lessons from this time Paul spent here in Caesarea.

As we do, I need to correct something that I misspoke a few weeks ago: After the first trial in Caesarea, I said it was the last we would hear from the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and obviously I got just a bit ahead of myself! Luke does give an account in our text of yet one more encounter that Paul has with those Jewish leaders who desire his death, as the new Roman governor tries to sort out the mess that Governor Felix had left him.

Felix was being recalled to Rome to give account of the many troubles that he caused by his rash life & rule: It nearly cost him his life, save for a last minute appeal by a family friend to Nero.

- Surely, the Apostle Paul had been very wise to confront this governor about his lack of self-control!

So a new governor has been appointed and as would be expected in such situations, his desire is to bring order and to try and please as many under his rule as possible, to bring about peace. In doing so, Governor Festus makes a immediate trip to Jerusalem to confer with the Jewish leaders... The Jews in Jerusalem waste no time in trying to get the new governor to do what they had been unable to get Felix to do: Bring Paul back to Jerusalem! The new governor wisely tells them they can have another day in court, but that it will take place in Caesarea.

- It is very likely that Governor Fetus knew of the plot to kill Paul.

So when the governor returns to Caesarea, the Jewish leaders travel with him so the trial can be held on the very next day.

- Paul is summoned before the court and the same false charges are leveled against him that were brought some two years earlier.

Not only do these Jewish leaders fail to produce the two or three witnesses that the Law required for conviction, they do not even have a single eye-witness to testify before Governor Festus. They wanted Paul's death because he violated the Jewish Laws, which ironically would now call for their own execution as false witnesses: The 9th Commandment states: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

In Deuteronomy 19 we learn how this commandment was to be enforced: 19:16 "If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, 17 then both men in the controversy shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days. 18 And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, 19 then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you. 20 And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you."

In other words, the false witness received the very penalty that his or her false testimony would have brought upon the innocent person. These Jewish leaders wanted Paul's death and yet the very Law they supposedly revered would call for their own execution as false witnesses:

- Something that would in fact, come upon them in just a few short years.

Luke points out that once again they had no proof to offer and Paul gives his own defense saying,

"Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all." Governor Festus knows that Paul is innocent under Roman law but he attempts to have his cake and eat it too, wanting also to please the Jews: He answers Paul and asks, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?"

Paul quickly perceives two major problems with such an offer:

- He knows that the Jews are still plotting to kill him on route
- He also knows that the Romans have allowed the Jews to determine both the law and punishments for those who violate the Temple, which could even include the death penalty for Roman citizens.

Thus Paul declares, "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." *[the governor had just witnessed the trial and had surely reviewed the record of the precious trials].*

Paul is NOT trying to escape any just punishment and goes on to assure the governor of this fact saying, "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."

- So once again we see Paul unafraid to assert his rights as a Roman citizen!
- And once again we see Rome playing the appointed role of protectorate of God's people!

Festus confers with his council and then declares, "you have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!" Just as Jesus had promised, Paul will now begin his journey to Rome after he gives one final testimony to the nation of Israel before King Agrippa.

- We will consider what may be the most personal testimony given by the Apostle Paul, and go on with his travels to Rome when we return to Acts in the middle of June.

For today, I think it would be good for us to step back and consider the important lessons that we can learn for today from Paul's extended stay here in a Roman prison at Caesarea.

- **I know this is very dangerous ground, but obviously there is an important lesson here about patience!**

With a world to conquer for Jesus and dozens of churches that he planted in need of support and encouragement...

- **I am sure the Apostle Paul struggled at times with this extended & seemingly needless stay in prison.**

I am sure that some even argued that they SHOULD have paid the bribe that Governor Felix hoped to receive, so Paul could be released and continue his important work as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

**Instead, Paul waited for God's timing, knowing he would travel to Rome:
And in the meantime, taking what opportunities he could to minister.**

- **Paul was patient and we can see many ways that it was beneficial!**

As we saw over the past few weeks there was the strong witness to Governor Felix and his wife Drusilla over these two years. Even though we see no direct fruit in their lives, as Mr. Vaughan pointed out last week, the fear and conviction that Governor Felix came under has been an example to thousands or tens of thousands down through history who have read Luke's orderly account.

Many, just as we did, have learned about what it means to be an effective witness through this account as well. Since Governor Felix put no restrictions on who could visit Paul, I am sure that many of the Christians there in Caesarea and even as far a Jerusalem sought his teaching and counsel.

- **As the destruction of Jerusalem drew near it would have been a very important work for the Apostle Paul to be a part of...**
- **And it may well be why the Jewish leaders were still so anxious to kill him even after more than two years in prison.**

There is also another great blessing that has come down to all the Saints in all the ages because of the Apostle Paul's imprisonment, both here in Caesarea and later in Rome:

We have enjoyed and been challenged by what are called his prison epistles. These epistles include Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. While there are arguments about whether these were dispatched from this prison in Caesarea or Paul's further time of captivity in Rome...

- **I would certainly argue that much of what was written was worked on here in Caesarea.**

What a blessing these Epistles have been down through the ages, and Paul as the human instrument used by the Holy Spirit to pen these books, would have needed the time to give them the proper attention they needed!

- **As we sung in response to Peter's admonition to hear God's Word this morning, God certainly does move in mysterious ways.**
- **Think of all those times where we are sure that OUR actions, whether sinful or not, have made a real mess of God's plans**

Think of those four men back in Jerusalem who Paul was taking to the Temple to assist with their vows when he was arrested... Can you imagine how guilty they would have felt, from a human standpoint, in thinking that it was their vows that took this great Apostle to the Gentiles off of the mission field?

- **But Paul was NOT taken out of commission!**
- **Paul continued to minister through visits and his writings.**

And what a blessing these writings have been to all the Saints who have followed:

Writing to the Ephesians Paul says, “ I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” [Ephesians 4:1-3]

How many of us have been blessed by the book of Philippians? Take time this week to read through this short epistle again: As you do remember the situation that Paul find himself in as he writes these words: Something he talks about at length in the first chapter: “3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; 7 just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. 8 For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. 9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge & all discernment, 10 that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, 11 being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. 12 But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, 13 so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; 14 and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. 15 Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will: 16 The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; 17 but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.”

- The Apostle Paul was NOT into ‘pity parties!’

I am sure he often remembered the story of Joseph who also spent seemingly needless years in jail after being sold into slavery by his brothers... When they feared Joseph’s revenge he said, “Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.” [Genesis 50:19-20]

- What these rebellious Jewish leaders and hardened Roman officials meant for evil God used for His glorious purposes!

I could spend the rest of the day sharing the wonderful blessing and challenge the book of Colossians has been in my own Christian walk, a book that he ends by asking the Saints to “remember my bonds!”

And finally the book of Philemon which clearly begins with, “Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ.” While this is a book that does not get a whole lot of attention these days, it has certainly played a major role down through history.

- There are many attacks made on the Bible today claiming that it is a book that at best tolerates slavery and at worse supports it as an institution.
- Of course nothing could be further from the truth, but that will need to be a sermon for another day.

What I want us to notice today is the fact that the one book in the New Testament that is pointed to as evidence that the Bible supports slavery is in fact the one, perhaps more than any other, that brought an end to human bondage in Western civilization.

Paul pleads with his brother Philemon to receive back a slave named Onesimus who came to salvation while with Paul at one of these prisons. We talk often about the coming of the New Covenant and that the Kingdom of Jesus is now going to fill the earth

- Here we have one of the most stunning examples of what the advance of God’s Kingdom means, and it comes from an experience that Paul had while in prison!

Paul did not go to Rome to declare that slavery must end, and please remember that slavery up until this point was a very accepted institution in virtually every civilization.

- **It was a major part of the bondage Satan had put all the nations of the earth under!**

Paul is rather a faithful witness of the Gospel which saves a runaway slave!

- **A slave who faces the penalty of death under Roman law, is given new life by a man who is in prison!**

Paul then writes this to Philemon: “8 Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, 9 yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you--being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ--10 I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, 11 who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me. 12 I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, 13 whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. 14 But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary. 15 For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, 16 no longer as a slave but more than a slave--a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.”

- **Today's progressive humanists would declare that Paul was soft on slavery because he did NOT condemn Philemon as a slave-holder and clearly put a runaway slave at risk by sending him back.**

Paul understood that the institution of slavery would fall because it was of Satan and not of God: But he had the patience to see God abolish it in His own good time as the Kingdom of His dear Son Jesus filled the earth.

- **Slavery did not end because we changed the laws...**
- **We changed the laws because God changed people's hearts!**

So I hope you can see the benefit we have all had from this time that Paul spent in prison!

I could go on to speculate about how Luke likely used this time to work on gathering all the materials that he needed for the Gospel of Luke...

- **But I think you see the point!**

God is in control and we must trust that He knows what He is doing even when we do not fully understand the circumstances that we face. Edith Schaeffer would often use the illustration of a tapestry to demonstrate how we often do not see how God works in our lives: When you observe it up close it can appear cluttered and confusing with all the seemingly crowded and even dis-oriented colors, patterns, & threads...

- **But when you pull back and see the entire tapestry, it is a glorious work of art.**

It is so easy for us to often be anxious about where we are in this life: We may struggle with where we are physically: I am too short or too tall, too thin or too fat, I am too high strung I am too tired. Now certainly we can deal with some of these with better habits, but our physical appearance and general health is in God's hand and He will often have us in a place we would prefer not to be!

- **We must learn to trust Him!**

None of us are currently in prison as evidenced by the fact that you are here this morning! However, we may suffer in prisons of our own making by not being satisfied with where God has placed us today. Perhaps you think he has you in the wrong family or the wrong marriage. Perhaps you are certain that He has you in the wrong job or wrong house.

- **Again, sometimes we must deal with an abusive parent or a husband that commits adultery.**
- **There are certainly times where we have a real need for a better job or different home...**
- **The question to ask even in these situations is whether we are trusting God and waiting for His timing.**

Jesus had come to Paul in Jerusalem to give him great hope because He knew it would be a difficult time for Paul in Caesarea from a human standpoint.

What we need to believe and meditate on is the fact that God does the same for us today...

Children who wonder if God has them in the right family can know that God has given them the first commandment with promise: Honor your father and mother "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." [A comment on this Commandment penned by Paul from this very prison: Eph 6:1]

Wives who are struggling with a disobedient husband can know that Jesus has promised that he will be won without a word [see I Peter 3].

Those who struggle with the work that God has given them can know that He has promised to feed and clothe them in the same glorious way he cares for the birds of the air & lilies of the field.

- Now I seriously doubt there is anyone here this morning who would directly say that the promises that I have mentioned are NOT true.
- The struggle is to believe they apply to our own personal situations!
- Can I claim these promises for my parents, for my husband or my job.
- Does God REALLY understand the situation that I am in? [this is REALLY what we are often asking, like when my cars used to breakdown!]

Do you think there were times when Paul sat in that Caesarean jail for over two years that he did not wonder if he ever really was going to reach Rome?

I am pretty sure there were such times! The way that the Apostle Paul dealt with such struggles is the same way that he encouraged those at Philippi to handle their struggles and how the Spirit will help us even today..._Here is what Paul wrote from that very jail where he 'languished' for years:

"4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things. 9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, & the God of peace WILL be with you."

Communion Meditation: John 16:

"19 Now Jesus knew [the disciples] desired to ask Him, and He said to them, "Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'? 20 Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; & you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. 21 A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. 22 Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you."