Making the Most Of Every

by Dr. Jerry Vines

By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from Jerry Vines Ministries
2295 Towne Lake Parkway
Suite 116 #249
Woodstock, GA 30189

Let's Begin

If the apostle Paul were alive today, he couldn't pastor a church! The reason is simple: his criminal record would prohibit his ever receiving an interview. Paul was in jail about as much as he was out of jail. The costs he paid for faithfully testifying to the Lord Jesus and salvation in Him were overwhelming.

Nonetheless, Paul virtually always took advantage of the circumstances he faced and made the most of them. To the Philippians he wrote, "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 1:11-13).

As we follow the apostle Paul's continuing journey to Rome, let's use the following outline:

I. The Governor Evaluates an Evil Plot (vv. 1-12)

II. The Governor Expedites an Extraordinary Prisoner (vv. 13-27)

I. The Governor Evaluates an Evil Plot (vv. 1-12)

The Jewish leaders requested Festus to assist them in extraditing Paul back to Jerusalem. Luke wrote, "Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him" (vv. 2-3).

Paul's enemies were relentless. Behaving like bloodhounds, they stayed on Paul's trail wherever he went. In this passage, they planned to ambush Paul, killing him before he ever arrived at Jerusalem. Yet, even if he did arrive there, odds were, they could talk Festus into allowing the Sanhedrin to take charge of the trial rather than the civil courts.

Reflection Connection

Are you prepared to suffer at the hands of God's enemies? In your view, what would persecution look like in your own neighborhood?

Christians today can mark it down: if the Bible is believed; if the Bible is lived; if the Bible is taught, God's enemies will haunt those who do so. The Jewish leaders never gave Paul even a single night's rest. And the intensity increased as time went on.

Festus' refusal to assist them was initially firm, "But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither" (v. 4). When we commit ourselves to God's care, even pagans will assist us in doing God's work.

God says through Isaiah the prophet of the pagan ruler, Cyrus, "He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid" (44:28). And, again, "Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut" (Isa. 45:1). Just as God is sovereign over Kings, He watched over His apostle. Festus thought it was his decision to keep Paul

Copyright 2008© Jerry Vines Ministries. All rights reserved. No portion may be altered or copied without written permission.
For more information about this and other teaching and growth resources, contact www.jerryvines.com

in Caesarea. It was not. God was protecting Paul. Paul was on a mission to Rome, not Jerusalem!

Even so, the Jewish leaders would not quit. They travelled with Festus back to Caesarea to bring charges against Paul. Upon arrival, Paul was summoned, "And when he [Paul] 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" (v. 7). Two lessons are noteworthy. First, on one hand, God's providential protection covers us, and on the other hand, God allows persecution to continue. It is not that God is punishing us; rather it is God proving us. Second, God's enemies attempt to smear us and ruin us with charges and accusations they cannot prove.

Thus, the accusations against Paul were rehearsed by his accusers (vv. 6-12). Imagine each witness coming one by one and making accusations with no proof. A life void of God pushes us to behave in unconscionable fashion. In one of the greatest Russian novels of all time, *The Brothers Karamazov*, the author contends that if there is no God, everything is permitted. While the Jewish leaders theoretically believed in Him, they did not know Him. Their life was void of Him.

God's enemies attempt to smear us and ruin us with charges and accusations they cannot prove.

Further proving his weakness, Festus expressed to Paul an appeasement toward the Jews, "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?" (v. 9). Fickle commitment is always a characteristic of a person with no moral anchor. Whatever sentiment Festus possessed earlier, his true colors brightly showed in his cowardly backpedaling.

Undoubtedly, this took the apostle Paul by surprise. Without flinching, however, Paul took his civil rights seriously. Luke wrote, "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. 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" (vv. 10-11).

We can be fairly certain Festus was relieved the apostle Paul chose to appeal to Caesar. He now was completely off the hook with the Jews. Festus excitedly extended to Paul his request, "Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go" (v. 12). Paul was returned to his quarters to await extradition.

Reflection Connection

How far should Christians go in appealing to their civil rights for protection? Explain. Isn't "appealing to Caesar" a fundamental disregard of trusting God? Why or why not?

Copyright 2008© Jerry Vines Ministries. All rights reserved. No portion may be altered or copied without written permission.
For more information about this and other teaching and growth resources, contact www.jerryvines.com

II. The Governor Expedites an Extraordinary Prisoner (vv. 13-27)

A few days had passed. King Agrippa and his wife, Bernice, arrived in Caesarea, "And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus" (v. 13). Festus debriefed Agrippa concerning their famous prisoner, summarizing the political situation (vv. 14-22). Interestingly, the way Festus framed the situation made him appear the hero, "...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" (v. 16).

At times people have a tendency to color circumstances so as to justify their own actions as well as to relieve a guilty conscience. Rather than face the truth that perhaps they have been wrong, truth is skewed to make them look right. Christians must guard themselves to portray truth accurately. Remember: *all truth is God's truth*. Hence, it's better to tell the truth and simply trust God.

Reflection Connection

Reflect for a moment on your personal practice concerning factual matters. Do you "guard the truth"? Do you accurately retell matters?

In addition, Festus shed new light concerning his conversation with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Luke recorded, "Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive" (vv. 18-19).

At times people have a tendency to color circumstances so as to justify their own actions as well as to relieve a guilty conscience.

Clearly what Festus was privately told concerning Paul in Jerusalem was different from the charges they publicly announced in Caesarea. Evidently the concerns the Jews at first raised against Paul were civil matters, which probably focused on insurrection or government treason. Now, however, the witnesses against Paul focused on the Gospel Paul preached; that is, Jesus and the resurrection. Note: preaching Christ and His resurrection inevitably brings the wrath of culture against the church. Through history, the resurrection of Jesus Christ has suffered more attacks than any other single doctrine of Christianity. Festus referred to the resurrection as "superstitions." Liberal scholars have consistently referred to Jesus' rising from the grave as "superstition." Paul said, however, if Jesus be not raised from the dead, we are still in our sins (1 Cor. 15:16-17).

Reflection Connection

How often do you reflect upon the resurrection? Do you think the church should emphasize the resurrection only at Easter or should there be more focus? Why or why not?

Agrippa was intrigued by Festus' words and called for a personal look at Paul himself. Luke explained, "Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. Tomorrow, said he, thou shalt hear him" (v. 22). In a sense, the two political scoundrels were toying around with the apostle. However, what they meant for evil, God meant for good (cp. Gen. 50:20).

Copyright 2008© Jerry Vines Ministries. All rights reserved. No portion may be altered or copied without written permission.
For more information about this and other teaching and growth resources, contact www.jerryvines.com

The next day, Paul was summoned to appear before Agrippa, "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" (v. 23). Not only were Agrippa and Festus waiting, but a rather large assembly gathered to observe the inquisition of the Apostle. Once again the testimony of Paul's accusers was considered (v. 24). Their request was nothing short of death (v. 25). Once again, Festus rang his own bell, appearing to consider justice his most passionate concern (v. 27).

Paul silently awaited the moment when he could testify again of the Lord Jesus and the power of the Gospel to save.

Paul silently awaited the moment when he could testify again of the Lord Jesus and the power of the Gospel to save. He was confident Agrippa would send him to Rome for God called him to such a purpose (26:32). The more we serve our Lord, the greater our confidence solidifies that whatever God calls us to, He will provide the means and the strength to complete the task.

Golden Greek Nugget

In verse one, Luke recorded Festus' journey from Caesarea to Jerusalem with the phrase "after three days." The same Greek phrase is used concerning Paul's journey elsewhere (28:17). The phrase literally translates "on the third day." Interestingly, this is the same phrase used so often pertaining to Jesus rising from the dead "after three days" and "on the third day."

Wrap Up

Making the most of every opportunity God gives us takes courage, patience, and plenty of faith. Christians must remain committed to the task to which God has called them. Every person on this planet is a precious soul. The church cannot afford to lose any time in evangelizing the world. Paul remained unhindered in keeping on target toward Rome. Are we any less committed? Are you doing your part in reaching people with the Gospel? Are you making the most of every opportunity God sends your way? May our Lord empower us to burn out for Him!

Copyright 2008© Jerry Vines Ministries. All rights reserved. No portion may be altered or copied without written permission.
For more information about this and other teaching and growth resources, contact www.jerryvines.com