

**“JUSTICE DELAYED” (Acts 25:1-27)**

Acts 21-28 is dominated with Paul's defences before men. The Holy Spirit is demonstrating the blamelessness of Paul, the depravity and hatred of the unbelieving heart, the courage and longsuffering of Paul, and the wonder of God's providential care. The Jews will now try again to destroy Paul when a new ruler comes. We should never underestimate the zeal or depth of the commitment of the devil to destroy God's people. Every true follower of Jesus is the target of false accusations by the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10).

This whole process dragged on for years with Paul seemingly held under house arrest indefinitely. It would be easy for him to become embittered or impatient with the Lord. But Paul remains content in God's hands. One writer notes,

“The fact is: God doesn't reveal the reason why this happened to Paul, and that is often the way He works. He doesn't always tell us why things happen. What He does tell us is that He is sovereign, and He is faithful, and we are to trust Him. Paul did that. He didn't despair. He knew that the reins of the universe hadn't slipped from God's hands. He still controlled and guided world affairs. He still guided and controlled the events of Paul's life.”

Although men like Felix and Festus are self-serving God will nonetheless use them as providential instruments to accomplish his plan for the gospel. Paul never planned any of these incidents neither was he the prime mover. God was in control even of the forces of evil.

*Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem. 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. (v1-3)*

Acts 24 transitions between the governorship of Antonius Felix to that of Porcius Festus in the province of Judea. Festus was a relative novice compared to his predecessor the experienced Felix. But Festus had a reputation for dealing with issues promptly and more fairly than Felix. The relationship between the Jews and the Romans was at a low point here and doubtless Festus sought to build bridges with the leaders of the Jews for political expediency. He may well have been warned that Felix lost his job because of troublesome relationships with the Jewish leadership. The Jews hoped that the new governor's inexperience could be utilised for their advantage. Despite two years passing, the issue of Paul was paramount to them. Probably Paul was being too effective as a witness under house arrest.

The leaders of Judaism claimed to love the OT Law but were constantly plotting to murder innocent men. This shows the depraved nature of apostate religion and its hatred for Christ (John 15:18-19). When men reject the truth, they are desperate to remove any remembrance of it from their lives. The devil and his disciples don't give up easily. They have a tremendous zeal to destroy God's work and God's people.

*But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any*

*wickedness in him. And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought. (v4-6)*

We aren't told that Festus knew of the conspiracy to murder Paul. But once again, providence saves Paul from an attempt to assassinate him. Paul was destined to bear the gospel to Rome, and no plans of man could frustrate that. We so often forget that God is ordering the entire sequence of our lives no matter how frustrating or confusing they may seem to us.



*And when he 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. While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all. (v7-8)*

Their charges are centred around the allegation that Paul had offended Rome, Israel, and God. Constantly in Acts, the Jews tried repeatedly to persuade the Romans that Christianity was a revolutionary. The great irony is that Judaism was the faith seeking to overthrow the Romans. This expression, “*could not prove*” is an important phrase again in reminding us that Paul is innocent. However, even if there is no evidence against us, it does not mean that God will always vindicate us before men.

*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? 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. Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go. (v9-12)*

Festus was a political pragmatist and a people-pleaser like Felix. There are always men like this in prominence in every part of a society. However, Paul did not demonstrate any frustration or impatience having to defend himself of the same unproven charges but calmly defended himself. Some say that we should not defend ourselves but Paul's example is to the contrary. As Steve Cole notes,

Paul was not silent, because in addition to several defenses in the Book of Acts, he also wrote Galatians and 2 Corinthians to defend his ministry. Satan tries to discredit the gospel by slandering those who preach the gospel. There is no virtue and much damage to the cause of the gospel if a faithful man allows false charges and slander to stand without defense or explanation.”

That doesn't mean that we should defend ourselves on every point of controversy. One of the principles of Christian reconciliation is that minor offences or slights should just be abandoned. For Proverbs 19:11 makes clear, *“The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.”*

Interestingly, in his reply Paul declares that he believes in capital punishment, *“For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die.”* It is not just an Old Testament truth. All Roman citizens had a right to appeal to Caesar and the Empire had to use all expense to get them to him. We are not to have a martyr complex. Guzik notes, *“Rightly and wisely, Paul wanted to avoid martyrdom if he could. He wasn't afraid to face the lions, but he didn't want to put his head in a lion's mouth if he could avoid it.”* Paul did not do this lightly as Nero was a capricious ruler but he had no other option as Festus played a game with him and the Jews. Ironically Paul had more confidence in the justice of a pagan Gentile Emperor than the Jewish Sanhedrin.

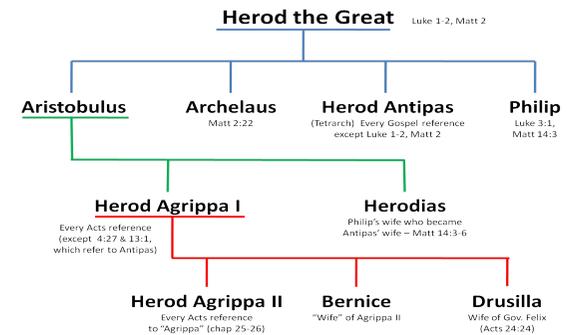
These corrupt Roman judges and rulers were forced by their own law to protect the Apostle Paul. For God had allowed Roman law to be formed to protect His servant Paul. It is legitimate and honourable for us to use the government to protect and uphold our rights as citizens for the sake of the gospel. Christians are not to be revolutionaries but model citizens so far as the laws are consistent with the Word of God (Rom. 13:1-6). But there are times when believers must use the law to protect themselves and their ministry. John Calvin points out the consistency of this, *“God, who has appointed courts of law, also gives his people liberty to use them lawfully.”*



*And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus. And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have*

*judgment against him. To whom I answered, 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. Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. 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. And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar. (v13-21)*

King Agrippa II ruled another province to the north with a similar name for its capital city called Caesarea Philippi. He was the son of Agrippa I who slew James and died by worms and the grandson of the notorious Herod the Great who was on the throne when Christ was born. He was the best of this ungodly family and the last of Herod's descendants to rule as king. Agrippa was a vassal king to the Romans in a Northern province but he was given authority to take charge of many of the affairs in the temple in Jerusalem. For although he was educated in Rome in the ways of the Romans, he was also trained in Jewish Law, custom and religion. Paul acknowledges that Agrippa had understanding in Jewish matters in Acts 26:3. Bernice was the sister of Agrippa and is accused by Josephus of being in an immoral relationship with her brother.



Festus must have been pleased to see the more experienced Agrippa arrive. For Agrippa was an expert on matters that he needed counsel on. Now the problem (and the blame) can be shared with others. He openly admits that he could not find any worthwhile criminal accusation against Paul, but only a charge about religion. He was perturbed that this dispute was over what he regarded as a silly superstition. This is how the world views the resurrection of Christ – mythical.

Festus revealed to Agrippa that he had given Paul the option of standing trial in Jerusalem by the Jews or to stay in prison in Caesarea to be tried by Roman law. But what he doesn't state is that there was a third option of freeing Paul since his accusers had no evidence that Paul had violated any Jewish or Roman laws. Festus had no idea what to do about Paul. For he didn't want to risk offending Roman law or offending the local Jewish leaders. That is why he needed the more experienced Agrippa's help.

*Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also bear the man myself. To morrow, said he, thou shalt bear him. 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. (v22-23)*

Festus must have been delighted when Agrippa agreed to help. He rolled out the red carpet for his royal VIP guests. Festus is adorned in the splendour of his Roman procurator's clothing and Agrippa and Bernice in their royal robes. Luke contrasts the insignificant Paul against the splendour of this world. However, God's man will always dominate the true agenda. Boice notes,

"In Greek the word "pomp" is *fantasia*. It is the word from which we get our words "fantasy" and "fantastic." It refers to something light, fleeting, or passing, something of momentary interest only. In the context of this great public display by Agrippa, Festus and the others, the word was probably chosen carefully to suggest that these seemingly important things are only passing fantasies."



*And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him. (v24-27)*

In this section, we see the Holy Spirit emphasizing the innocence of Paul again, "But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death." Festus had to have a real charge to write against Paul and hoped Agrippa could find an accusation that Festus could put in his report to Rome. It also would help his relationships with the Jews. It would be embarrassing for Festus as the new ruler to send Paul to Rome with such a shallow case.

Paul is not intimidated upon meeting another member of the Herodian family. He is ready to seize the opportunity to present the claims of the gospel. Throughout the interaction, we see a deep desire in Paul's heart to reach these people for Christ, despite his dark past. For

Paul knew that he, while a prisoner, was the only one who was truly free from the bondage of sin. Festus, Felix, and Agrippa will fall off the pages of history and be almost forgotten. But God's man lives on. The seemingly insignificant was in fact the most significant one there. MacArthur states,

"What a beautiful setting Paul had for preaching! The place was jammed with people who didn't know the Lord, and he had them all as an audience. The objective of the church is to go into the world and preach the gospel. The church meets to pray, break bread together, fellowship, and study the Word of God, but it never meets to evangelize - it has to go out into the world to do that. Paul was confronting the world. He was surrounded by a Roman entourage and all the Jewish dignitaries of that part of the world. He was as bold and fearless as any man who ever lived. His testimony is fantastic. His presentation is dynamic and penetrating as he unmasks the sin of those present."

