

To Caesar You Shall Go

Introduction

If you have your Bibles...

- The pax Romana had come. Of course, the Jews hated the fact that they were a nation occupied by foreign troops. They knew peace only at the cost of Roman domination. When the Romans invaded Israel in the latter years of the decade of the sixties, which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in the year a.d. 70, they completely denuded the land; their way of battle was to lay siege to the walled cities. While the city was besieged, the Roman soldiers camped outside the walls until food and water became so scarce that the inhabitants of the city were weakened and ready for conquest. While the soldiers waited, they cut down every tree in sight and used the wood to cook and to keep themselves warm at night. On the night of Jesus' agony in the garden of Gethsemane, that slope of Mount Gethsemane had been covered by huge olive trees, three or four hundred years old. When Jerusalem was destroyed in a.d. 70, not a single olive tree was left on the Mount of Olives. It had been stripped bare like a desert. Tacitus had it right when he said that the Romans made the place a desert and called it peace.

Acts 25

Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. 2 And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him, 3 asking as a favor against Paul[a] that he summon him to Jerusalem—because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way. 4 Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. 5 “So,” said he, “let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him.”

6 After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. 7 When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove. 8 Paul argued in his defense, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense.” 9 But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, “Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?” 10 But Paul said, “I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. 11 If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.” 12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, “To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.”

13 Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus. 14 And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, “There is a man left prisoner by Felix, 15 and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. 16 I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him. 17 So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be

brought. 18 When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. 19 Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. 20 Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them. 21 But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar.” 22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I would like to hear the man myself.” “Tomorrow,” said he, “you will hear him.”

23 So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. 24 And Festus said, “King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. 25 But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. 26 But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. 27 For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him.”

Context/Story

If you're new here, we've been journeying through the book of Acts, verse by verse, chapter by chapter, watching the unstoppable advance of the gospel through the early church. We've seen the Holy Spirit empower ordinary people to do extraordinary things—Peter preaching on Pentecost, Stephen martyred for his faith, Philip evangelizing the Ethiopian, and now, for the last several weeks, we've zeroed in on the apostle Paul, the former persecutor turned preacher, standing on trial for his life.

We've covered Paul's trials before the Sanhedrin in chapter 23, where he divided the council by highlighting the resurrection. Then in chapter 24, before Governor Felix, where Paul boldly proclaimed the gospel, exposing Felix's corruption and fear.

Festus the Roman

- Notice the shift: Felix is out, Festus is in. Historically, we know Porcius Festus took over as procurator around A.D. 59 or 60, after Felix was recalled for brutality and corruption. Festus is a new player, he is more competent and less greedy than Felix. But he is still a Roman politician who wants to curry favor with the Jews to stabilize his rule. He heads straight to Jerusalem, the place of highest tension. The Jewish leaders waste no time. They "laid out their case" which we can assume were the same old accusations from two years prior: sedition, heresy, temple desecration.
 - But they are not just accusing Paul, they are plotting murder... Again. This is the third ambush attempt on Paul (remember Acts 23?). These religious elites, who claim to uphold the law, are scheming like mobsters.
- Festus, though, isn't biting. He insists on a proper trial in Caesarea, under Roman jurisdiction.
 - Festus unknowingly thwarts the plot, protecting Paul. Two weeks ago, we saw God's protection through a nephew's tip-off. But here, it's through a pagan governor's administrative decision.

- Apply
 - These Jewish leaders are cowards. They cloak hatred in religion.
 - Men, lead your family with integrity...don't scheme in the shadows.
 - These Jewish leaders were men in authority—elders, priests—and they failed miserably. They hid behind their titles, manipulating Festus. Guys, as husbands, fathers, or leaders in this church, don't take advantage of that God given role! Don't scheme or manipulate to get your way. Lead like Paul, who stood tall in the face of adversity. Who did not avoid tough conversations. Who spoke the truth plainly.
 - Ephesians 5:25 - Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.
 - That means sacrifice, not scheming. If you're dodging accountability, or cutting corners, or stirring up drama in the church, repent. Be a man who fears the Lord.
 - Women, don't manipulate behind the scenes.
 - whether it's gossip disguised as concern or subtle power plays to control relationships. I see it often in churches: women undermining other women over jealousy or cliques, all while smiling sweetly on Sunday. Use your influence for the gospel, not for control. If you're convicted right now, don't brush it off—take it to Jesus.
 - Church, let's do a heart check. Are we plotting against brothers or sisters over petty disputes? Are you holding a grudge because someone else got the spot on the worship team? Are you bitter because someone didn't invite you to their small group? Are we dividing over secondary issues, while forgetting the gospel that unites us?
 - Galatians 5:15 - But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.
 - The Sanhedrin's hatred consumed them. Don't let it consume us. If you're scheming, slandering, or silently resenting someone in this room, repent. Go to them after this service, confess, and make it right.
 - Matthew 5:23-24 - So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Herod The King

- Enter King Agrippa II and Bernice. Agrippa is Herod Agrippa II. He is the great-grandson of Herod the Great, and he is ruling a sliver of territory by Roman grace. The Romans kept him around because they considered him an expert in Jewish affairs. Bernice was

his sister, but rumors of incest swirled, which was scandalous even by Roman standards.

- Festus vents his frustration: Paul's case is baffling. He has committed no treason or crime. Festus just doesn't get it. Why does everyone hate this guy so much?
 - Vs 18-19 "points of dispute about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive."
 - People today grapple with Christianity all the time. They will throw a million arguments related to philosophy and morality around. I was reading the philosopher Fredrick Nietzsche and his views on religion. He is the one who is quoted as saying, "God is Dead, and we have killed Him." He hated God, and it was astounding the mental gymnastics he was going through to disprove Christianity. All of it was really just muddying the waters of the mind.
 - I genuinely believe that it is much simpler than all that. Simple enough for a child to understand. You see Christianity, at the core, is really just about Jesus: is He dead or alive?
 - The answer to that question is a statement of fact, not opinion. It either happened or it didn't. And if it happened then Herod and Festus and everyone alive must hear of it. Must repent and believe.
- The next day comes, and Agrippa and Bernice enter in royal robes, military brass, city elites. Paul enters in chains, the underdog.
 - Notice the Irony - Earthly powers paraded in splendor; God's apostle is in shackles. Yet Paul's the freest man there!
 - Paul is free from his sin.
 - Romans 8:2 - For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.
 - He is free from Death
 - Philippians 1:21 - For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.
 - Nobody can take anything from him. He has treasures that cannot be touched or taken by Rome.
 - However, Herod and Festus are still slaves to sin, still enslaved to death.
- If Herod knew his sinful state before a holy God, he would be casting aside his crown and robes, he would do away with all pretense and fall to his knees crying out for Paul to give him the knowledge of salvation.
- Apply
 - If you are not yet a Christian, listen closely—Paul's story tells us that Jesus is worth everything... even chains.
 - Beware dismissing spiritual matters. Don't let your pride or arrogance keep you from seeing your need for Jesus Christ.
 - God's standard is perfection
 - You might be a superior specimen - Like Herod. Your wealth may dwarf everyone in the room. Your status might be such that

others bow before you. You may hold the livelihoods of a thousand families in your hands, and with a word, you could crush another. None of that matters at the foot of the cross. You NEED Jesus Christ.

Understand the Time

- Next week we will see Paul's defense before Herod and Festus, but let me spoil the story now if you don't know it. They do not repent, they do not convert. They send Paul away.
 - You see both Herod and Festus could not discern the times. They thought they were the most important people in the room. But in fact Paul was. They thought they knew what was happening. They were grievously, tragically, disastrously mistaken. Salvation was at their fingertips and they didn't even realize it. The most important moment of their lives came and went without them realizing it.
 - Matthew 16:3 Jesus Rebukes the Pharisees - And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.
 - The Pharisees, the Sanhedrin, Felix, Festus, King Herod, they all had this in common. They couldn't get past themselves and they couldn't see through their culture. We must be better than that. We must understand the times.
- In the cultural upheaval of recent decades, a new ideology has risen, cloaked in the language of justice and compassion but structured like a religion complete with its own sovereign, savior, salvation, repentance, justice, and gospel. While it claims to champion equality and progress, its parallels to Christianity reveal a secular faith that seeks to replace the divine with the human.
 - A New Sovereign - Christianity proclaims God as the ultimate authority, sovereign over all creation. His will is eternal, unchanging, and just. In contrast, the woke agenda elevates the state—or its ideological enforcers—as the supreme arbiter of truth. Governments, institutions, and cultural elites dictate morality, rewriting right and wrong with the stroke of a pen or the weight of social pressure.
 - Where Christians bow to the Creator, the woke kneel to the collective, the majority vote, a fickle deity that shifts with the tides of public opinion. They've traded the throne of heaven for the altar of bureaucracy.
 - A New Savior - In Christianity, Jesus Christ is the Savior, He is the one who sacrifices for humanity's redemption.
 - A New Salvation - Christian salvation is the promise of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. But woke ideology offers a different salvation: a utopian society achieved through moral perfection and community sacrifice. This salvation hinges on endless human effort.
 - Yet, this earthly paradise remains elusive, always just beyond reach, demanding ever more sacrifice to attain.
 - A New Holy Spirit: The Activist

- The Holy Spirit is responsible for our conviction. He is the one who convicts the world concerning sin and salvation. But the woke agenda replaces Him with the activist, a self-appointed messiah who fights not for souls but for social capital. These saviors wield hashtags, protests, and cancellations.
 - Unlike Christ, who bore the cross for all, the activist demands others bear the weight of their cause. Everyone must repent but themselves. Never themselves. If you don't do what they tell you to do, they will hate you for it.
- A New Justice
 - Christian justice is rooted in God's righteousness, balancing mercy and accountability, aiming for restoration. The woke agenda's justice is retribution, seeking to punish rather than redeem. It divides the world into oppressors and oppressed, demanding reparations and cancellations rather than reconciliation. This justice leaves no room for grace, only the endless settling of scores. Where Christianity seeks to heal, woke justice seeks to wound.
- A New Repentance: Confession Without Forgiveness.
 - In Christianity, repentance is a personal turning from sin, met with God's grace and forgiveness. But the woke agenda demands a different repentance: Whether for the sin of Systemic Racism, or Political Disagreement. Your repentance will be demanded through social shaming. This woke repentance offers no forgiveness, no absolution, no resolution, only a perpetual cycle of guilt and expected payment.
 - Where Christian repentance frees the soul, woke repentance chains the individual to a never ending expectation of inferiority. And once you do repent of the evils you have been told you are committing,
 - A few months ago I saw a video of a group of white people bowing down to a group of black people.
 - Look I get it, everyone has a desire to resolve all this tension and anger in our country. But this is America. We have no kings. The only one worthy of our kneeling is God himself.
- A New Gospel
 - It promises a perfect world, a utopia, but it delivers only division, it promises progress but sows chaos. And it is all cloaked in this moralistic guise of compassion. This false gospel spreads through institutions, media, and education, demanding allegiance with the fervor of a revival meeting.
 - Yet, like all religions, without a foundation, it falters, It leaves its followers grasping for meaning but failing to find anything beyond their own flesh.
- This should remind us of the fact that when God is removed, something else fills the void. This new religion, with its sovereign government, activist saviors,

coerced repentance, offers a counterfeit spirituality. In the end, the woke agenda is not just a political movement but a spiritual one. And it is fighting for the hearts and minds of a generation. Its allure is strong, but its promises are hollow.

- 1st Chronicles 12:32 - Of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, 200 chiefs, and all their kinsmen under their command.
- Christians, we are called to discern this shift, to hold fast to the true gospel, and to offer a world the unchanging love of Christ. They have built a temple without a foundation, and it's already crumbling.

Conclusion

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Pray/Invitation