**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

  **Witnessing on Trial**

 ***Acts 25***

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May 23rd In the Year of Our Lord

(Anno Domini A.D.) 2021

(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted.)

We see the Apostle Paul, who was called by the Resurrected Lord on the road to Damascus, is presented another opportunity to witness the Gospel. Who is the audience? Who are the main characters in these live events that will have eternal ramifications?

**Main Characters:**

**Paul** – Apostle of Christ, prisoner of Rome, charged by Temple Priests

**Antonius Felix** – Governor of Roman Province over Jerusalem (52-59 A.D.). Headquarters in Caesarea.

**Porcius Festus** – replaced Felix as Roman Governor (59 – 62 A.D.)

**Chief Priests and Jews from Jerusalem** – brought religious charges against Paul

**King Agrippa II and Bernice – 59 – 71 Ended during Jewish revolt.**

Marcus Julius Agrippa / 8th and last ruler from the Herodian dynasty

Rome’s puppet King over the Jews

His father, Agrippa I, is the "King Herod" who killed James and imprisoned Peter (Acts 12:1–3). In Acts 12:23, an angel of God struck him, and he fell dead and was eaten by worms.

Had power to appoint the Temple High Priest

Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian, notes that it was viewed that Agrippa II lived in an incestuous relationship with his sister, Bernice.

Present at Paul’s trial with Gov. Festus in about 59/60 A.D.

Reviewing the main characters, we see that Paul has an opportunity to witness to Jews and Romans who were opposed to the Gospel due to religious or political beliefs. However, the Romans viewed Paul with curious eyes and could not find a Roman law to charge him. But the Jews had their own religious law that the Romans did not enforce. The Romans desired to keep their Jewish vassals pacified to a certain extent and tolerated their religious customs. We see this at the trial of Jesus exemplified with Pilate washing his hands. Therefore, Paul was held in custody pending inquiries by successive Roman rulers who, to some degree, wanted to pacify the Jews in order to keep the peace. The Romans could, and did, crush rebellion if needed. The Roman governors sought a balance between total dictatorship and pacification to gain cooperation.

 With Paul’s arrest in chapter 21, we see how the Roman and Jewish authorities work. Here in Acts 25, there is a focus on the relationship between Festus, the Roman Governor, and the King of the Jews, Agrippa II. Paul, being a Roman citizen and a Jewish Pharisee, had knowledge of both legal systems.

**Biblical Text**

**Acts 24:27** But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned.

**Festus Arrives as New Governor**

 **Hears Charges Against Paul by Temple Priest**

**Acts 25:1** Festus then, having arrived in the province, three days later went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea.

 2 And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul, and they were urging him,

 3 requesting a concession against Paul, that he might have him brought to Jerusalem (at the same time, setting an ambush to kill him on the way).

 4 Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly.

 5 "Therefore," he said,

"let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him."

 6 After he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them, he went down to Caesarea, and on the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought.

**Tribunal Seat**: Official Chair of presiding magistrate. Best illustrated when a judge enters a courtroom and the court officer says, “All Rise”. Everyone rises until the judge takes his seat overseeing the court.

**Paul’s Defense**

 7 After Paul arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove,

 8 while Paul said in his own defense,

"I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar."

 9 But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said,

 "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?"

 10 But Paul said,

"I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried.

 I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know.

 11 "If, then, I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death**, I do not refuse to die**; but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. **I appeal to Caesar."**

**Governor Festus Befuddled**

 12 Then when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered,

"You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go."

By Paul claiming Roman citizen’s right of appeal to Caesar, he gave Governor Festus a political pass on judging him. Festus could not find a Roman law to judge Paul the “Roman citizen”. At the same time, Festus could use Paul’s citizen right of appeal to Caesar to put-off the Jews. Festus was not about to allow the Jews to execute a Roman Citizen without a conviction under Roman law.

**What We Learn**

 Here in chapter 25, Paul does not present the Gospel. The questioning that Paul undergoes highlights the Roman legal system and the persistence of the Jews to get him released to them for execution. The Roman legal system is revealed.

A Roman citizen is entitled to a trial and to have their accusers present to make charges and present evidence.

The defendant can represent their case and present their evidence and question the evidence of their accusers.

There are formal court proceedings with a state appointed judge.

There is a difference drawn between religious laws and secular laws.

There is an appeals process.

**King Agrippa and Bernice**

 13 Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and paid their respects to Festus.

 14 While they were spending many days there, **Festus laid Paul's case** before the king, saying,

 "**There is a man** who was left as a prisoner by Felix;

 15 and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him.

 16 "I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges.

 17 "So after they had assembled here, I did not delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and **ordered the man** to be brought before me.

 18 "When the accusers stood up, they began bringing **charges** against **him** **not of such crimes as I was expecting,**

 19 but they simply had some points of disagreement with **him** about their own religion and about a dead man, Jesus, **whom Paul** asserted to be alive.

 20 "Being at a loss how to investigate such matters, I asked whether **he** was willing to go to Jerusalem and there stand trial on these matters.

 21 "But when **Paul** appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar."

 22 **Then Agrippa said to Festus,**

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

 23 So, on the next day when Agrippa came together with Bernice amid great pomp, and entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in.

 24 **Festus said**,

"King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you see this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer.

 25 "But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him.

 26 **"Yet I have nothing definite about him to write** to my lord. Therefore, I have brought him before you all and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the investigation has taken place, **I may have something to write.**

 27 "For it seems **absurd** to me in sending a prisoner, **not to indicate** also the charges against him."

**Religious Trial**

We see that the Jews seek to prosecute Paul on religious grounds. The Romans did not have any legal history of prosecuting a person using the Jewish religion. Again, we see the Romans challenged at Jesus’ trial.

Being a missionary-believer in God has always drawn opposition. History chronicles repeated persecutions of Believers. Our time is not any different. We have mentioned organizations like “Voice of the Martyrs” previously. They can be found online at <https://www.persecution.com/> .

Through their online witness, we can see that missionaries and believers all over the world are killed and persecuted for their faith. We still enjoy a relatively free religious climate here in America. We need to take full advantage of our freedoms. From reviewing Paul’s trials, we can make application to ourselves. The big question – is our faith mature enough to be tested like Paul’s? Many have the thought that it is up to the professional preachers and teachers to engage the lost society surrounding us, to stand-up to persecution. However, many of us see on the future horizon the need for more saints to engage the lost world in a more proactive way. My view is that “we all” must prepare to be a better witness - or future generations of Christians will be on trial for their property and life. I remind all, once again, the words of George Washington in his 1796 Farewell address -

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, **religion and morality are indispensable supports**. […] The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. (27.1, 3)

. . . Let it simply be asked: **Where is the security** for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of **religious obligation desert the oaths** which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with **caution** indulge the supposition **that morality can be maintained without religion**. (27.5-6)

 What would you do if you were in Paul’s shoes?

 Have you prepared yourself to answer questions about Jesus?

 Would you need more time to prepare a defense?

 Would you need assistance at your trial?

 Would you feel alone?

 Who is always with you through trials and tribulations?

 When is the time to prepare for your witness of the Gospel?

Do you see that the secular culture in which we live places people of faith and the Gospel on trial all the time?

 I have said in the past that the biggest threat to God and His people are two competing religions: The H.A.S. community and Islam. (H.A.S. – Humanism, Atheism, Secularism). I see that the vast majority of Christians are not equipped to respond to the questions of either group. There are two main reasons for this failure.

1. Church leader’s inability and failure to teach basic/foundational understandings.
2. Misplaced allegiance of time and resources for the average Believer. Our American society has generated a culture of entitlements. There are the welfare entitlement programs, and there is the entitlement of entertainment. We see this exemplified in young people the most. If learning is not fun then they are not interested.

 Regarding Church leaders, when they attempt to teach their faith, they are hard-pressed to present God and His Word outside of their specific traditions. Therefore, church members are charged with two variables to learn; the traditions of the denomination with which they are aligned and basic Biblical truths. This often brings confusion to those they attempt to teach.

Church leaders and those they teach are focused on the reasons to become a member of their group. Oftentimes, these basic reasons for membership do not answer deeper questions about faith. It is true that Christ calls people to have a childlike faith to be accepted by God. There are many passages of Scripture detailing this fact.

**Mark 10:13-15**

13 And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. 14 But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all."

Heartfelt, genuine faith does not require (by God) materialistic explanations. Anyone can see that Jesus’s teachings omits a lot of detail. Jesus also says that He performed miracles for those of little faith.

**Matthew 17:20** And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.

**John 4:46-54** 46 Therefore He came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a royal official whose son was sick at Capernaum.

 47 When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and was imploring Him to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death.

 48 So Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe."

 49 The royal official said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

 50 Jesus said to him, "Go; your son lives." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off.

 51 As he was now going down, his slaves met him, saying that his son was living.

 52 So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. Then they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him."

 53 So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives"; and he himself believed and his whole household.

 54 This is again a second sign that Jesus performed when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.

**Matthew 17:14-20**

14 When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying,

15 "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water.

16 "I brought him to Your disciples, **and they could not cure him."**

 17 And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me."

 18 And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once.

 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?"

 20 And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.

**Matthew 18:1** At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

 2 And He called a child to Himself and set him before them,

 3 and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

 4 "Whoever then **humbles himself** as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 "And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me;

 We can see that at times, Jesus presented witnessing simplistically. Jesus also answered many questions throughout His ministry time, exampled in the encounter with Nicodemus in John 3. The apostle Paul was very detailed in his teaching about Jesus, the Resurrection and justification by faith (Romans 4) – pointing to many Old Testament passages of Scripture regarding Abraham (Genesis 12 and following). The New Testament book of Hebrews is very technical in explaining the intent of the Law of Moses and the purpose of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We can see God’s intent in witnessing is to approach people with a simple message of faith and be ready for others who seek a more technical explanation.

In Nabeel Quareshi’s testimony and talks, he emphasizes how easy it was to defeat Christians who witnessed to him. Nabeel, “The Muslim”, said he grew-up in America and found that the people he knew that were Christian, and went to church, seldom reached-out to him in an evangelistic way. He said, when someone did, he simply asked them a few questions about the validity of the Bible and the life of Jesus that they could not answer. He followed by quotes from the Quran that said Jesus was not crucified and, therefore, there was not any resurrection. He said that throughout his twelve years of school, he was confident in being a Muslim and didn’t have any challenge to his faith until he met David Wood in college. David was a Christian who surrendered to the Lord in prison. David had been an atheist. When Nabeel saw David reading the Bible, he told him that it was not reliable and was inaccurate. David deferred to Nabeel to make his case, at which time Nabeel didn’t have any facts just a belief. David then told him what many of us know - that we now have over 5,500 Greek New Testament manuscripts (whole or in part) from the first few centuries giving us an accurate New Testament. Through four years of David’s witnessing to Nabeel, he surrendered to the Lord.

See link to one of Nabeel’s talks.

What About Other Religions? | Nabeel Quareshi" on YouTube

<https://youtu.be/qzByh4ix_K4>

 Nabeel died of cancer in 2017. Before Nabeel died, he published a number of books and was a sought-after international speaker for God.

Seeking Allah Finding Jesus, No God But One and Answering Jihad

 The great commission (Matthew 28) challenges all of us to witness God in His Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are not all gifted the same, and we do not all have the same opportunities. What we do have in common is an opportunity, and we must look for those opportunities when they become apparent. We also are all charged with preparing ourselves through prayer and the study of God’s Word. Nothing happens overnight. America did not arrive at the cultural malaise currently in vogue last year.

 Next week, we will examine the objections voiced the most in opposition to God and His Gospel Message. The goal is to prepare you to have a ready response to a fallen world in desperate need of the TRUTH.

 Paul’s trial continues through us. **AMEN**