

**Ministry of The Holy Spirit**  
**Paul's Journey to Rome: Festus' Dilemma**  
**Acts 25**

Last time...Paul and the Council of the Jews appeared before the Roman governor, Felix,  
who did not render a decision on Paul's case  
but rather kept Paul under house arrest, trying to squeeze a bribe out of him

This time...in Acts 25, there is a change of Administration but no change in Paul's disposition  
More than 2 years after being arrested in Jerusalem, an innocent man is still imprisoned  
And now, Festus' dilemma – what to do with Paul?

v1 Porcius Festus

Succeeded Antonius Felix, the 5th procurator/governor of Judea, governed from  
late 50s to early 60s AD  
Had inherited a great deal of trouble from Felix' vicious and corrupt  
maladministration  
History describes him as fair, reasonable, and impartial—unlike Felix  
e.g. Josephus had favorable things to say about Porcius Festus.  
Festus was governor for only two or three years before he died.

Within 3 days of arriving at his post, barely at his new home long enough to unpack,  
Festus embarks on a diplomatic mission to the “heart” of Judea, Jerusalem

v2-3 What happens as soon as he gets to Jerusalem?

The Jewish power base, the Who's Who of the Jews, confronts him about the  
Apostle Paul, who has been “locked up” in Caesarea for the past 2 years  
Festus' very first problem/issue as governor is Paul

It has been two years since

- Paul testified of his God-given calling to the “Gentiles” that set them off  
(Acts 22:21)
- a conspiracy to assassinate Paul was hatched and foiled  
(Acts 23:11-15, Acts 23:23-24)  
btw...the 40 either broke their vow or died of hunger!
- the Jews were dismissed empty-handed by Felix  
(Acts 24:22)

and the Jews are still as rabid about murdering Paul as they ever have been!

The Jews' hatred for the Apostle Paul is DEEP-seated!

Who is fanning the fire of this hatred?

Their father

John 8:37b but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you.

John 8:42 If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.

John 8:44 Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

John 8:47 He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear *them* not, because ye are not of God.

John 15:18-23 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it* hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also.

Satan wants Paul dead, NOT going to Rome!

What does this say about these miserable children of the devil?

They have "Stage 4 cancer" of bitterness

Heb 12:14-15 Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and thereby many be defiled;

They have failed of the grace of God, are embittered and defiled, and are defiling others with their spiritual disease

Are the followers of Jesus Christ immune from bitterness?

Absolutely not

Is it possible for a child of God to fail of the grace of God?

Absolutely

- strained, broken, estranged relationships
- Church splits
- the revolving door of Christianity is fueled by the failure of grace

Jesus taught against such an unforgiving spirit

Matt 6:14-15 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Matt 18:21-22 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Matt 18:23-35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

The Holy Spirit teaches God's children to not be bitter toward any

Eph 4:31-32 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Rom 12:14 Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

Rom 12:18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

Rom 12:21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Bitterness is a spiritual disease that destroys relationships, a tool of the devil  
And we are to guard our hearts and minds against it

If any of you are harboring bitterness toward someone, you need to repent right now, for your own spiritual health!

Back to the embittered and hate-filled Jews:

they want a change of jurisdiction of Paul's case...so they can carry out their conspiracy to murder him

v4-5 Festus, a fair and impartial man, denies their request  
The jurisdiction for this Roman legal case will remain in the Roman city, the seat of  
Roman government

This is a civil case involving a Roman citizen who has the right under Roman Law to  
face his accusers

“But, hey! You guys can go back down with me and we’ll pick up this matter there.”

Satan and his children are foiled again

v6 After about 2 weeks, once his diplomatic mission in Jerusalem was finished,  
Festus returns to Caesarea and gets right down to the business at hand...  
very un-Felix-like

Sitting on his judgment seat, Festus has Paul brought in to face his accusers  
Court is in session for Paul...again

judgment seat: *bema*  
also interpreted as “throne”

Every believer will appear before a *bema*/judgment seat, too!

Rom 14:10 But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at  
nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat  
of Christ.

2 Cor 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that  
every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to  
that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad.

1 Cor 3:9-15

Are you ready?

It is never too early to put your affairs in order!

It is always foolish to put it off!

And...every unbeliever who has rejected God’s love and His gift of salvation by grace  
thru faith in Jesus Christ will also stand before a judgment seat/throne

Rev 20:11-15 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose  
face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no  
place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before  
God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened,  
which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those  
things which were written in the books, according to their works.  
And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell

delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

When Grace is rejected, Justice prevails.

So before which throne/judgment seat do you prefer to stand – Jesus’ or the Father’s?!

- v7 Clearly some of the Jews followed Festus to Caesarea  
As soon as Paul arrives in court, they jump to their feet and lay very heavy charges  
against him...capital charges  
Acts 24:5-6

But...they had no proof, no eyewitnesses, no evidence of any wrong-doing by Paul  
All they had were baseless accusations, lies, and slander

- v8 Given the opportunity to defend himself per Roman Law, Paul simply and succinctly  
declares his innocence of all the baseless charges  
He is innocent of
- breaking the Law of Moses
  - defiling the Temple of the Jews (trouble maker)
  - conspiring against Rome/Caesar (insurrection)

- v9 Another mistrial

For reasons we will read later in the chapter, Festus,

- trying to win points with his new and difficult to govern subjects
- perhaps securing a political chit he could redeem later,

asks Paul if he is willing change the jurisdiction of his case to Jerusalem

This is a political maneuver, not a judicial maneuver

Festus is seeking peace, not justice

He does not want his new political assignment immediately blown up by the Jews

Grasping for a resolution, he proposes a move to Jerusalem

- v10-11 Paul,
- of sharp mind and great intellect
  - given the best spiritual gift for the situation – discernment and a word of wisdom
- balks at the proposed change of jurisdiction

He understands the game being played by the Jews and their desire to kill him  
He understands what Festus is after, a political win

But he stands his ground, the Truth

- charged with capital crimes against Rome, he is rightly standing before Caesar's judgment seat here in Caesarea
- he has committed no offense against the Jews
- he has committed no offense against Rome
- Festus, Caesar's representative responsible for Law and order in this province, knows full well that Paul is an innocent man falsely charged
- as an innocent man and a Roman citizen, no person, not even Festus, can deliver him to his accusers
- as a Roman citizen, he appeals to Caesar (only a Roman citizen could appeal to Caesar, Paul plays his "Roman card" yet again)

We followers of Jesus Christ also stand on the Truth and play our "Jesus card"

- Satan, the accuser of the brethren (Rev 12:10), relentlessly levels baseless charges against us
  - our sins have been removed from us as far as the east is from the west
  - our sins have been washed by the Blood of the Lamb
- when we are accused, we appeal to our Father
- there standing with us is our Advocate, our Defense Attorney
  - "Paid in Full!"
  - "It is finished!"
  - "Justified!"

Rom 8:33-34 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifieth. Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

v12 Festus turns to the Jewish counsel, Paul's accusers, and basically tells them,  
"This Roman citizen has appealed to Caesar.  
The case is now out of my hands.  
The jurisdiction has in fact been moved – to Rome.  
We are done here...go home (empty-handed again!)"

And then he turns to Paul,

"You, as is your right as a Roman citizen, appealed to Caesar.  
So shall you go to Caesar.  
(As a prisoner of Rome and at the expense of Rome.)"

Festus is "let off the hook"...only to find himself on another hook

Taking stock of the situation before we move on...

when Paul recorded

Rom 1:10 Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.

Rom 15:23-24 But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you; Whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you:

when Paul heard

Acts 23:11

do you think Paul thought he was going to Rome

- as a prisoner of Rome?
- at the expense of Rome?
- after such seemingly pointless and unfruitful delay?

Was this Paul's plan?

Is this how he would have scripted the story?

Is he raising a stink about his unjust circumstances?

Does Paul sound like he is coming unhinged or having a hissy fit?

Is he having an emotional meltdown?

This is not a crisis of faith for Paul

He is not throwing any self-pity parties

A waa-mbulance is not needed for the Apostle

He is waiting on the Lord, resting on His promises

He is daily comforted by the Word and Spirit of God

He is more than a conqueror, content in the love and the will of the Lord

Rom 8:31-39

Phil 1:12-14

Phil 3:7-11

Phil 4:11-13

1 Thes 5:18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

He is not focused on what he does not know – Why, When, How, What

He is focused on what he does know – Who

How many times in our walks with Jesus have things NOT gone according to our plan, according to our will and desire?!

So many times followers of Jesus Christ fall into a crisis of faith because

- their plans did not happen
- things did not turn out they way they wanted them to
- they did not get their way
- their prayers were not answered with the answer they wanted
- they think God is chastising them because they are not getting their way

Such a crisis of faith is because faith is weak,

- looking intently on What, When, Why, How instead of only on Who
- focused on Self and circumstances instead on the sovereign King of all the kingdoms of earth seated on His throne, before Whom every knee will bow and none will be able to withstand

Is 55:8-9      For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Faith is increased/strengthened by trials and tribulations,  
for which we are to rejoice, not murmur/complain!

As it relates to last week's report/testimony, the hard trials of 15 years did not shake my faith

I had no idea of How, When, Where, Why...but I knew Who!

And I did not need to know the How, When, Where, Why in order to follow by faith

Ours is a walk of faith, not of knowledge

We follow Jesus, not knowing where we are going

We are to pray for God's will in heaven to be done on earth,  
NOT for our will on earth to be done in heaven!

Let's be encouraged by Paul's faithful example of following Jesus



v13     Some number of days later, King Agrippa II and his wife Bernice show up in town from Jerusalem to welcome/hang out with the new Roman governor

great grandfather: Herod the Great, destroyer of the innocents in Bethlehem  
given the title “King of the Jews” by Rome for his

- loyalty
- regal projection of Rome’s majesty and power
- protection of Rome’s eastern frontier
- hefty contributions to Empire coffers

grandfather: Herod Antipas, murderer of John the Baptist and mocker of Jesus

father: Herod Agrippa I, eaten of worms because he gave not the glory to God  
(Acts 12:21-23)

sister: Drusilla, wife of Felix the sly cat (Acts 24:24)

sister: Bernice!!!

What a lovely family!

Nothing new under the sun

- the Greek Empire was profoundly morally diseased...  
and it fell, was brought down by God
- the Roman Empire was profoundly morally diseased...  
and it fell, was brought down by God
- the American Empire is profoundly morally diseased...  
and it will fall, brought down by God
- Western Civilization is profoundly morally diseased...  
and it will fall, brought down by God

v14-16   After many days of this state visit, Festus shares his dilemma with Paul

- desired dead by the Jews
- innocent of anything worthy of death
- nonetheless, detained by Felix
- a problem not going away, a problem without a solution
- he is responsible for the administration of Roman Law
  - the accused has the right to face his accusers
  - the accused has an opportunity to defend himself, to plead his case
  - the accused has a right to a speedy trial (justice has been perverted)

Legal foundation for Western Civilization is Roman Law

v17-19 “This was the very first thing that greeted me in my new post – Welcome to Judea!  
This is how I handled it.

But it was nothing I expected it to be!

- the accusations of the Jews, dressed up as capital offenses against Rome, were nothing of the sort
- their issues with Paul are not concerns of the Roman Empire but of
  - their religion – a debate about the resurrection of the dead
  - a man named Jesus – who was certifiably dead but Paul affirmed to be very much alive

All this is information that lies in the white space between v7 and v8

What is on trial before Festus (and Felix before him)?

The Gospel...the heart and power of the Gospel being resurrection

1 Cor 15:3-4

1 Cor 15:13-26

Who is on trial before Festus (and Felix before him)?

Jesus

v20 Because the issues were not of any concern to the Roman Empire,  
Festus was at a complete loss on how to make a judgment in the case within the confines of Roman Law  
So he proposed to Paul a change of jurisdiction to the religious center of the Jews and to be judged there

Reality:

- Festus is an unqualified judge of this case
- the Jews are already made their wicked verdict
- the jurisdiction of this case is...the God of AI&J

v21 Paul knew what Jesus had said

Acts 23:11

Acts 9:15 he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel

and played his Roman card again

- to be guarded from his enemies by the Empire
- to be examined by Augustus (title for Caesar, who was Nero at this time)

Festus could not deny these things of a Roman citizen so he put Paul into protective custody until he was ready to send him to Nero for his hearing before “the Supreme Court”

v22 Agrippa, who knew

- something about Jewish Scriptures
- about Jesus

expressed a willingness/desire to hear directly from Paul

And Festus eagerly accepts the help with his dilemma

v23 So without delay, the next day, and with great pomp  
(King Agrippa II and Bernice apparently had not learned humility from their  
dad's death)  
yet another hearing for Paul is conducted

The setting is formal...gathered is the Who's Who of the Romans in Caesarea

What do you think Paul is feeling?

Fear?

no way!

Excitement to share the Gospel?

absolutely!

v24-27 Festus opens the formal proceeding with his introductory remarks

- standing before us is the Jews' "Public Enemy #1"
- but who has in fact committed nothing worthy of the death the Jews so urgently desire for him
- he as a Roman citizen has appealed to Augustus ("exalted"), Caesar (Nero)
- I have decided to send him (I have no choice but to send him)
- but I have no criminal charges to write up for Ceasar to consider;  
the legal brief is a blank sheet of paper
- I think it unreasonable...career and maybe life-threatening for me...  
to waste Nero's time
- my dilemma: I got nothing
- I need your help...especially from you, King Agrippa II

## **Take-aways**

1. Guard your hearts and minds against the poisonous self-inflicted wound of bitterness.  
Forgive as you have been forgiven.  
Don't let the grace of God fail!
2. When life throws you a curveball and things don't go the way you want them to,  
don't lapse into a fruitless crisis of faith  
Embrace the perfect will of God, as it is revealed to you  
Be more than a conqueror as you walk by faith

**James 5:7-8, 10-11**

Count on things not going according to our plan in these last of the last days  
If we find ourselves on trial in this perverse nation, know what and Who are on trial:  
the Gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ

**Matt 10:16-39**

3. Get *bema* ready!