

Part 58 Paul Before Festus

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney Wednesday, Nov. 16, 2016

+ Acts 25:1-27

Last week we looked at all of Chapter 24 which detailed Paul's trial before Felix the Governor. We saw that the Jews could not make a good case against Paul and Felix was not willing to turn Paul over to them. Instead, Felix kept Paul bound for another 2-years until he left and a new governor took over, Porcius Festus, whom we will be talking more about tonight.

1 Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

After Festus begins his governorship of Judea, he doesn't waste any time going to Jerusalem. Caesarea is where Festus will spend most of his time because that is where his palace is, however, Jerusalem is the capital city and is where all of the Jewish leadership is. Festus is no doubt going there to make himself acquainted with the Jewish leaders and start things off on their good side. They had no love for the former governor, Felix, so he has to win them over. Notice it says that he "ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem." Typically when Jerusalem is mentioned you are going UP. Jerusalem is UP. So he ascends up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. If he had been coming from Jerusalem to Caesarea he would be descending.

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.

Even after 2-years the Jews are still feeling the sting from Felix denying them of trying Paul. They immediately bring the case up before the new governor in hopes that they can persuade him differently. And, they are up to their old tricks again. They plan to tell a lie to get Paul out in the open so they can attack him and kill him. I wonder if it was the same 40 "certain Jews" that were going to lay in wait for him?

4 But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither.

Festus isn't going to be the pushover that they hoped for. More than likely he has been informed of how the Jews work and isn't going to fall for their trap. He tells them that Paul will remain in Caesarea and that he would be going there again soon and would deal with the matter then.

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.

He invites anyone that wants to come along with him to Caesarea to come and be part of the trial

6 And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought.

Festus hangs around Jerusalem for 10-days and then heads back down to Caesarea. The very next day after arriving he holds a trial for Paul. He isn't wasting any time. And obviously from reading our next verse many of the Jews took him up on his offer to come with him and be part of the trial.

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.

So here they go again. Hurling wild accusations against Paul. The Bible doesn't detail them all here but we know from the last trial they brought the following accusations against him: *Acts 24:5-6: For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: 6 Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.*

And just like last time, they could not prove any of these things that they accuse him of.

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.

And also just like the last time Paul defends himself and proves that he did not do any of the things that they accused him of.

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?

Festus is wanting to stay on the good side of the Jews. He knows the kind of trouble they caused for Felix and he doesn't want any of that happening during his administration. So he asks Paul if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there. We get a glimpse of the kind of man that Festus was. He would rather be popular than do what is right. Much like Pilate did in the trial of Jesus. Pilate knew that Jesus was not guilty of any crimes yet to please the people he allowed him to be crucified.

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.

Paul isn't going to let the Jews have their way. He even gives Festus a little jab by saying "as thou very well knowest." Of course Festus knows he has done no wrong. This is Paul's way of letting him know that he isn't fooling anyone here, he's not doing what is right. He is a Roman citizen and he has every right to a fair trial by the Roman court system. So, he appeals to Caesar. This is sort of like appealing to the Supreme Court. Caesar's court was the highest court in the land.

12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.

So, Festus discusses things with his council. This was not the Jews he was conferring with, it was the Roman council that worked in the court system. There is no way that Festus can let the Jews take Paul now, especially after Paul rebuked him for not doing what was right. I'm sure Festus is eager to get Paul out of his hair. That way he doesn't anger the Jews by letting Paul go but he doesn't hand him over to them either and break Roman law. So, it is unto Caesar Paul shall go.

13 And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus.

Before they can transport Paul to Rome to stand before Caesar, King Agrippa and his sister Bernice show up in Caesarea. This Agrippa is Agrippa the 2nd. You remember his father, Herod Agrippa, whom we studied about when we were in Chapter 12. He was the one that had James beheaded and the one that the Lord smote because he took credit for the things of God and he died and was eaten up by worms. This Agrippa in Chapter 25 is his son who is now king and Bernice was his daughter. Bernice was married 3-times before she turned 20-years old. It is said that she served as queen alongside her brother and there were also rumors that the two also had incestuous relationships. Oh, by the way, Bernice's sister was Drusilla, the wife of the former governor, Felix.

One thing you need to understand about Agrippa. He is really just a puppet king. He has no real power or authority. The Romans just allowed him to keep the title of King to keep the Jews happy. But he had no real power and certainly had no authority over a Roman prisoner.

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: 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.

It's not clear why Felix decided to relay all of this story about Paul to Agrippa. It wasn't like he could do anything about the situation. Felix is still being buddy buddy with the Jews to stay on their good side. It probably impressed Agrippa that Felix confided in him about Paul.

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.

Festus fills him in on all of the details of the trial, the accusations, and Paul's appeal to Caesar.

Notice that Festus calls Caesar "Augustus." Augustus was not the Caesar's name. His name is actually Nero. Augustus is an honorable description. It means "The revered one," or the "worshiped one." Caesar is a title that is given to Roman emperors. They are called "Caesars." A Caesar is like what we know as a President. So the Roman emperor of that day was Nero and he could be called "Nero (his given name), Caesar (supreme ruler), Augustus (revered one). His full name was actually Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus.

22 Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.

Agrippa decides he too wants to hear from Paul himself and Festus gladly allows him to.

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.

They make a big show of coming to see Paul. It says "with great pomp." They wanted to show off their royalty and made a gaudy parade out of it. It was times like this that Agrippa could get the attention he wanted.

Paul did not legally have to even show up for this hearing. He had already appealed to Caesar and being a Roman citizen he did not have to allow them to do this. But he does come. Of course we know why Paul came don't we? If you don't know the reason then you haven't been paying attention. Paul takes every opportunity to share the Gospel, especially with kings, magistrates, rulers, and such. So of course he shows up so he can do a little preaching!

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.

My but Festus is making a big show of this. He describes how all of the Jews were crying out against Paul and calling for him to be killed.

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.

Now we find the real reason Festus is allowing Agrippa to hear Paul. He needs something to write to Caesar for the reason Paul is being sent before him. He knows Paul hasn't done anything wrong. He's not broken any Roman laws so Festus has to come up with something to write as to the reason he is sending Paul to Rome for a trial. He hopes that something will be said that will help him with his explanation.

And we will stop right there for tonight and pick back up in Chapter 26 next time and see what Paul has to say to Agrippa and Bernice.

¹ All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version of the Bible