

Sermon No. 425

CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH

The book of Acts

CHAPTER 25

Scripture Reading: Colossians 3:12-17

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Paul has been imprisoned in Caesarea two years

- Unusual imprisonment . . . Herod's palace
 - Visitors – some freedom – but he cannot leave!
 - Imprisoned because the religious leaders made terrible accusations against him
 - He is a disease – seditious – troublemaker
- Without evidence he could not be convicted . . . so Felix just left him
 - Providential will of GOD

Acts 25 Judea now governed by Festus

- He was a good man compared to Felix
 - But like Felix a people pleaser

(1-3) Paul's Jewish accusers decide to re-try the case against Paul

NKJV ¹ Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

- Caesarea: capital of the Judean province, but Jerusalem, most important city

NKJV ² Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him, ³asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem—while *they* lay in ambush along the road to kill him

- Two years earlier they had failed to get a conviction . . .
 - Under Claudius . . . under Felix . . . lawyers
 - They knew that Paul would be acquitted in any fair trial

- So now they are over trials . . . now they just wanted to assassinate him
 - 'Religious men' . . . wrong . . . self-serving . . . legalistic . . . prideful
 - If your religion makes you a liar and a murderer . . . something wrong!

(4-6) Fortunately Festus refuses to put Paul on trial again in Jerusalem

- Another way that God protected Paul

⁴ But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going *there* shortly. ⁵ "Therefore," he said, "let those who have authority among you go down with *me* and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him." ⁶ And when he had remained among them more than ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought.

(7-12) Festus re-opens the trial

⁷ When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove, ⁸ while he answered for himself, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all."

- Paul isn't cynical
- Paul confidently rested on the evidence, his integrity, his faith

⁹ But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?" ¹⁰ So Paul said, "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. ¹¹ For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar."

- Was it divine intervention THAT ALLOWED HIM to see through the plot?
- Or was it just good common sense?

- Two things we do know:
 1. It wasn't because he was afraid to die!
 2. He had every right to appeal to Caesar
 - The right to a fair trial . . . to prove our innocence
 - We must not abuse the legal system

¹² Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, "You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!"

- Festus, like the others, found it difficult to close the case . . . *but at least he had made a decision!*
- But it didn't end there . . . something got his curiosity

(13-22) Agrippa visit Caesarea

¹³ And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus. ¹⁴ When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying: "There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix, ¹⁵ about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed *me*, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him. ¹⁶ To them I answered, 'It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction^[b] before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.' ¹⁷ Therefore when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in. ¹⁸ When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed, ¹⁹ but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. ²⁰ And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters. ²¹ But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar."

- Herod Agrippa II ruled a province of the Roman Empire to the northeast
 - His great-grandfather tried to kill baby Jesus
 - His grandfather had John the Baptist beheaded
 - His father martyred the first apostle, James
 - Now it is Paul's turn . . . to stand before the Herod family!
 - Festus may not have known all the history
 - But he knew Agrippa was an expert in Jewish customs . . . this was a complex case
 - He needed help . . . the complexities included:
 - He doesn't know Judaism or Christianity
 - Paul is talking about a dead man that came alive
- Paul sounds like an intelligent man!
- They're asking to assassinate him
- Men who claim to be men of GOD!
- Like the lost . . . he is thinking religion is a waste of time

²² Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him."

- It is also another example of GOD's providence
 - Festus' confusion and Agrippa's curiosity meant he would have another opportunity to speak God's truth

(23) Paul is brought before Agrippa, Bernice, and Festus

²³ So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus' command Paul was brought in

- This had become more than a trial or a hearing!
 - This didn't bother Paul . . . it was another God-given opportunity to share Christ

J The more religious leaders protested . . . the more Paul got to share!

(24-27) Festus makes an opening statement before Agrippa

²⁴ And Festus said: "King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer. ²⁵ But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him. ²⁶ I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore, I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write. ²⁷ For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him."

- Even though this isn't a trial
- Festus needs this time to prepare an official brief for Paul's trial before Caesar

- He can't write,

"I really don't know what this man is accused of and he is probably innocent, but I thought I should send him to you anyway"

- Not a good way to get in Caesar's good books!

Many in the Bible were the target of false accusations

- Joseph . . . Daniel . . . David . . . Jesus Christ
- Yet in another sense, *every* follower of Jesus is the target of false accusations by Satan
- He is called the accuser of the brethren . . . Revelation 12:10
 NLT ¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice shouting across the heavens, "It has come at last salvation and power and the Kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters has been thrown down to earth—the one who accuses them before our God day and night
- He accuses you before GOD . . . day and night
 - o He holds you in contempt because of Christ
 - o He wants you to do anything but live peaceably and content in Christ
 - o He wants to do anything he can to weaken your faith

But thankfully, Jesus Christ is our solid defense against condemnation and false accusation

Romans 8:31-34

NLT ³¹ What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? ³² Since He did not spare even His own Son but gave Him up for us all, won't He also give us everything else? ³³ Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for His own? No one—for God Himself has given us right standing with Himself. ³⁴ Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and He is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us

Jesus Wonderful Lord

Wonderful, wonderful Jesus! He is my friend, true to the end;

He gave Himself to redeem me; Jesus, wonderful Lord!

The Heart of the Matter

Acts 23 – 25 show us first-hand the danger of a religion not connected to GOD through the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ

These religious leaders hold a contempt for Paul that defies all logic

- They claim to be followers of GOD
... but their actions show nothing of who GOD truly is
- They claim to have the truth
... but their actions reveal everything but the truth!
- They are convinced they are doing GOD's work
... but somehow made themselves equal with GOD

But GOD has no equal . . . He expects us to simply seek Him

How did they think their actions reflected GOD's grace . . . mercy . . . love?

Their entire focus was self-centered . . . let's get this guy . . . he is a disease
. . . he claims to know the truth, but GOD entrusted the truth to us!

Matthew 15:1-20 – defilement comes from within Jesus said

Luke 9:49 – Jesus forbids sectarianism

⁴⁹ Now John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us." ⁵⁰ But Jesus said to him, "Do not forbid *him*, for he who is not against us is on our side."

1 Corinthians 1:10 – Paul tells us sectarianism is sin

¹⁰ Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

RELIGION . . . is it possible for a believer . . . to become RELIGIOUS to the extent that their actions and hearts are totally disconnected from GOD?

- Believers can fall into this trap
 - Convinced Jesus needs to know what everyone is doing
 - Convinced we must eradicate anyone who doesn't fit the mold
 - Develop a heart attitude that is wrong
 - A two-year vendetta against Paul is nothing!

The critical question for us . . . is to know what GOD expects of us

And to know what He expects of us . . . means that we have to stay connected to Him throughout the week

- We keep our connection with God alive by spending time in His Word and in prayer
 - That actually makes us "doers of the Word" (James 1:22-24)
- The writer of Psalm 119 recognized the importance of a connection to God
 - He asked God to teach him His statutes and give him understanding of His law (v.33-34)
 - He prayed that he would observe it with his whole heart (v.34)
 - By meditating on God's Word and then applying it, the psalmist stayed "connected" to God
- God has given us His Word as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path to lead us to Him

Acts 26 – Paul gives his defense before King Agrippa

Paul explains . . .

- His early life as a faithful Jew and Pharisee
- That at one time he persecuted the followers of Jesus
- But Jesus revealed Himself to Paul on the road to Damascus
- Jesus commissioned Paul to preach to Gentiles and Jews
- About his obedience to Jesus
- In summarizing his defense

Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come; that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles

The response from Festus and Agrippa

- Festus declares that Paul is mad
- But Agrippa declares that he is *almost* persuaded to become a Christian
- Agrippa admits Paul's innocence, yet forwards him to Caesar