

Lesson 21:

Paul's Testimony before Festus and Agrippa

Acts 25-26

Two years had passed since Paul had been arrested in Jerusalem and imprisoned in Caesarea. At this point, Paul understood that the tension between himself and the Jews was primarily caused by Christ's resurrection (Acts 25:18-19). I can't help but think of the powerful words: "He is risen!" It wasn't just a one-time occurrence. Ever since Jesus Christ rose from the dead, He *is* risen. Not just alive. *Risen*. He conquered death, and it no longer looms. He *is risen* on that first Easter morning. He *is risen* on the day of Paul's trial. He *is risen* today. I'm not even sure that verb tense would be possible apart from the power of God. Our minds can hardly fathom it, but our spirits – filled with His Spirit – beat with the faith that it's true: He is risen, indeed!

"When the accusers stood up, they began bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting, but they simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive."

Acts 25:18-19

Festus' Rise to Power in Caesarea

Read Acts 25:1-12.

In 58/59 A.D., two years after Paul's initial arrest and imprisonment, Nero removed Felix from power after a riot in Caesarea between the Jews and Gentiles ended violently. As Festus took Felix's place as procurator of Judea, tensions between the Jews and the Gentiles were very high.³⁵

1. In Acts 25:1-3, what did the Jews request that Festus do for them? What was their plan?

³⁵ Wong, John-Michael. *Opening Up Acts*. Opening Up Commentary. Leominster: Day One Publications, 2010. Page 152.

Two years earlier, the Jews had vowed neither to “eat nor drink until they had killed Paul” (Acts 23:12). These must have been some awfully hungry men!

2. How did Festus reply to their request in Acts 25:4-5?

3. From Acts 25:6-7, how valid were the serious charges that the Jews brought against Paul?

4. What was Paul’s defense in Acts 25:8?

We have looked at this before, but it seems appropriate to revisit the topic. Jesus Himself spoke of the trials that believers will face on account of Him. While we currently live in a land where our lives and freedom are not threatened by our belief in Christ, we would be wise to take His words to heart.

5. Read Luke 21:12-19. What opportunity did Jesus say these trials would give? What will He do for us at that time? What is His promise to those who suffer on account of Him in Luke 21:18-19?

6. Festus offered to oversee Paul’s trial in Jerusalem in order to “do the Jews a favor” (Acts 25:9). What have you done in order to please or appease someone in your own life? How did it affect you and your relationship with that person?

7. Paul appealed to Caesar in Acts 25:11, exercising his right as a Roman citizen to be tried before Caesar. Why do you think Paul made this appeal? Do you think he was motivated by fear? Why or why not?

Festus concluded this trial by declaring Paul’s fate – a trial in Rome before Caesar. At this time, the Caesar of Rome was Nero.

King Agrippa's Visit to Caesarea

Read Acts 25:13-27.

Herod Agrippa II, the “King of the Jews” and a great-grandson of Herod the Great, had risen to power in about 48A.D. He did not rule over Judea but over several smaller territories in the surrounding area. He was appointed “Curator of the Temple” by Emperor Claudius and as such had the authority to appoint or remove the high priests.³⁶ Agrippa II was seen by Rome as an authority on the Jewish religion, and Festus, who does not seem to have known what to do about Paul, would have welcomed Agrippa's expertise. Bernice was Agrippa's half-sister, who lived with him. Every rumor you're currently entertaining about their relationship swirled in their time as well.

8. How did Festus summarize his understanding of the dispute between the Jews and Paul in Acts 25:18-19?

At this point, the resurrection of Christ seems to have been the focal point of the fight. It is the ultimate point of contention.

9. Read Matthew 27:62-66, what was the chief priests' primary concern, and what precautions did they take?

Even His critics knew that a resurrected Christ would make the disciples an unstoppable force, and they took every precaution to insure that no one was able to fake His resurrection. In spite of their best efforts, though, the Son of God could not be contained by death or tomb.

10. Read Matthew 28:6, Mark 16:6 and Luke 24:34. The news is so good that it's worth reading in the words of each gospel writer. Write out that good news in your own words with your own pen, and worship the One who defeated death!

Two thousand years ago there was proof that Jesus is risen. The tomb was empty. The resurrected Christ appeared to many. When He appeared to the disciple Thomas, Jesus spoke these precious words: “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed” (John 20:29). Blessed are they. Blessed are we!

³⁶ Gangel, Kenneth O. *Acts*. Holman New Testament Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998. Page 418-419.

11. We may not have seen the physical body of the risen Lord, but how have you seen Christ your own life? How do you know He is risen?

12. From Acts 25:20-22, what did Festus and Agrippa decide to do about Paul? What was Festus' concern about sending Paul to Rome according to Acts 25:27?

Paul's Testimony Before Agrippa

Read Acts 26.

13. How did Paul summarize the reason for his arrest in Acts 26:1-8?
(See especially verses 6-8.)

14. What is the promise that Paul spoke of in verses 6 and 7? To whom had the promise been made? Who fulfilled that promise?

15. In Acts 26:9-18, Paul again told of his sinful past and radical conversion. What strikes you as you read this final retelling of his story?

Paul spoke of the purpose that was given to him directly by the Lord Jesus in Acts 26:16-18. Just as Paul's did, our purposes stem from the purpose of God.

16. What are God's purposes as seen through Paul's calling in Acts 26:18? What does Christ desire for all people?

17. Paul stated God's purpose in another way in his letter to the Ephesians. Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Christ intervened on our behalf. Why does it say He did that according to Ephesians 2:7? How have you experienced God's kindness toward you in Christ Jesus?

18. How did Paul say that he responded to God's call on his life? See Acts 26:19-20.
19. How do you respond to God's promptings in your own life? How do you see Him accomplishing His purposes through you?
20. What is most likely to keep you from responding when you sense the Lord is prompting you to do something?
21. How did Paul say that his testimony lined up with the prophets and Moses (Acts 26:21-23)? How does that align with Jesus' own testimony in Matthew 5:17?
22. Festus was truly perplexed by Paul's words (Acts 26:24-25). From 1 Corinthians 2:14, how might Paul have explained Festus' confusion? How would you pray for someone like Festus?
23. How did Agrippa respond to Paul's testimony, and what was Paul's stated desire for him (Acts 26:26-29)?
24. In Acts 26:30-32, what did Festus and Agrippa conclude?

In the end, Festus is left in a predicament even worse than his original one. Not only did he not know what charges to send with Paul to Rome (Acts 25:27), but now he had also concluded: "This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment" (Acts 26:31).

Prepare for Life

In his testimony to Festus and Agrippa, Paul said to Agrippa: “I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains” (Acts 26:29). He sought neither retribution nor retaliation. Instead, he longed that they might come into a saving relationship with his Lord and Savior.

25. What is your desire for those who have hurt you?

26. Think of one person who has hurt you and toward whom you might still feel some level of hostility. Does anyone come to mind? If so, begin to pray that the Lord would change your heart to desire for them to know Him (if they do not already) or for them to come to know Him more intimately. Ask the Lord what blessing He would like for you to pray for that person to receive, and pray that for them when they come to mind.

Lecture Notes: Lesson 21