

Paul Before Festus - Acts 25:1-22

Introduction:

Welcome to your new job! How often are people surprised by the real situation they are being put into as they start a new job after the job offer sounded so ideal? When Lise and I arrived in Kelowna we discovered the church was involved in a lawsuit and the next few years I would be guiding the church through that mess. No one told me about that when I signed up for the job!

Festus is the newly appointed governor of the territory that included Judea and its capital city, Jerusalem. As soon as he was appointed various groups started to stir the people, seeking to cause a great uprising to free the people from their oppressors, the Romans. So Festus has to send out the armies to squash the uprisings, and at the same time he needed to build bridges to the powerbrokers in the major centers. This is why he makes the journey to Jerusalem just days after assuming the role of governor.

No doubt Festus is quite curious that the concern of the leaders in Jerusalem involves a man named Paul of Tarsus, a follower of Jesus. Why was this man such a threat? What had he done? No doubt Festus is curious, but he is no fool. This could be a political landmine, so he will tread carefully. In this chapter we discover how he deals with the problem of Paul.

The Jerusalem Request – Acts 25:1-5

1. Festus is governor for three days and then he makes his way to Jerusalem. He is governing over Judea, Samaria and Syria, but his first stop in Jerusalem. Why would this be the first place he goes?
2. Who assembles before Festus in Jerusalem (v. 2)? And what do they present to Festus?
3. What favour do the religious leaders want Festus to grant them (v. 3)? Why?

4. What is Festus' response to their request (vss. 4-5)? Why is this providential (directed by God)?

Paul's Defense – Acts 25:6-12

5. Festus senses that this situation with Paul is quite serious. How long does it take him to summons Paul and hear his case after he returns to Caesarea (v. 6)?
6. What is the problem with the case the religious leaders present to Festus (v. 7)?
7. In verse 8 Paul declares his innocence. What three areas does he say he has done no wrong against? Why are these three important?
8. What favour is Festus willing to grant to the Jewish leaders (v. 9)?
9. How does Paul respond when he realizes what Festus is willing to do (vss. 10-11)? What is Paul willing to do? What is he not willing to do? Who does he believe should handle his case?
10. What pronouncement does Festus make after consulting his advisers (v. 12)? Why is this significant?

Festus Consults King Agrippa – Acts 25:13-22

11. Who are we introduced to in verse 13? Why have they come to Caesarea?

Background: The King Agrippa who comes *to pay his respects to Festus* was Marcus Julius Agrippa II (A.D. 27-100), son of Agrippa I (Acts 12:1-25) and great-grandson of Herod the Great (Mt 2:1-23). Brought up in Rome in the court of Claudius, he was a favorite of the emperor, though too young to immediately succeed his father at his death in A.D. 44. He had supreme power in Jewish religious life, for the Romans gave him the right to appoint the high priest and custodianship of the temple treasure and the high priest's vestments (Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 20.213, 222). He was the last of the Herodian line.

Accompanying him now is his sister Bernice, a year younger than he. She had been engaged to Marcus, a nephew of the philosopher Philo of Alexandria. Then she married her uncle Herod, king of Chalcis. At his death she returned to live with her brother Agrippa II and engaged in an incestuous relationship with him. This gained her notoriety both in Palestine and in Rome (Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 20.145-46; Juvenal *Satires* 6.156-60).

12. Knowing what powers were given to Agrippa, why might it be advantageous to discuss the Paul situation with him (ie. vss. 13-15)? What has he concluded the religious officials want done with Paul (v. 15)?
13. What was the proper protocol in dealing with cases under Roman law according to Festus (cf. vs. 16)?
14. Festus immediately brought Paul before his accusers, as per the Roman law, and heard their accusations. According to Festus, what was at the heart of their accusations (v. 19)? What does this tell us about the importance of the death and resurrection of Jesus to the Gospel message?
15. Why might Festus want to take Paul back to Jerusalem to try the case about his belief in Jesus (v. 20)?
16. What kept Festus from sending Paul to Jerusalem (v. 21)?
17. What is Agrippa's response when he heard the drama of this case (v. 22)? Why might this interest him?

Conclusion:

The Apostle Paul has faithfully shared the message of Jesus wherever he went. He has planted churches and raised up pastors and elders in each church. He has written letters to inform and instruct the local churches, as well as correct their wrong actions and beliefs. Nonetheless, he is arrested and held prisoner despite the fact he has done nothing wrong. It seems so unfair. There are those who want

to claim that no bad thing happens to the Christian, that God will always protect them and take them out of harm's way. Some have let this ideology creep into the Coronavirus situation, claiming Christians cannot get sick because God made a promise to save us from any pestilence (Psalm 91:3).

But Paul is not confused by what is happening, nor concerned. He knows God is still in charge. Jesus himself had said, "On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles" (Matthew 10:18). Paul sees this being played out in his life. Rather than being depressed or angered, Paul is excited. The door has been opened for him to travel to Rome. This had been his desire for many years now, and God had opened a door for him, even though it meant traveling in chains.

It is one thing to live for Jesus when things go well. Can we also suffer for Jesus, stand true when things get difficult? The Apostle Paul says we can. Hear the promise he holds from God himself: "9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

May we hold fast to Jesus as Paul did, no matter what we face. Christianity is not for the faint of heart, but those made bold by the power of the Holy Spirit.