

Acts 25:1-8

"The Unrelenting Agenda Of The Enemy"

Bound by Felix. For 2 years! That's how Ch 24 leaves Paul the apostle. Vs 27 reads, "But after 2 yrs, Porcius Festus succeeded Felix, & Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul *bound*." If you're anything like me, when we read that (initially) it's almost like a monotone statement of fact. Simple information to digest. We're like, "Ok, so that's what happened."

But ladies & gentlemen, we do well to occasionally rewind our emotionally desensitized state & remind ourselves, this represents the mistreating/mismanaging of a man's life! Imagine someone simply having a vendetta, a grudge against you, so you're arrested. Perhaps you're thinking, "Hey, this is certainly jacked up, but at least I'll be exonerated/vindicated in court. But when you have your day in court, far from being vindicated; not only are you *not* exonerated, you're left there for 2 more yrs as a political pawn just because the judge is wanting to do your accusers a favor... That's where Paul's at!

& This is the (I'm going to go out on a limb here, you're free to saw it off behind me) greatest church planting, gospel preaching, evangelizing man to ever walk the face of the earth outside of Christ Himself! & He's seemingly left to rot in *prison*... If you're like me, perhaps initially you're left to think, "What a waste! This guy could be out planting churches, making disciples, touching hearts, changing lives!"

& Guess what, Paul knew that we'd be prone to think that way. & A couple yrs beyond even where he's at now he addressed that mentality in his 2nd letter to Timothy where he writes, "*Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained.*"¹ "Hey, I may seemingly be stuck, God's word is not stuck, the word continues to move forward & minister in ways & in places that otherwise it wouldn't have." He told the Philippians, "*But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.*"² You & me, we might be saying, "God, why?" Those palace guards were saying, "God, thank You! For loving me enough to send your foremost apostle into this place so that I might hear the gospel, knowing that outside of this, I'd have never had the opportunity to hear, respond & receive." Perspective is an interesting thing, isn't it?

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [2 Ti 2:8-9]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Php 1:12-14]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Paul wasn't sent to jail. He was delivered to those guards (that was *his* perspective). He wasn't chained to *them*; they were chained to *him*! Imagine (if you will), allow the movie to roll out in your mind. 6 Roman guards a day, changing guard every 4 hours, chained to the apostle Paul... What do you think he talked to them about?

My suspicion is that he reasoned w/them about things like righteousness, self-control & the judgment to come. He shared w/them the gospel & they couldn't go anywhere if they wanted to! ☺ They couldn't hang up the phone, couldn't leave the room, they were literally chained to him! & They came to thank God for that...

Yes, Paul could've been ministering in Ephesus, or Philippi or Colossi, & we'd have never known what he said, how he disciplined them. But because he was incarcerated, he wrote them letters instead & we have Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Philemon... 2nd Timothy. Listen; this time in the apostle's life was far from wasted. God was very much moving & ministering through him in a way that would impact lives well beyond *his* generation & still be touching hearts & changing lives over 2,000 yrs later. So that now, you & me, we can say, "God, thank You so much that Paul was allowed to be placed in prison." We don't rejoice in his mistreatment, but we're reminded again how that God can take what the enemy meant for evil, to shut down the spread of the gospel in restricting Paul's movement in the world, & use it to *impact* the world throughout all time & history from his day forward through His written eternal word...

Now, flash forward & here you are. You're at work, you're in school, you're wherever you are & you feel "chained" to your desk, "enslaved" to the system. I want you to know that there are people there (like the palace guard) who need to hear the gospel of J.C. & God has allowed *you* to be *in* that place *at* this time that they might hear & have the opportunity to respond to & receive the message you have to offer them. That Jesus died on the cross for their sins & that through faith, they can be forgiven & receive new life, *everlasting* life in Him.

This world is not your home, you're just passing through. Contrary to popular opinion creature comforts are not God's greatest concern for you. There are people slipping off this planet apart from J.C. & He wants to use our lives to reach them. That may find us in some otherwise unpleasant places... You are the light of the world! I'm so glad that someone gave the gospel to me, be that someone for those around you... wherever you may be, redeem the time, we don't have much of it. What is your life? It's even a vapor that appears for a little time & then vanishes away. Make the most of it, to the glory of J.C.

Vs 1-3

BTW, the words, “while they lay in ambush along the road to kill him” is what we refer to as a parenthetical phrase. Luke is letting you in on their side plan. They asked him to have Paul brought to Jerusalem to have him examined there. & Luke says, “But their plan was to ambush him along the way & kill him.” They didn’t say to Festus, “Bring him on up here & we’ll ambush him along the way.” Luke is telling you that through hindsight.

Now, Festus was a much better governor than Felix & in part that’s shown by how quickly he made his way up to Jerusalem after arriving in Caesarea. He’d only been in town 3 days when he determined that he needed to get up to the most important city in his region.

Let’s not forget that things were heating up between the Jews & Rome at this point & in reality that’s why Felix was taken from the office. So Festus is quick to head to Jerusalem to try & smooth things over. He’s doing damage control.

But this is what kind of blows our minds. *He doesn’t waste any time in visiting Jerusalem & they didn’t waste any time in bringing up Paul’s case. Why does this intrigue us? Because it’s been 2 yrs! & Yet for all intents & purposes, it’s virtually the 1st order of business that they bring to his attention!* & Beyond even that, they know that he’ll be acquitted if he receives a fair trial so the truth of the matter is that they’re just trying to get him in transit so they can murder him before the trial could ever take place!

Now, you would think that after 2 yrs their anger would’ve subsided, that they’d perhaps have other, more pressing things on their minds, but that wasn’t the case at all... Let’s not forget that there is a satanic undercurrent to all of this. These are the same group of guys (albeit different men, same group) whom Jesus called sons of the devil! Why? Because they wanted to murder *Him!* He said, *“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning,”*³

Guys; let me remind you of something. Too often the world portrays the devil as the cool kid. He’s everyone’s buddy. He’s the one who has all the fun & God is the giant killjoy in the sky. But you need to know; that is a lie from the pit of hell. Satan is not your buddy, he has one mission, one primary agenda which is what? Jesus said it like this, *“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.”*⁴ He wants to ruin, to wreck & to destroy your life. He wants to end you.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 8:44]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 10:10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& If you're a child of God you can quantify that infinitely. It never changes. You may get distracted. He stays focused like a laser on his one objective.

2 yrs prior to this there was a group of men who made a vow not to eat or drink until they'd killed Paul (they failed). Now here we are 2 yrs later & they're still so angry, so embittered, still bearing such a grudge against the apostle that they're still plotting, planning his murder.

Listen, he didn't do anything wrong! Doesn't matter.

I have a word for somebody today. You've been bearing a grudge against someone. You're angry *with* them, embittered *toward* them & have been for some time, maybe yrs. Listen to me, it's time to let it go. It's eating you up inside, you think about it, you lie awake at night & it runs through your head.

It's time to release that wound, that hurt, that pain, that grief over to the Lord. I'm not saying they were right; you were wrong. Maybe you're exactly right. However, the net effect of holding on to that resentment isn't harming *them* but it's killing *you*. Listen, unforgiveness really doesn't hurt the person you have something against. But it *imprisons* you, it'll wreck you.

I'm gonna take you & turn over to **Matt 18**. We discover there a parable that Jesus taught on the imperative nature of forgiveness. We find our focus beginning in Vs 21 (read thru 35).

You get the idea don't you? You & me, we realized how we had violated God, His righteousness, His holiness, we'd sinned against Him in such a way that we could never repay (an insurmountable debt). So we fell on our proverbial (or perhaps literal) faces *before* Him, we cried out that we might receive mercy & compassion *from* Him & He forgave us all... Then we come across someone who has offended us; & it's legit, but small potatoes compared to the way we'd offended God. But we *bind* them over it, we *grind* them over it & we make them pay for every ounce of hurt they've caused...

But God looks on that & it's like, "Wait, correct Me if I'm wrong, but didn't *I* forgive *you* when you'd offended *Me*? Why then are you so hard hearted so as to not forgive that person even though they've offended, wounded, or somehow hurt *you*?"

The practical point is obvious, if God has forgiven us, He anticipates that we in turn will forgive others. "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment."⁵ Blessed are the merciful... for they shall receive mercy.

⁵ The New King James Version. (1982). (Jas 2:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Far from letting things go; this root of bitterness w/in Paul's enemies has only grown deeper in the soil of their hearts over these last couple of years. I've discovered (perhaps you have as well) that a root of bitterness, if left unchecked can grow into a full-blown forest... That's why the author of Hebrews says... *"Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;"*⁶

There are people who have been angry w/me, left the church yrs ago (& in some cases I genuinely don't even know why) but they're bitter toward me, feel hurt by me & they hold on to that... it's not worth it. Listen, if I've hurt you in anyway, (& I'm not talking about confronting you over sin for which you've refused to repent. I won't apologize for the appeal of the word of God), but if I've hurt you, I'm sorry. I don't want to be that person in your life.

& Listen, I have to practice what I preach. When I hold on to something, it doesn't hurt anyone but me. But people, even if you're justified in *feeling* hurt, it doesn't in anyway help you emotionally, mentally & spiritually to hang onto & nurture that hurt. Cast your cares upon Him, for He cares for you. Turn it over to God, be free from the prison of unforgiveness & move forward from that.

So, here they are. Religious leaders, religious men, plotting, planning to murder a man. Can I just state the obvious here? If your religion somehow makes you a liar & a murderer, there's something radically wrong w/your religion! & You're *certainly* not connected to J.C. be that the case! Because Jesus is truth, He's love & He's life. Not a liar & a murderer, we've already discovered who the author of those things is.

But as I mentioned, the *hatred* of the devil toward the believer *never* diminishes, never waivers, lessens or lightens up. Just the other day I had someone say to me, "Hey, you know, (I'm paraphrasing), I've just come to a place where I've started tithing. & It feels so good to render that obedience to the Lord, yet I've noticed that my life has been under fire, under stress, things going wrong around me, ever since. How does that add up? Me doing right, but things going wrong?"

It's called spiritual warfare, you've ramped up your obedience, the enemy ramps up his resistance, his attack, but resist the devil (the bible says) & he will flee. Greater is He who is in you, than he who is in the world (these are precious promises of the word of God).

Vs 4-5

We don't know if he'd reviewed the records Felix had left, if he was somehow aware of their plan... Ultimately (once again) it was God's providential care & protection of Paul. He said, "I'm willing to hear you, but not here, not now, you'll need to come to Caesarea."

Vs 6-8

Same ol' song & dance, right? Complaints apart from evidence, empty allegations & accusations, no proof to back them up. 2 Things here & we'll be done.

Here are the Jews, accusing Paul before Festus, trying to convince him of something that will stick, something that will bring forth the sentence of death. A verdict of guilty!

Now; we've already shined a *little* light on Satan's agenda, yes? To steal, to kill & to destroy. Here's a little *more* of his handy work; accusations, allegations leading to condemnation. Rev 12:10 refers to him as the "accuser of the brethren" who "accuses them day & night before God."

It's not uncommon at all (in the bible) to find followers of God being *falsely* accused. Satan is a liar from the beginning. But here's the good news, he may bring forth accusation. However, the bible assures us (Rom) that there is therefore now *no condemnation* to those who are in Christ Jesus ☺. Is that you?

Paul went on to say, "*Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.*"⁷ You have a defense attorney in Christ Jesus that is "out of this world". ☺ He's never lost a case, you're in good hands.

Final thought. Back in Vs 6 we find Festus sitting on the "judgment seat". In the Greek it's the word "Bema". The Bema seat, the place where the one in authority over you is seated & his verdict is handed down.

It's the same word that Paul used to describe the judgment seat of Christ before which the believer will stand. It's found in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians & it says this, "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men;*"⁸

Now; let me ease your worries. Your *salvation* was settled at the cross of J.C. If you believe in the Lord J.C. (not academically, but in truth from the heart) you are saved.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ro 8:33-35]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [2 Co 5:10-11]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

When you stand before Jesus it won't be to ascertain whether or not you're granted access to heaven. That's settled. He who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God *in Him*.

But the way you've led your life *in Him*... Have you truly served Him, have I taken the time to cultivate my relationship *with Him*? Am I leading life set apart to Him? Or have I led a carnal life, not invested in the kingdom of God but just lived for the things of this world? Rom 2:16 tells us that God will judge the *secrets* of men by J.C. ... Think about that. **Those things that no one else knows, God knows. Man may look at the outward appearance, but God searches the heart. & We'll all stand before J.C. & be rewarded accordingly. Sounds a little terrifying doesn't it? That's why Paul said, "We persuade men."**

Let's not play games w/God, let's lead lives set apart *to Him*, ready to be used *by Him*, that honor Him in the secret place.

I'm so glad that we serve a God who is full of grace & compassion, because I need His grace & His mercy. & If you've not received J.C. I urge you to do so today, right here, right now. It's not by coincidence you're hearing these words & this invitation. You know you've sinned, come before the Lord, call upon the Lord & you'll be saved.

Just say to Him, "Lord, I'm calling upon You now. Forgive me, save me, create in me a clean heart & renew a right spirit w/in me. Fill me w/Your Spirit & strengthen me to live for You from this day forward." If you prayed that prayer, God bless you, & welcome to the family of God.

Prayer Points:

Father, thank You for the ready reminder today of the unrelenting agenda of the enemy. But that this world is not our home. God strengthen us, increase our faith. May we honor You in the secret place & may You be glorified in our lives. & Father, even as You've forgiven us, may we in turn forgive others...