

The Acts of the Apostles

Sermon Number: 32

Acts 24 – 26

July 15, 2012

Good News to All!

In the previous study we saw how the Apostle Paul was arrested by the Romans. The Roman tribune ordered the Sanhedrin to call a meeting and bring their charges against him. Paul used his knowledge of the two main religious factions to create uproar over the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Paul said the reason for the disturbance was a theological matter that would have nothing to do with civil law.

Acts 23:6

Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial." ESV

One faction, the Sadducees, denied the existence of angels, demons, an afterlife, and thus a resurrection from the dead.

The Pharisees believed all of the things the Sadducees denied.

Paul used his right as a citizen of Rome to appeal directly to Caesar.

That was Paul's Ticket to Rome.

So we pick up with Paul's travel to Rome with a stop at Caesarea before Felix, the governor.

It is over 1200 miles "as the crow flies" from Caesarea to Rome but the trip will be mostly at sea and the route is anything but a straight line. In the next study we will go to sea with Paul.

But now Paul is going to appear before Felix.

Nothing much has changed in the way the culture divides into the common folk and the celebrity class; the "ordinary people" and the "beautiful people."

Much of popular television now is devoted to the stupidity of celebrity.

The current president, in his bid for re-election, is employing class envy pitting the poor against the rich, saying it's not "fair" for those rich people to have all that money and they ought to give most of it to the poor! Elect him for another four years and he will see that the poor get their "fair share."

But God does not view us in that way; God sees us as either justified or guilty; in Christ or not; saved or lost. Paul knew this and he preached the Gospel as fervently to the mighty and powerful as he did to a soldier he was chained to in a dungeon.

A Corrupt Politician Hears the Gospel

Acts 24:1

And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul.

Paul is taken from Jerusalem to Herod's palace in Caesarea to keep him from being assassinated by a band of 40 men who had vowed to neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. Paul's nephew heard of the plot and informed the tribune who arranged to move Paul to safety.

Now five days after the transfer the high priest and members of the Sanhedrin arrive with a professional orator named Tertullus to present the charges against Paul.

Luke, the inspired writer of the Book of Acts, generally presents the Roman justice system in a favorable light. A Roman citizen had protection under the law and Paul, a citizen by birth, was not hesitant to demand his right of appeal to Caesar.

The Slave Who became a Ruler

Marcus Antonius Felix had been born a slave in the household of Antonia, the mother of Claudius Caesar. Through the influence of his brother, Pallus, a freedman close to Claudius, Felix gained his freedom and after serving in lesser government offices was appointed governor of Judea in 48 A.D.

The Roman historian, Tacitus, wrote that, “Felix exercised kingly power with the mind of a slave.” Felix was a cruel and lustful man. He married three wives, all princesses. The name of the first wife is not known. The second wife was the granddaughter of Antony and Cleopatra. The third wife was Drusilla, the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I.

Flattery and Deceit

Acts 24:2-9

² And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying:

"Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, ³ in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude. ⁴ But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. ⁵ For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. ⁶ He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. ⁸ By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him."

⁹ The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so.

Tertullus used flattery to set Felix up to be receptive to the charges. What Tertullus said about Felix and his rule was utterly hypocritical. There were few periods in Judean history that were marked by civil unrest. At this very time the government was rife with corruption.

The delegation from Jerusalem brought three charges against Paul:

He is a troublemaker [a pest, a plague] who stirs up Jews all over the empire.

He is the ringleader of the Nazarene party.

He attempted to violate the temple by bringing a Gentile into it and would have been successful if the Jews had not arrested him.

Tertullus makes the lynch mob sound like an orderly action by the temple police.

Paul's Defence

Acts 24:10-23

¹⁰ And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied:

"Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense. ¹¹ You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem, ¹² and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. ¹³ Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me. ¹⁴ But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, ¹⁵ having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. ¹⁶ So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. ¹⁷ Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. ¹⁸ While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia— ¹⁹ they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me. ²⁰ Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, ²¹ other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: 'It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.'"

²² But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, "When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case." ²³ Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.

Felix motioned with a nod for Paul to speak. In contrast to Tertullus, Paul's address was respectful and truthful and completely lacking in manipulative flattery. His defence was that the charges were groundless.

1. Paul says that he did not argue with anyone at the temple; he did not stir up trouble at the temple; and he did not cause trouble anywhere in the city [12-13].
2. Paul did admit that he worshipped the God of Israel as a follower of "The Way." He said he believed everything in the Scriptures and that he shared in the hope of a resurrection with the Jewish patriarchs and the prophets. He said he strived to live with a clear conscience before God and man [14-16].
3. Paul said the reason that he came to Jerusalem was to bring gifts for the poor as an offering [17].

4. Paul said that he was participating in a ceremonial cleansing as prescribed by the Mosaic Law [18-20].

5. Paul said that his accusers have no proof of any wrongdoing; and besides where are the Asian Jews that started the trouble, why aren't they here in court? The Sanhedrin itself found no crime for which to indict him

The only "crime" to which Paul would admit guilt was proclaiming the resurrection of the dead [21]. The real issue is the high priest's hatred of Christianity, or the Way.

Felix gives an example of the politics of expediency. He could see that the case against Paul was false and that there was no proof of guilt and that he had no legal grounds to hold him. But Felix also knew that if he released Paul it would offend the Sanhedrin, so he made up two excuses to hold him.

Paul's Testimony **Acts 24:24-26**

²⁴ After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁵ And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you." ²⁶ At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him.

Paul preached the Gospel of righteousness in Christ and self-control to a corrupt politician. There may have been moments of genuine interest in Christianity on Felix' part but he allowed his own self-interests to overcome him and he tried to get Paul to offer him a bribe for his freedom.

Felix is Removed from Office

Acts 24:27

When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

Paul had now been under arrest in Caesarea for two years when the rule of Felix ended with an outbreak of mob violence between the Jews and the Greeks. With Felix' approval, thousands of Jews were killed. Felix is recalled to Rome. But because of his connections through his brother he was never charged with corruption in office. But Paul is left in prison.

Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus. Nothing is known about Porcius prior to his appointment as governor of Judea in 59 or 60 A.D.

Old Men Full of Hatred

Acts 25:1-8

Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. ²And 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. ⁴Festus 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."

⁶After 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. ⁷When 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. ⁸Paul argued in his defense, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense."

When the new governor arrived in Jerusalem for an inaugural visit these same old men tried to pressure him into returning Paul for trial. They still planned to kill him. Festus' refusal shows his commitment to Roman justice. Festus invited a delegation to come to Caesarea where he promised to hear the case.

In verse 8, Paul states the nature of their complaints: breaking Jewish law; violating the temple; violating Caesar's decrees. All of the charges were false. The charge that he was against Caesar gives Paul the basis to appeal to Caesar.

A Compromise is Proposed

Acts 25:9

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?"

Festus' proposal to try Paul in Jerusalem represented the politics of compromise. Festus knew the charges should be dismissed but he did not want to offend the Jews in his first month in office.

Paul's Appeal to Caesar

Acts 25:10-12

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 yourselves 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."

Paul knew that he could not get a fair trial in Jerusalem, nor had he forgotten the assassination plot. As a Roman citizen Paul had the right of appeal directly to Caesar in a capital case. It may seem odd that Paul would appeal to Nero who was known for his cruelty to Christians, but this is during the fifth year of Nero's reign and he is still under the influence of Seneca, and ruled the empire well at the time. Five years later Nero began his mad campaign against the church.

Almost Persuaded

Acts 25:13-22

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."

A few days after the disgruntled Jews left Caesarea; Festus received a royal visit from King Agrippa and his sister Bernice. Festus described the situation and revealed his grasp of the matter. The real issue is a "dead man Jesus, whom Paul insists is alive." Agrippa says he will hear the case himself.

Circus! Circus!

Acts 25:23 – 26:1

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."

Acts 26:1

So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense:

They staged a royal pageant with all the trimmings of royalty. For all of its pomp and ceremony this was not an official trial.

Paul's Defense of the Gospel

Acts 26:2-25

²"I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, ³ especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

⁴"My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. ⁵ They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. ⁶ And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, ⁷ to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! ⁸ Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

⁹"I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

¹²"In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³ At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. ¹⁴ And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' ¹⁵ And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles— to whom I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

¹⁹"Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰ but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God,

performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. ²¹ For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. ²² To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: ²³ that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles."

²⁴ And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind."
²⁵ But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words.

As Paul told his account of meeting Jesus and the strong Jewish theme may have been over Festus' head. When Paul pressed the issue of the resurrection, Festus' practical and logical Roman mind rebelled and he told Paul that he was insane.

An Invitation to a King

Acts 26:26-32

²⁶ For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." ²⁸ And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" ²⁹ And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains."

³⁰ Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. ³¹ And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment." ³² And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

As the hearing progresses you realize that it is Agrippa, not Paul, who is on trial! Agrippa knows very well the things of which Paul speaks: "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."

The Roman procurator has just equated Christianity with insanity. The Romans looked to Agrippa as an expert on Judaism. If he believes the prophets, he must believe in Jesus. If he denies the prophets, the Romans would not think him able to rule the Jews he is appointed to govern.

So Agrippa makes a joke!

"In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?"

How about you?

Have you been persuaded that Jesus is Lord?

Have you repented and publicly confessed that you are a believer in Christ?

The Scriptural way to confess Jesus as Lord is to repent and confess with the mouth and obey Him in disciple's baptism.