LESSON 25:
PAUL IN PRISON, PART 4 (ACTS 25:13-26:32)

Paul had been left imprisoned for two years by Governor Felix. After Felix was replaced by Festus as governor, the Jews in Jerusalem brought Paul's case to Festus's attention. This resulted in Paul standing trial before Festus and appealing his case to Caesar.

PAUL'S CASE IS BROUGHT BEFORE AGRIPPA (ACTS 25:13-27)

25:13. King Agrippa visited Festus in Caesarea to show respect to the new governor. He (Agrippa II) was the son of Agrippa I (Acts 12), the great-grandson of Herod the Great (Matthew 2), and the great-nephew of Herod Antipas (Matthew 14:1-12; Luke 23:6-12). He held limited authority over Jewish territories north of Judea. He was in an incestuous marriage with his sister, Bernice. His younger sister, Drusilla, was married to former governor Felix (Acts 24:24).

25:14-22. Festus used Agrippa's familiarity with Jewish laws and customs to present Paul's case to him. He explained how the Jews wanted Paul condemned; but that he refused to condemn someone without a trial. However, he explained that the Jews brought no real charge of wrongdoing against Paul, only disagreements about their religion and a dead Man named Jesus who Paul claimed to be alive. Festus said he was at a loss about what to do. He wanted to do the Jews a favor and send Paul to Jerusalem, but Paul appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:9). After hearing this, arrangements were made for Agrippa to hear from Paul directly.

25:23-27. The following day, Agrippa and Bernice entered the judgment hall with great pageantry and Festus ordered Paul to be brought in. Festus summarized the reason for the hearing before all who gathered (including military commanders and prominent men of the city). He said that the entire Jewish community wanted Paul to be put to death. However, he had found no evidence of Paul deserving death. Festus's desire, therefore, was for Agrippa's help in determining what should be written to the emperor concerning the charges (since it was unreasonable to send a prisoner without stating the charges against him).

PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE AGRIPPA (ACTS 26:1-23)

26:1-3. After King Agrippa gave Paul permission to speak, he expressed his gratitude for the opportunity and began to make his defense. Paul was especially grateful for this opportunity because of Agrippa's grasp of the Jewish customs and controversies (v. 26). Note that Paul also desired to preach Jesus to Agrippa (vv. 27-29). Paul then asked for a patient hearing.

26:4-11. Rather than addressing the specific accusations made against him, Paul spoke of his past deep convictions in Judaism. The Jews who had known him knew (if they were willing to testify) that he lived as a Pharisee (the strictest sect of Judaism). But, Paul said he now stood trial because of his belief in what God had promised and the Israelites had hoped for concerning the Seed of Abraham and Messiah. At the core of Paul's hope and preaching was the resurrection of the dead that centered around Jesus's resurrection (Psalm 16:10), which the Jews denied. Therefore, Paul challenged why it is too incredible to believe that God (who created the world) raises the dead. Paul then spoke of his prior deep convictions that he must work many things in opposition to the things done in the name of Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2). He did this in Jerusalem by imprisoning many of the saints through the authority of the chief priests and casting his vote in some way to execute them (whether voicing support unofficially or having an official role). Furthermore, he had worked in all the synagogues to try to make the Christians blaspheme the name of Christ and denounce their faith. Paul's hostility then caused him to pursue Christians outside the local region. In this, Paul's previous zeal and hostility against Christians may have even surpassed the hostility shown by the Herod's!

26:12-23. As Paul (then Saul) was on his way to harm Christians, he encountered Jesus (also Acts 9 and 22). A bright light shone around him and Jesus confronted Saul for persecuting Him and kicking against the goads (e.g. an ox goad; a reference to stubborn resistance). Jesus identified Himself as the One Saul was persecuting and how Paul would be used as a servant and witness to what he had now seen (the resurrected Messiah) and would see (Acts 18:9-10; 22:17-19; 23:11). Jesus would rescue Paul from both the Jews (his people) and the Gentiles as he would go about accomplishing this mission (Acts 9:23-25; 18:9-10; 2 Timothy 3:10-11). Paul would be used to open the eyes of those he preached to (through enlightenment and instruction), turn them from the darkness of sin and ignorance to the light of God's truth, help them go from being under Satan's power and rule to God's, and help them find the forgiveness of their sins through Christ and share in the inheritance experienced by those who

are set apart (sanctified) from sin by faith in Jesus! Paul obeyed what the Lord had commanded by preaching in Damascus (Acts 9:19-25), in Jerusalem and Judea (Acts 9:26-30), and to the Gentiles (Acts 13-21). He preached that people must repent and turn to God, and do works that fit with repentance (Luke 3:8-14). He explains that doing these things is why the Jews seized him in the temple and tried to murder him. It was only by God's help (through God's strength and providence, e.g. Acts 23:12-35) that Paul continued having the opportunity to testify of Christ to both the great and small (the powerful and lowly; the wealthy and poor). He spoke as Moses and the prophets had spoken – that the Messiah would suffer and would be the first to rise from the dead (never to die again) and proclaim light to both the Jews and Gentiles!

RESPONSE TO PAUL (ACTS 26:24-32)

26:24-29. Festus interrupted Paul's defense by loudly claiming that he was out of his mind and had become insane through too much learning (lost touch with reality). However, Paul said he was speaking truthful and rational words that reflected good judgment. He turned his attention to Agrippa and said that Agrippa knew about these matters (e.g. Old Testament prophecies, Jesus's death, claims of Jesus's resurrection), as these things had not been done in an isolated corner. So, Paul asked if Agrippa believed the prophets, indicating he knew Agrippa did believe (e.g. could see how Jesus fulfilled them). But Agrippa indicated he was not going to be persuaded to become a Christian with such little effort (or time). Paul wished Agrippa and everyone who heard him would be persuaded to become a follower of Christ as he was, except for the chains he experienced as a prisoner.

26:30-32. After the hearing, Agrippa, Festus, Bernice, and the others got up and discussed the case. They concluded Paul had done nothing worthy of death or imprisonment (Acts 23:29; 24:27; 25:18-19, 25). Agrippa even concluded that Paul could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar (as the case now belonged to Caesar).

CONCLUSION

Agrippa could now help Festus craft the letter explaining the reason Paul was being sent to Caesar. Perhaps they would declare Paul's innocence but blame Paul's appeal as the reason for him being sent. Next, Paul would need to be transported to Caesar in Rome.

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

Why did Festus share Paul's case with King Agrippa?

Why was Paul grateful for the opportunity to speak before Agrippa?

Why did Paul say he was on trial?

How did Paul summarize his life prior to becoming a Christian?

Why did Paul's life change?

How did Jesus plan to use Paul?

How did Agrippa respond to the gospel?

What did Festus and Agrippa conclude about Paul's case?

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