

Acts 25-26

“Almost Or Altogether?”

Since Ch 25 seems to contain more *historical information* rather than *practical application* I decided that we'd just make our way through ch 25, and a portion of ch 26 having covered its contents in previous studies, and then we'll begin to focus our attention a little more specifically towards the middle of ch 26.

But Ch 25 is important because it chronicles for us how it is that Paul got to Rome. You recall back in ch 23 that as Paul sat alone, in that dark prison cell, depressed, and discouraged, that the Lord appeared to him saying, “Be of good cheer Paul, for as you've testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.” and In saying that the Lord both *encouraged* him, and *assured* him that he would see Rome, that statement brought him into the assurance of the sovereign protection of God over his life at least until he'd testified at Rome. Because that was the Lord's promise, and Ch 25 tells us how it is that he gets from this prison in Caesarea to the judgment seat of Caesar Nero in Rome. and In short it's due (in the practical, we know that it's ultimately because the Lord said he would) to the fact that he made his appeal to Caesar (a right reserved for every Roman citizen) when he came to the apparent conclusion that he would never get a fair trial in the setting he was in.

Now, James said, “...*count it all joy when you fall into various trials,*” James 1:2 and of course he spoke of how it produces patience in our lives, and Paul spoke in Romans of tribulations, producing perseverance, perseverance character, and character, hope. But if there was anyone familiar with various “trials” it was Paul. He went through more trials than you could shake a stick at. He went through trials personally, practically, (and we read of some those last week in 2nd Cor), but as we're reading here, he also went through trials politically/literally. He's been through political trial after trial, after trial, not to mention the countless times Felix called upon him to hear from him but never setting him free. He'll get another trial in the ch before us, and a hearing in ch 26.

Well between ch 24 and 25, 2 yrs go by, Felix leaves office, he's succeeded by Festus, and wanting to do the Jews a favor he leaves Paul bound.

Vs1-3

So just as soon as Festus takes office, he wastes no time (3 days), and he goes up to Jerusalem to establish relations with the Jewish leaders. and What's the 1st order of business they're interested in? “Hey Festus nice to meet you, about this prisoner you've got named Paul.” Now at this time there's a different high priest, 2yrs have gone by, you'd have thought that they'd have cooled off just a bit with all that. But that root of bitterness has grown into a forest, it's just been simmering and stewing, listen, be careful to guard your heart against bitterness, it's poison.

The bible says, “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” Eph 4:31-32 and Again, “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;” Heb 12:14-15 Did you see that? Bitterness causes trouble, it can defile you before the Lord, what then are we to do? Pursue peace; be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God in Christ has forgiven you. Bitterness just has this way of festering in us, and it boils up, eats us up from the inside out like a cancer, and it’s a great weapon in our enemies arsenal.

2 yrs later and these guys are still as enraged against Paul as they were to begin with , they’re still wanting to ambush him, and kill him. The bible tells us that Satan was a murderer from the beginning, and when God is using your life, Satan wants to destroy your life. Jesus said that the thief (that is Satan) came to steal, to kill and to destroy, and he’s working overtime on his agenda with Paul.

Vs4-8

So 2nd vs same as the 1st, it goes down exactly like their last trial 2 yrs earlier, they’re hurling horrendous accusations at Paul, but the key is there at the end of vs 7, “which they could not prove.” and He categorically denied them all, “I did nothing of fault toward the law of the Jews, against the temple, nor against Caesar.” and I love the example that Paul gives us once again in his suffering. I’m sure that as the days turned to weeks, turned to months, turned to years, that it got pretty frustrating for him, perhaps he was reminded of Joseph and how he sat in prison for a few years and then God brought him before Pharaoh. He’d done no wrong, and yet here he is suffering just because of his conscience *toward*, and commitment *to* Christ. Peter said, “*For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:*” 1 Peter 2:19-21

If you’ve done wrong and someone busts your chops over it, big deal, you got what you had coming. But if you’ve done *nothing* wrong and yet you suffer, but so that you might be a good witness you take it, and do what you can do to live peaceably with all men, now that’s commendable before God. Because Jesus didn’t do anything wrong either, yet He suffered and was spitefully treated at the hands of man, but He endured the suffering out of His love for us, that we might come to know the love of God towards us.

Now that doesn't mean (ladies) that you're to be your husbands punching bag and just endure it for "love's" sake. That goes beyond the context here, Paul is suffering for Christ's sake, but he's not willfully subjecting himself to spousal abuse, that's seeking to interweave 2 different topics altogether. and I just mention that in passing because occasionally it comes up, but being given the mind of Christ, and knowing the heart of the Father I think we can safely say that God never intends you to be the victim of your spouses violent/out of control temper.

So they accuse, but they can't prove, Paul defends his position and is once again with out fault before them.

Vs9-12

Basically what's happening here is that Paul says, "I'm finished being a political pawn, you know I'm innocent, I've done nothing wrong, all the evidence is in my favor, yet I'm not even getting a fair trial here, why on earth would I want to go to Jerusalem to be tried, these are the guys that are wanting to kill me? If I've done something deserving of death, fine, but I'm not going to just lay down and die for these guys for not having done anything wrong! I appeal to Caesar." Paul pulled the trigger that would take him to Rome, as I said earlier every Roman citizen had the right to appeal to Caesar if he felt unjustly tried, especially in the case of a capital crime, and here the Jews were seeking the death penalty against Paul. But Festus isn't quite out of the woods yet; he really doesn't have any formal charges against Paul to report to Caesar. All kinds of accusations, but no proof, it's a bit precarious to send a prisoner to Caesar with no charges against him, it just doesn't seem right. and The Caesar he's appealing to is Nero, who would become an avid enemy against the Christians, but during the 1st 5yrs or so of his reign he was seen as a pretty level headed, and just ruler. So at this point Paul has no reason to believe he'll get anything but a fair trial.

Vs13-19

Don't miss that, the core issue at hand is the resurrection of Jesus Christ Now this Agrippa was Herod Agrippa II. He was the last of the Herodians and we spoke briefly of his family last week.

Drusilla was his sister so his great granddad was the one who killed the baby boys in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth, it was his great uncle who had J.B. beheaded, his dad had the apostle James killed and Peter imprisoned, he was struck by an angel, eaten by worms and died there in Acts 12.

Bernice is also his sister and history points to an incestuous relationship that they had, and he was in power basically at the mercy of Rome, but he was also a student of Jewish law and customs, Rome had placed him in the position to appoint the high priest, have charge over the temple treasury and all.

So he was quite adept to the customs and traditions of the Jews, a student of the law and the whole bit. The point being that when he came to town to pay his respects to the new governor, Festus was glad to see him because he was in way over his head with respect to what these guys were talking about, accusing him of and all the rest. So he figured perhaps Agrippa would be able to help him out, glean some formal charges or something. Notice

Vs20-27

Notice the repetition with which Luke continues to reaffirm the innocence of the apostle, they can't find anything wrong legally or otherwise with him. 1 Thing we should be aware of at this point is the fact that Paul isn't at this point defending himself. This is just really an informal formal hearing, Agrippa is out of his jurisdiction and has no power over this case, Paul has appealed to Caesar and had his request granted so Festus can't do any legal maneuvering at this point either. So Paul's really not out there *defending* his case (and he knows it) but rather at this point he's *declaring* the gospel, to these rulers, dignitaries, and the king, just as Jesus said he would as we pointed out last week.

We love the contrast that Luke is setting up, and that's what I meant by an informal formal hearing. They enter the amphitheatre with all the fanfare and pomp, purple robes, horns blowing, and all the hype they could muster up, all the who's who were there, the elect, the elite, the intelligentsia, it was a parade of ostentation and pride. Festus motions with his hand and ushered into the center of the arena is a prisoner chained to 2 guards, and the 2 primary men who come into focus are Paul the apostle, and Herod Agrippa. One in royal purple, the other in rags/prison garb, one on a throne, the other in shackles, one wearing a crown, the other in chains. Agrippa is a king, but he's bound/chained and enslaved to sin. Paul is there in chains but rejoices in the freedom he has having been forgiven of sin, liberated by Jesus Christ Agrippa (the earthly king) couldn't do a thing to free Paul at this point, but Paul the prisoner is an ambassador of the King of kings who'd already freed him and could just as easily free Agrippa right then and there. So if you stop to look at it for a moment it's a pretty amazing scene happening here, this meager prisoner, Paul the apostle commanding the attention of rulers and kings as he declares the gospel of Jesus Christ Who's really on trial here? It's not Paul, he was freed long ago, this is the trial of Herod Agrippa and anyone else who was with in the sound of Paul's voice, they were placed on the stands of decision time that day and given the choice to be set free in Christ, or leave the arena with the sentence of death and separation from God resting upon them.

The same thing lies true for each of us, we either leave this place in Christ, free from sin and the wages thereof, or we leave having rejected Him, taking our chances on another day. But understand that to leave apart from Christ is to have that same sentence looming over you, the bible says, *"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."* John 3:36 Therefore my obvious recommendation is to give your heart to Jesus Christ that you might obtain everlasting life, the forgiveness of sin. (Lets continue on)

Vs1-3

Paul warns him that this might take a few minutes so, “Please be patient with me.” Again we’re only going to point out a thing or 2 here in this portion since we’ve gone over Paul’s personal testimony twice before in the book of Acts.

But you can see how powerful your personal testimony can be, here Paul is before some of the most powerful people in Rome, which at this point in history makes them some of the most powerful people in the world. He’s given their undivided attention to share with them anything he should choose and what does he share? His personal story of his life changing encounter with Jesus Christ his testimony, and just like before he speaks of his conduct prior to Christ, his contact with Christ, and his commission by Christ, which segues right into the message of the gospel. Let’s listen in.

Vs4-7

What hope? The hope of the resurrection, the hope of the nation, not to mention the world relies upon the promise of the resurrection, the fact that the Messiah would be born of a virgin, suffer at the hands of sinful man, die the death that we deserve taking our sins upon Himself, paying the price of our sin. Then having paid that price in full rising again from the dead, the 1st born from the dead never to die again, (which the bible calls the 1st fruits of the resurrection) ascending to the right hand of the Father whereby He continually intercedes for us until the Father makes His enemies His footstool. All of these things are spoken of in the scriptures, not to mention the practical perks that God promised the nation with respect to the property He’s promised them of which Ab never seen the fullness of, Hebrews tells us that Joshua didn’t give them the rest God spoke of, then when are they to receive it? In the resurrection during that time period we call the millennial reign of Christ, then they’ll enter in to the fullness of that promise, the promise that the Seed of David perpetually rule upon his throne, that to will be fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ But all of these things are predicated upon the resurrection, if there is no resurrection, how can God fulfill His word to His people?

I love how that once Paul develops this premise of the resurrection he goes for a quick pierce into the heart of Agrippa and those listening before he moves on. Notice

Vs 8

That word “You” is the 2nd person plural, which means he’s saying in essence “You all” though his conversation is directed towards Agrippa, he’s challenging everyone with in the sound of his voice. “Why should it be considered a big deal to you that God would raise the dead?” In other words, “How big *is* God?” and This is where a lot of people hit a brick wall, their concept of God is just too small, there’s nothing too hard for the God *I* serve, what’s your perspective?

You've heard it before, if you can get past Gen 1:1 (In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth) everything else becomes cake, the question boils down, do you really believe it? If you do, the fact that God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah bears no difficulty, the parting of the Red Sea, no sweat, keeping the rain from falling on the earth for 3 yrs at the word of Elijah, it's not even a question, causing the earth to quit rotating for Joshua so that they might pursue their enemies does nothing to phase me. Because nothing will be impossible for God, if it's God who gives life, than why should it be a big deal to believe that God raises the dead?

Vs9-11

So this is his history, before he met Christ he was exceedingly enraged against believers, before he had them put to death he sought to force them to deny Christ. He told Timothy, *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life."* 1 Tim 1:15-16 and The idea there is that he's saying that he was so anti-Christ in his position that you couldn't take a more hostile position than what he had. So the very fact that God saved him serves as an example that there's no one beyond the reach of the saving grace of Jesus Christ and that where sin abounds, grace abounds still more. There's more grace in the heart of God and available in Christ than there will ever be sin in you.

Vs12-16

So now he's speaking of his contact with Christ, and his conversion through Christ and what I want to point out here is 2 things in vs 16, what was the purpose of Christ's appearing to him, what was God's plan for Paul in apprehending his life? To make you #1 A minister (which simply means servant) and #2 A witness, one who simply testifies of the facts, both of the things you've seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.

Now this is critical, Paul wasn't to make the vision, or the message to serve him, he wasn't to use his platform to manipulate people or vie for prestige and position. The vision, the message wasn't to serve him, he was to serve the message, and in that he was to witness or testify not only of what he'd seen, (the risen Lord) but those things that Jesus would reveal to him over time. and That's exactly what Paul is doing right here before Agrippa, but what is it Christ wants of you? To use *you* as a minister, a servant and a witness of what you've *seen* in Christ and have come to *know* in Christ, to share the reality of Jesus Christ and Him crucified for our sin, delivered up for our transgression and raised up for our justification. Don't cause your testimony to serve you, but rather you be a servant to it, be true to what Jesus has done in your life, don't use it to manipulate people, or as a platform to make yourself a position, but simply humbly share, and show Jesus Christ to a hurt and dying world.

Then 2^{ndly} as you grow in Christ, bring others along with you, those things that He continues to reveal to you, be a witness of those things as well. Our growth in Christ is a process, there are things you'll learn immediately, but then there's also things God reveals to you overtime. The question is that wherever you're at *with* the Lord, are you being faithful *to* the Lord in this commission *of* the Lord for our lives? If He's challenging you in an area, revealing something new to you, an area He's wanting to deal with you in, what are you doing with that? Are you serving the Lord in obedience to that, or sort of filing it away in the procrastination file of "I'll get to that later."? (The things which you've seen, and the things of which I will yet reveal to you).

Vs17-18

Now we know that eternal life is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, that's what Jesus said, eternal life is knowing/having an intimate and personal relationship with the Father, with the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit, by grace through faith. But if someone asked you to define what it was that took place in the process of salvation, this vs wouldn't (at all) be a bad way to explain that.

It's to have your eyes opened to the truth, to see Jesus Christ for who He is vs Satan for the lying rip off that he is. It's stepping out of the darkness where I can't see a thing and am constantly stumbling through life, into the light whereby I can see clearly as the word of God shines brightly on the path before me. It's being released from the power of Satan over my life and given into the non-negotiable grip of God's hand upon my life, receiving the forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance being adopted into the family of God among those who are sanctified, that is set apart, by faith in Jesus Christ How liberating is that!?

Now conversely just the opposite is true. If you're not in Christ, you're blinded to the truth, you're walking in darkness, under the power of Satan over your life having never received forgiveness for your sin being with out God and with out hope in the world. But it doesn't have to be that way, you can enter in fullness of what God desires for your life through simple submission to Christ, giving your life to Him. Paul wrote the Col, "...*giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*" Col 1:12-14 Redemption is available to you in the person of Jesus Christ

Vs19-20

J.B. said, “...*bear fruits worthy of repentance*,” Matt 3:8 Which is to say, “I don’t want to simply hear you *say* the right things, I want to *see* the right things translated into your life, not out of a legal regimen, but out of a loving relationship with Jesus Christ” Lip service comes ez, but the bible calls us to repentance, a changing of our mind and our direction that was previously headed *away* from God, and that we’re to turn *towards* God and submit our lives to Him.

Vs21-23

Boom! He lands the gospel, and notice he states the fact that it’s all predicated upon the solid foundation of the word of God, it’s not some made up thing. It’s all there in the writings of the prophets and of Moses, and we explored that a bit last week, but in short it’s vs 23. That the Christ would suffer (Is 53 and other passages) that He would be the 1st to rise from the dead (Ps 2, Ps 16:10 and other passages) and that He would proclaim light to both Jew and Gentile alike (Is 42:6 along with other passages as well.) He’s saying that there isn’t anything that I’m saying that’s beyond the context of the written word of God, to the contrary it’s solidly established right there for all to see.

Vs24-25

Again we spoke of this last week, how reasonable the gospel is, your sin for His righteousness, He died, so you can live, it’s beyond a reasonable offer in the favor of the sinner. The bible says, “...*the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*” 1 Cor 1:18 Which tells us what category Festus is in. But Paul refuses to be distracted at this, and I love that, Festus interjects, Paul quickly deflects his comment and then “Boom” he zeros right back in on Agrippa, he’s trying to win Agrippa to Christ.

Vs26-32

Paul goes for the close, “Do you believe the prophets Agrippa? I know you believe.” and Just like that he backs him into a corner, it’s decision time, “If I say yes I need to conclude all these things that Paul has said, and give my life to Christ. If I say no it’ll look as though I’ve disgraced the scriptures in the eyes of the Jews.” and There’s a variance of opinion as to his response, he literally said, “You in a little persuade me to become a Christian.” Some see that as a snide remark, “Do you think you’re going to convince me just like that?” Others see it the way it’s translated here, “You’ve almost convinced me Paul.” Paul says, not only almost, but I wish you were all *altogether* as I am, except for these chains. They stand up and he says, “He hasn’t done anything wrong Festus, I’d have encouraged you to just set him free if he hadn’t appealed to Caesar.” and They walk out. But he was to go to Rome and so to Rome he’ll go.

Almost persuaded, that's too bad, where are you at today, "Almost" or "Altogether" a believer in Jesus Christ? Almost does you no eternal good whatsoever, I pray that you be altogether persuaded to place your trust and your faith in the person of Jesus Christ that you might receive the forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Him.

Prayer Points: God would you teach us what it means to be altogether sold out to You, seeking *after* You, in love *with* You. Thank You for opening our eyes, turning us from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, giving us the forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified in You. Help us to be faithful minister/witnesses to what we've seen and come to know in You. and God be there anyone here struggling with a root of bitterness, would You uproot that even now by the power of You Holy Spirit in their lives, remind us Lord of your forgiveness towards us, that we might forgive one another.

If you're here and you've never experienced the forgiveness of God, don't leave here almost persuaded, but altogether persuaded, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, that by believing you might have life in His name. So if the Lord is dealing with you, if you want to give your heart to Christ, let encourage you, do it now.