

Paul Appeals to Caesar Acts 25:1-27

(Scripture Reading: Luke 23:1-16)

Introduction

It may come as a shock to some of you but I don't do well with delays

When things don't happen when they were scheduled to happen I tend to get antsy

And my tendency is to begin to pace and stew and wonder if whatever was scheduled will ever happen

It's very difficult for me to remain unperturbed in the face of delays

Paul had been assured by the Lord in a nighttime visit that it was necessary for him to testify in Rome so Paul knew that Rome was where he was headed and that God would make certain that he got there

Claudius Lysias, the head of the Roman garrison in Jerusalem, had sent him off to Caesarea on the coast in grand style with 470 Roman soldiers to make certain that he arrived safely

He had stood trial before the Roman governor, Felix, and should have been acquitted since his accusers couldn't prove any charge against him

But Felix was not an honorable man and, hoping for a monetary payoff along with trying to curry favor with the Jewish authorities, he kept Paul in custody for two years

Until things got so bad under Felix's governance that the emperor recalled him to Rome and sent Porcius Festus to replace him

Luke doesn't tell us but I can't help but wonder what Paul thought of a two-year delay

But as we open our passage today we see that God had a plan and was working out the details of his plan

God was moving people and even governments as necessary to achieve the ends that he designed

Every moment of our existence, we are subject to forces beyond our imagination and control. As we sit here in church each Sunday morning we are not at rest; not standing still. In fact, we are moving at speeds that we struggle to comprehend. We don't notice it but we are actually spinning at roughly 1,000 miles per hour at the equator which translates to about 764 mph in Walworth as the earth rotates on its axis and whizzing through space as the earth orbits the sun at 67,000 miles per hour while the sun makes its orbit within the Milky Way at 448,000 miles per hour and the Milky Way hurtles through the universe at 1.3 million miles per hour.

We are completely unaware of all this breathtaking motion, or at least we take it all for granted and don't really give it a second thought. But we should occasionally pause and remember that the same God who put placed the heavenly bodies in their places and set all these forces in motion is the same God who knows the number of hairs on every person's head and takes note when a sparrow falls dead to the ground. We need to recognize that the same God who controls the forces that drive the universe is also guiding the events of our lives; even if we are unaware of his working.

We are not the victims of random chance or even of circumstance; we live under the direction and protection of God and God is constantly acting according to his purposes. We need to realize that the same God we trust for the preservation of our eternal souls is capable of taking care of the details of our present lives.

This morning we are going to see how God used the traits and characters of different people and even the mechanisms of governments to move his plan along

And we will see, as we often do only in hindsight, that God was active and working throughout Paul's incarceration and trials even if Paul and his contemporaries were unaware of that fact at the time

We will be looking at **Acts 25:1-27** this morning and I have broken the chapter down into three sections

Festus in Jerusalem, Paul's trial before Festus, and Agrippa and Bernice in Caesarea

Let's begin by looking at **verses 1-5** as we see Luke's record of the trip that the new governor, Festus, made to Jerusalem

I. Festus in Jerusalem

***1**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 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.”*

Straight away we see that Festus was different from Felix because whereas Felix was a procrastinator of the first order, Festus wasted no time in getting down to business

He was only governor for three days when he went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with the influential Jewish leaders

He likely knew well that even though Caesarea was the Roman capitol of the province, Jerusalem was the true power center

We also see that he had a very short honeymoon as the Jewish leaders wasted no time in bringing up the matter of Paul's adjudication and persistently petitioning him to bring Paul to them

Festus was the new guy and while Felix was a hardened veteran of official affairs, Festus was a novice and the Jewish leaders sought to take advantage of him by framing their demand for Paul as a favor to them

I remember being the new guy a lot during my time in the tool and die trade since I changed jobs quite often first as an apprentice and then as a journeyman as I moved from job to job

As the new guy you always want to be accepted by the old-timers and sometimes they take advantage of that fact

I remember all too well going into a new work assignment as an apprentice and having one of my new coworkers ask me if another worker had guessed my weight yet

As the story went, he was really good at guessing people's weight and if he couldn't guess my weight within 5 pounds he would buy me a cup of coffee

He took me over and introduced us and the other fellow set his tools down and looked me over

Of course, I wanted to be liked so I went along even when he said that he would need to pick me up in order to make an accurate guess

He had me get behind him and drape my arms over his shoulders so he could pick me up like a backpack

And once my feet were off the ground I felt the serious sting of a paddle smacking into my rear end

I had been set up and I fell for it hook-line-and sinker

They all laughed as he handed me a quarter for the coffee machine and watched to see how I would react

I have to admit, it was a pretty good joke so I laughed too and was accepted as being “alright”

I was naïve and the Jewish leaders believed that Festus was too and so they acted swiftly to coerce him
As we continue we will see that Festus was unprepared for what lay ahead of him but in this instance he showed some spine as he demonstrated that he was in charge
It seems he was wise enough to recognize what lay ahead if he allowed the Jews to dictate procedure to him
So he told them that he hadn't planned on being in Jerusalem all that long and they could travel to Caesarea for a trial if they wanted

Ulterior motive

Of course, Festus had no way of knowing what Luke reveals to us in **verse 3**, that the Jews didn't want a trial at all they wanted Paul out in the open so they could ambush and kill him on the way

It seems unlikely that Festus would have known about the plot to kill Paul from 2 years earlier so he would not have taken the same precaution in transmittal as Claudius Lysias had so Paul would have been vulnerable

The Jews hadn't forgotten the plan though and after Paul devastated their case against him before Felix they knew the only way to be certain to rid themselves of the plague of Paul would be to murder him because there was no way they would ever prevail in a just court of law

Persistence and deceit remain the hallmarks of persecutors of the church to this day

So believers need to be sure to remain wise as serpents and harmless as doves as we see in **Matthew 10:16**

We need to be realists who are aware of the schemes of those who would harm us and the cause of Christ

But we need to not become cynical or mean-spirited because our mission is to witness to those very enemies
However, being harmless as doves or "winsome" doesn't include being patsies and we have to remain vigilant and avail ourselves of the means of protection that God provides

God is in control

Festus acted in his own interest and for his own convenience in denying the request of the Jewish leaders

If you could ask Festus why he had resisted the urging of the Jewish leaders he would no doubt say that he was simply being pragmatic in choosing to deny the request and he would have been totally unaware that God was using his thoughts, tendencies and decisions to protect Paul and further his plans

However, **Proverbs 21:1** tells us:

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

God didn't make Festus act as he did but used the way Festus acted in the furtherance of his plans

Then we also need to realize that God didn't protect Paul simply because he was Paul

Paul was not special except for the fact that God had a purpose for him and God would see to it that Paul was able to fulfill that purpose

Every person who responds to God's call, follows his leading and direction, and commits to doing his will can be confident of the same providential protection that God provided to Paul

In due course, Festus returned to Caesarea with the Jewish authorities in tow and we pick up the account with Paul's trial before Festus in **verses 6-12**

II. Paul's trial before Festus

*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."

I thought it was kind of amusing that Festus not only denied the request to bring Paul to Jerusalem but that he took his sweet time in heading back to Caesarea

I detect just a bit of passive aggression in his delay but he might have just been engaged with some manner of official business in Jerusalem that kept him for that length of time

Having arrived in Caesarea though we see the return of the expediency that described Festus as he convened court the very next day

One can't help but get the image of a pack of snarling wolves as the Jewish leaders are described as surrounding Paul as they leveled their charges against him

It's easy to imagine the court devolving into confusing pandemonium as Paul's accusers grew more and more passionate in accusing Paul of "many and serious charges" as we see in **verse 7**

Luke doesn't record what the precise charges were but in omitting them we get the sense that they were largely the same as they had brought when Paul's case was before Felix

And the summary of Paul's defense seems to bear this out as he proclaims that he is innocent of committing any offense against, the Jews, the temple, or Caesar (who represents Rome)

Paul has not betrayed his religious roots as he demonstrates that his beliefs and teachings are in perfect continuity with the Old Testament

And he is not a revolutionary figure bent on overthrowing civil authority although he would admit that government will be changed as the result of the changes that following Christ brings to individual hearts

No proof

But the real issue is that none of the charges can be proven by Paul's accusers because they were unprovable. In the Roman justice system, much like ours in the United States, merely accusing someone wasn't sufficient – there had to be proof to convict

And Paul's accusers couldn't provide proof because none existed all they had was bluff and bluster so Paul should have once again been acquitted on the spot

But Felix had been crooked and desirous of monetary gain and of scoring political points with the Jews and Festus was a novice and in over his head

As we will see in verse 18 the charges against Paul were nothing like the case the Jews had laid out in Jerusalem

And when Festus discovered that the charges were religious in nature he was at a loss as to how to continue

Proposed compromise

So Festus did what political people are prone to do – he offered a compromise solution that he thought would be agreeable to all

Since Paul was an un-charged and un-convicted Roman citizen he still had to show him respect and seek his permission so he asked Paul whether he would consent to going to Jerusalem to be tried on the religious charges under his oversight

We need to understand that Festus wasn't necessarily saying that he would be the one to make the ultimate decision regarding Paul's innocence or guilt but that he would watch over the proceedings and would determine whether to give his stamp of approval to the outcome

But Paul was no fool and he realized straight away that if Festus was in a frame of mind to do favors for the Jews there was no telling how far he might go in yielding to their control

After all he knew how the pressure brought by the Jews during the trial of Jesus had ultimately caused Pilate to buckle to their demands to release Barabbas and crucify the Lord – and Festus was no Pilate!

What Festus presented as a simple change in venue had the very real possibility of becoming a change in jurisdiction

Paul also knew better than to allow his accusers who had already decided he deserved the death penalty to become his judges

It was also highly unlikely that Paul had forgotten the threat made against his life and how his life would be in jeopardy from assassins should he be transported back to Jerusalem

Paul's appeal

I expect that Paul's response took Festus by surprise

He had made an offer that he assumed would be readily accepted by all because it would satisfy the request of the Jews and if Paul was truly innocent he wouldn't have anything to fear by the change in venue

After all, he would still be presiding over the trial and protecting the rights of Paul as a Roman citizen

So Paul's response was likely seen as something of an affront as he asserted his rights under Roman law

Paul began by stating that his trial was being heard in the proper forum asserting that Festus should have acquitted him of the charges brought by the Jewish leaders because they had presented no proof and that Festus had no right to turn his case over to them

And he said further that, as a law abiding citizen, if he had violated Roman law he had no desire to avoid punishment even if it meant his death

Then Paul made the pivotal statement that would ultimately send him to Rome, "I appeal to Caesar"

History of the right of appeal

The right of appeal to the emperor was one of the most ancient rights of a Roman citizen that went all the way back to 509BC when a Roman citizen anywhere in the world could make the claim of a sovereign citizen to be tried only by the emperor

It was typically used after a local magistrate had rendered a verdict but could also be used preemptively as Paul was now doing

Under Roman law once the appeal to Caesar had been voiced nothing further could be done at the local level

There was to be no coercion, no trial, no sentencing, and no punishment and the accused had the right to have his appeal heard by the emperor in a timely manner

So if Festus were to proceed to convict and sentence Paul he would be in violation of Roman law himself

In **verse 12** we get another clue as to just how much of a novice Festus was as he turned to his advisors and basically asked, "Hey, can he do that?"

And when they assured him that Paul was well within his rights Festus agreed to grant his appeal

God's working behind the scenes

We could easily fall into the trap of seeing this as nothing more than the mechanics of the Roman judicial system and completely miss that God's working behind the scenes to achieve this outcome

Just as God had used the rabid hate of the Jewish leaders to form a plot to assassinate Paul and then placed Paul's nephew in a place where he could learn of the plot and caused him to reveal that plot first to Paul and then to Claudius Lysias who not only listened to the lad but believed what he said and took overwhelming caution in transporting Paul safely to Caesarea

And just as God had used a corrupt individual like Felix to keep Paul in protective custody giving him the opportunity to clearly share the gospel with Felix and his wife Drusilla in relative luxury while the rest of the pieces were moved into place

And God now used the bumbling of the novice Festus to bring Paul to the point of appealing to Caesar which will result in Paul being transported all the way to Rome at the expense of and under the protection of the Roman government because as we see in **verse 21** Paul's appeal also included a plea for protective custody

Just as we are zipping through space even while sitting still, God's plan is progressing

And when we think we are being left to twiddle our thumbs God is moving in ways that we can't even imagine and, if we see them at all, we will only recognize in hindsight as we look back over our course

Next we again see God's providence at work as Agrippa and Bernice just happen to drop by Caesarea for a visit

Follow along as I read **verses 13-27**

13Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus.

14And 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."

23So 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."

III. Agrippa and Bernice in Caesarea

Agrippa was actually known as Herod Agrippa II, the son of Herod Agrippa I

The Herods had a long and unfriendly association with Christianity

Herod the Great, great-grandfather to Agrippa, was responsible for the murder of the Jewish baby boys at the birth of Christ

Herod Antipas, great-uncle to Agrippa, was the Herod who beheaded John the Baptist

And Agrippa's father had killed James and imprisoned Peter

Agrippa though was very knowledgeable about Judaism and Festus saw his arrival as a fortunate occurrence since he was in a quandary about how to proceed with Paul's case

So Festus found opportunity to share the details with Agrippa and in verse 19 he reveals the central issue of the Jews' case against Paul –

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.

The point of contention has always been the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead because it's the one issue that demands acceptance or plausible explanation

The Jews have tried from the earliest days to deny the resurrection of Jesus

Look with me at **Matthew 28:11-15** –

While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

It's amazing how one act to deceive can be the source of leading so many astray for so many years

The recital of the issue by Festus piqued the curiosity of Agrippa and he stated that he would personally like to hear from Paul so an event was arranged where Paul would be examined

And from hearing Agrippa examine Paul Festus hoped to find something to write to Caesar regarding the charges against Paul

The hearing

Imagine the scene the next day when Agrippa and Bernice came into the court

Luke describes their entry as “great pomp” and one can imagine them arriving in their finest purple robes with their golden crowns all polished and perched on their heads

Not to be outdone by his guests Festus was likely adorned in his best scarlet robe as would befit a Roman official

There was a large contingent of military present as the commanders attended the examination and the soldiers guarded the proceedings

In fact, Luke says that “all the prominent men of the city” were there

It was probably the event of the season and the place to be for anybody who thought they were somebody

When they had all entered along with the proper fanfare and flourishes Festus gave the command to bring Paul in to the room

While we have no way of knowing with any certainty what Paul looked like tradition tells us that he was not a very impressive specimen that he was short, bald-headed with large eyebrows and a large hooked nose, and that he was rather bow-legged

Add in the scars that he likely carried from his many beatings and having been stoned and left for dead it’s doubtful that he made much of an impression in that august gathering – they had no idea

In fact, it’s not hard to hear a bit of a mocking tone when you read how Festus introduced Paul who was proving to be a bit of a thorn in his side

Festus was probably somewhat relieved when Paul first made his appeal to be taken before Caesar but as the days passed he realized that rather than being found between Paul and the Jews he was now in a more difficult spot between Paul and Caesar

If he couldn’t find some reason to have failed to acquit Paul he stood to face severe criticism from the most severe source any Roman could imagine – the emperor himself

I have nothing definite to write

Festus claimed to have nothing definite to write which is at best only partially true

He had very clear charges to include because the Jews had made certain claims against Paul

But they were unsupported charges that wouldn’t suffice for sending Paul to Caesar and Festus found himself in the uncomfortable position of having nothing to say except that he had been too weak to properly adjudicate Paul’s case – he actually admitted to the assembled crowd that he found Paul innocent in **verse 25**

And he would likewise be reluctant to pass along the fact that he had tried to abdicate his responsibility by handing Paul back over to the Jews for trial

Festus had failed in carrying out his judicial responsibilities and Agrippa was merely curious

But God used the characters of both men to put them in the place where they would be listening to Paul

And as we will see next week, Paul used the occasion not to defend himself but to present the gospel to the largest, most influential group God had given him the opportunity to address

Conclusion

This account should help us to recognize that God isn't just the God of the universe who keeps all the heavenly bodies moving along their courses

The God of the telescope is also the God of the microscope and the God of eternity is also the God of all our moments

And God is active and working even when it appears that nothing is going on

I know that I, and likely many of you, chafe when we are delayed or during periods of inactivity

We get impatient when things aren't moving or when they don't move quite as quickly as we think they should

But we need to remember that even things may appear to be at a complete standstill that God is likely just getting the pieces into place for the next big thing

So I think the key to making application of this passage is to recognize that what we see and experience is not all there is

We need to endeavor to see things as God sees them and we can ask God to show us things from his vantage point

But more importantly, we need to exercise faith in him by trusting in his revealed will even if he decides for his own purposes to keep some of the details from us

God often tells us his goal but not the path that he will take us as we move toward the goal along with all the twists and turns and delays we will encounter on the way and we need to learn to be content with that

God told Paul that he was going to testify in Rome but he didn't reveal any part of how he would get there or how long it would take or how perilous the journey would be

But God was gracious in having Luke record many of the details so that we can trace how God worked

Likewise, he has told us what he expects from us and now he expects us to put our faith into action and trust him with the details – especially when things don't seem to be moving

Let's pray