

## EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #52

Acts 25:1-22

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson told the story one time of when he was teaching in a seminary that some students decided that they would invent a slogan to promote the student body to evangelize. The slogan they came up with was this: "If love is felt, the message is heard." The school made up posters and buttons and everyone wore one, "If love is felt, the message is heard." Dr. Johnson said it sounded beautiful, but the problem was it was not biblical. No one loved the world more than Jesus Christ. No one showed he loved the world more than Jesus Christ. If all you have to do to get people to listen and respond to the Gospel is to love them then everyone would have responded to Him. But the fact is, very few did and most of the world rejects Jesus Christ and the world hates grace. You cannot love someone to salvation; God must open their hearts or minds and another great proof of that is the Apostle Paul (*Acts 25:1-27*, p. 6).

We come now to a moment when there is a change in government. It is time for a new leader. Felix' term is over and now a new leader takes charge and his name is Festus. But it really doesn't matter what political leader runs the world, none of them love Jesus Christ and none of them love the grace of God.

Jesus Christ personally spent a night with Paul and told him that he had been a great witness in Jerusalem and he would also be a great witness in Rome (*Acts 23:11*). When we travel through this book of Acts and actually see how he got to Rome, it is bizarre.

**THE WILL OF GOD FOR PAUL'S LIFE WAS THAT HE GO TO ROME, BUT THE WAY HE ACTUALLY GETS TO ROME IS A SOVEREIGN ROUTE FILLED WITH PROBLEMS AND INTIMIDATIONS THAT ONLY GOD COULD ORCHESTRATE.**

Paul again finds himself in court and there are nine historical facts that tell the story:

**FACT #1** – Festus arrives in the province and three days after his arrival he travels from Caesarea to Jerusalem. **25:1**

Porcius Festus was the man who replaced Felix (24:27), who was recalled to Rome. The reason he replaced Felix was because Felix' relationship with the Jews wasn't good. This was a good career step-up move for Festus. We do not know much about him except he was a good politician. Josephus says he had a generally good character and had a lot more integrity than Felix. He was a typical Roman politician in that he didn't care much for the religion of the Jews or of the Christians, but he wanted to keep everyone happy without making too many waves.

Now Festus arrived in Caesarea from a long trip from Italy. Because Felix was not highly esteemed by the Jews, he felt it was important to smooth things out. So before he could even completely unpack, having spent just three days in Caesarea, he took off for Jerusalem to meet with the Jewish leaders.

It is interesting to watch the dynamics of candidates in an election year. They try to make trips to areas to gain some popularity to earn votes. They make some political move to try and smooth things out. It isn't that they want people right with God, he wants them supporting him.

**FACT #2** – Religious leaders of Jerusalem want Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem so they can kill him. **25:2-3**

When Festus got to Jerusalem he ran into a buzz saw. Now keep in mind that two years have elapsed (24:27) since Paul's trial with Felix. But these leaders had not given up in wanting to destroy Paul. It is clear that these religious leaders still hate grace and still hate Paul and they still hate Jesus Christ whom he preaches. There is an old saying that "time heals"; well time does not heal when it comes to people who hate grace. William Larkin said you can always count on two things from religious frauds: persistence and deceit (*Acts*, p. 346). Jewish people will never be content, happy or at peace until Jesus Christ, her Messiah reigns. No political leader will ever solve Israel's problem.

Undoubtedly old Ananias was there along with other leading men from the priesthood and the Sanhedrin. These religious leaders are hateful and want to kill Paul because they want to silence grace. They are not interested in truth or in fact or in righteousness or justice; they want Paul dead so they ask Festus to bring Paul back to Jerusalem. The participle "requesting" is present tense which means they asked this over and over again, continually.

It seems to me that the real behind scenes issue here is Satan is trying to kill Paul because he does not want him getting to Rome.

**FACT #3** – Festus decides that the leading religious leaders should go to Caesarea and prosecute him there. **25:4-5**

Festus is a good politician. He consults with local officials while trying not to make waves or offend anyone, but he also keeps Rome in mind since his predecessor, Felix, was fired by Nero. He basically says Paul is in custody in Caesarea and not here and I am ready to travel back to Caesarea and why don't some of you come there for a trial. He said if there is anything legally wrong then let these leading men come there and prosecute Paul.

That word "prosecute" (κατηγορεω) is one that refers to a legal accusation or charge. The Greek word means that the prosecution is the accuser (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 241).

In the Casey Anthony trial, the defense attorney made up a chart of imaginary friends that were so far out that the prosecution actually started laughing. Well in this case, the prosecution is making up imaginary charges that are not only not provable and are laughable.

**FACT #4** – Paul is brought into court and many false charges are brought against him. **25:6-7**

Now Festus has only been in office a short time and he already has been out of Caesarea, the Roman capital for 8-10 days and he was anxious to get back to where he could conduct official government business.

Naturally the false religious leaders went to Caesarea to press trumped up charges against Paul and the next day after he got home, Festus was sitting on the tribunal and Paul is ordered to be brought in to appear in court. It is interesting that there is no mention of their attorney Tertullus being present (24:2). Perhaps they decided to represent themselves because he didn't win for them the last time before Felix.

Paul has not done one thing to even be in any trial at all and yet he finds himself in one legal battle after another. No one could prove anything against Paul and yet he is imprisoned and taken from one court appearance to another.

If you are doing God's will don't be surprised if you go through a period of time in which you face one hassle after another. You may get hit with a series of negative things that you don't like and can't explain. The good thing to know is that God is still sovereign.

According to **verse 7**, the Jews brought many serious charges against Paul which they could not prove. Luke doesn't mention them specifically, but from Paul's response it is clear they accuse him of being some sacrilegious insurrectionist who was a threat to the Law, the Temple and the Emperor.

One must ask why is all of this happening to Paul? Why is God permitting a man who is completely innocent to go through all of this? The answer is, His sovereign plan is to get Paul to Rome and before He takes him to Rome, he wants him testifying of His grace found in Jesus Christ to the most powerful people in the world. God wants him in Rome and Satan does not. We live in a world where there are times we want to ask why. Why does a pro-abortion politician get elected to office? Why does a Christian who loves the Word of God get branded as a right-wing kook, but a racial activist or extreme radical get branded as a hero? Why do people who love God's Word seem to be viewed as odd and those who love bands seem to be viewed as right? We must assume that God's sovereign plan is being worked out. We may not see it, but we can know it.

**FACT #5** – Paul defends himself as being innocent of any offense against the Law, the Temple or Caesar. **25:8**

When you are falsely accused or when you face problems you just hope they go away. You get sick and tired of having to defend yourself. Paul has been living with this cloud of false allegations for well over two years and here he is again back in court.

Paul did not have a slick defense attorney to represent him. He did not have a Johnny Cochrane who could come up with some cute saying like "if it doesn't fit, you must acquit." Paul had to defend himself.

His defense is very simple: I have not committed any legal offense against the Jews religiously, against the Temple sacrilegiously or against Caesar politically. In other words, Paul says, I am completely innocent of all charges.

**FACT #6** – Festus asks Paul if he is willing to go to Jerusalem to be tried there. **25:9**

Now keep in mind that the Jews have no proof and Paul says I am innocent. The case should have been thrown out right here. However, Festus desired to do some favor for the Jews to earn their support and he thought he could calm things down by having a change of venue from Caesarea to Jerusalem. So he asked Paul if he were willing to go back to Jerusalem to face the charges there. He thought this would really win the favor of the Jews.

But what Festus did not know is that both God and Paul had other plans. Paul was going to Rome and not to Jerusalem.

**FACT #7** – Paul said I appeal to Caesar's court and Festus agreed that he should go to Rome to appear before Caesar. **25:10-12**

Paul said to Festus, “I have done no wrong and you know it.” Think about that for a moment. A leading political and judicial leader knows this man is innocent, but he will not do anything to help him. He will not release him.

Roman citizens had a right to appeal to Caesar in any part of the Roman Empire and that is exactly what Paul did. Now this is a critical moment in the program of God. **In fact, had Paul not appealed to Caesar, he would have been set free in the next 24 hours (26:32). So this trial and this appeal is the will of God. This is the sovereign means God is using to take Paul to Rome.**

By the way, the appeal to Caesar's court is an appeal to the “Bema” (βηματος) or judgment seat of Caesar. This is the word Paul uses to describe the judgment seat of Jesus Christ that every believer will face. This will be a very intimidating place. The focus on Caesar is a key part of this chapter mentioned eight times (25:8, 10, 11, 12, 12, 21, 21, 25).

So the program of God is not only going to take Paul to Rome, it is also going to put him in the presence of the most powerful man in the world.

When Paul requests that he be tried by Caesar, all in court knew the Emperor (Nero) could trump all other court officials and any jury. In other words, any Roman citizen could appeal to the Emperor of Rome to hear and judge his case. This is exactly what Paul does here. Paul was a citizen of Rome and he used his right to appeal to Rome.

Paul knew it was God's will for him to go to Rome and from a practical standpoint, he probably thought there is no chance of justice here in Caesarea and certainly not in Jerusalem.

Some believe that Festus was shocked by this request and never assumed this. But he said, “Okay, if you want to appeal to Caesar, to Caesar you will go.” Festus would not dare deny Paul this request because if word got to Nero and he learned he had overstepped his boundaries, the ramifications for Festus could be serious.

Now what actually would prompt Paul to do this? The answer is the will of God for Paul's life. Jesus told Paul he was to go to Rome and be His witness and Paul made his appeal to go there. **This was God's sovereign way of getting Paul to Rome.**

We cannot ever forget the fact that God is sovereign over every negative thing that hits our lives or our church. God's will is usually not the way we would plan it.

**FACT #8** – King Agrippa and his sister Bernice meet Festus . **25:13-21**

Now I want you to remember that Jesus told Paul that he would be a witness at Rome (Acts 23:11). He is actually given the privilege of witnessing to key people of Rome long before he gets to Rome. God brings those people to him. There are two key actions here:

**(Action #1)** - Agrippa and Bernice pay their respects to Festus . **25:13**

Herod Agrippa and Bernice were brother and sister. They were political people who knew how to play the political game. They had been brought up in the corrupt political world that even makes the Kennedy's look good.

This is Herod Agrippa II, who was the son of Herod Agrippa the I (who put James to death—Acts 12:1) and the great-grandson of Herod the Great, who tried to kill Jesus Christ as a baby (Matt. 2:16). When Herod died, this Herod was seventeen years old and living in Rome. He was considered to be too young to rule so he was given some small territory in Lebanon, but later he was made the king over a large territory that included Galilee. He was brought up in the court of Claudius.

Bernice was also the daughter of Herod Agrippa I and the sister of Drusilla (Acts 24:24). She was one year older than her brother. She had been married but when her husband died, she moved in with her brother and there were incestuous rumors about their relationship between both Jews and Romans. This couple was the leading scandal of this time.

These were two very powerful political people in the Roman world and they stopped by to pay their formal respects to Festus, the new Roman governor.

**(Action #2)** - Festus told the whole story of Paul to Agrippa. **25:14-21**

Now the verb “**laid**” (ανατιθημι) carries with it the idea of declaring something to someone in somewhat of a consulting way. This word means you put something on someone else with the idea that they can help (Smith, p. 34). Festus cited seven chronological realities at this meeting. The purpose seems to be to make sure these two knew he handled things properly for Rome and also seek their input:

**Chronological Reality #1** - Paul had been left a prisoner by Felix . **25:14b**

This is a nice way of saying “I was left with this mess when I took over.” I am still picking up the pieces of Felix' reign.

**Chronological Reality #2** - Festus was in Jerusalem and the religious leaders wanted him to give Paul the death penalty. **25:15**

These are the religious leaders committed to their laws, their festivals, their legalism and their day observances. They have worship services weekly and they act so religious and so pious. They want to kill the one man preaching grace that is found in Jesus Christ.

**Chronological Reality #3** - Festus told them it was not right according to Roman law to execute someone without a fair trial. **25:16**

Festus wanted these two to know that he stood for Roman law.

**Chronological Reality #4** - Festus brought Paul to appear before him. **25:17**

**Chronological Reality #5** - Jewish accusers brought charges against him which were religious, that focused on the fact that Paul said that Jesus was alive. **25:18-19**

Festus said when the Jews started making their allegations it was not based on anything he expected. It was not based on any crime against the state, it was all religious stuff. Festus says this man has not done one thing against Caesar or Rome.

Now Festus really picked up on the heart of the issue right here. The whole point was that Paul was asserting that Jesus Christ was alive and he also was asserting that the only way to having a relationship with God was by faith alone in Christ alone.

**Chronological Reality #6** - Festus did not know how to investigate so he asked Paul if he would go to Jerusalem for trial. **25:20**

Festus said I was at a loss as to what to do. How do you track down Jesus when He has ascended into heaven and you have no connection to heaven? This does raise a good question. How do you prove things when you weren't there yourself? You must rely on witnesses.

**Chronological Reality #7** - Paul appealed his case to Caesar in Rome so I am holding him in custody until I send him. **25:21**

The Greek word "Emperor" (Σεβαστου) is actually one that refers to someone revered in a worshipful way (Smith, p. 404). Someone in this position had honor at a sacred level. Now here is the crux of it; God is going to send Paul to Rome and here is the way he did it. He will get an all expense paid trip to Rome as a prisoner.

**FACT #9** – Herod Agrippa wants to hear Paul himself. **25:22**

The verb "I would like to hear" is imperfect tense indicating that Herod had wanted to hear Paul for a long time. Paul's reputation had spread literally all over the world.

What was his reputation? This guy goes around the world teaching any sinner that if he or she will believe on Jesus Christ he may be saved forever from his/her sin.

Now there is coming a court date for every one of us. That court date will be the day we face the eternal God. We will all have our day in court. The issue at stake will be our sin. It will be proved by the Divine prosecution, who has kept the books that we have all sinned and we are guilty. To get into heaven we need a righteousness we do not have. That righteousness must be given to us and it will be the moment we believe on Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ died for our sins to give us the righteousness necessary to go to heaven. His resurrection proves He can do it. If you will believe on Him you will be saved. If you refuse to believe on Him you will be condemned forever the moment you step into the eternal court.