

Paul's Trial Before Festus and Agrippa

(Acts 25-26)

Pre-Session Warm Up

[Teacher, before class, write "THAT'S NOT ____ ____ ____ ____!" (Fair) on the board.]

As you came in this morning and saw this phrase on the board did you guess what word goes in the blanks? How many of you have ever said, "*That's not fair*"? What are some examples that cause us to say that? [Allow responses.]

As we have been studying the Book of Acts, can you think of any examples of people being treated unfairly? (Stephen, persecuted believers, imprisoned apostles, Paul being stoned, beaten, arrested, etc.)

Because believers have the Holy Spirit living inside their hearts, we have the power to respond with courage and perseverance when we are treated unfairly.

Let's review the last few lessons we've had about Paul's arrest in Jerusalem:

- What happened to Paul when he arrived in Jerusalem after his 3rd missionary journey? (He was arrested)
- How did he respond to his arrest? (He shared the Good News with the crowd.)
- How did God protect Paul when over 40 Jews made a vow to kill him? (The commander sent him to Caesarea with 470 soldiers to protect him)

The commander sent Paul to governor Felix. Felix didn't like it when Paul told him about Jesus, so he left Paul in prison. Besides, Felix was hoping Paul would pay him some money to let him go free. And after two whole years, Paul was still sitting in jail. That is a long time to be in prison for not doing anything wrong, isn't it?

Was Paul being treated fairly? (No!)

If you were Paul, how do you think you would respond to being unfairly imprisoned?

Let's look at our Bible verse for today and see how we should respond when unfair things happen to us.

Today we're going to find out how the Holy Spirit enabled Paul to be still and wait patiently for the Lord.

Opening Prayer

Father, only by the power of the Holy Spirit can we choose to be patient when we face unfair or difficult situations. But we thank You that You have given us Your Holy Spirit who can give us peace in our hearts and hope for the future. Give us good listening ears this morning so that we do not miss the important lessons you want to teach us. In Jesus Name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Be still in the presence of the LORD, and wait patiently for him to act. Don't worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes. (Psalms 37:7)

Lesson

Now there is a new governor that replaced Felix, named Festus.

Acts 25:1-2

Three days after Festus arrived in Caesarea to take over his new responsibilities, he left for Jerusalem, (2) where the leading priests and other Jewish leaders met with him and made their accusations against Paul.

Three days after he became governor, Festus traveled to Jerusalem. There the Jewish religious leaders met with him and begged him bring Paul to Jerusalem for trial.

Acts 25:3-5

They asked Festus as a favor to transfer Paul to Jerusalem (planning to ambush and kill him on the way). (4) But Festus replied that Paul

was at Caesarea and he himself would be returning there soon. (5) So he said, "Those of you in authority can return with me. If Paul has done anything wrong, you can make your accusations."

The unbelieving Jews still had Paul on their minds even after two years had passed. They were still plotting to kill Paul.

Festus told them if they wanted to accuse Paul of committing a crime, they needed to travel with him back to Caesarea where he would have another trial to prove whether Paul had done anything wrong.

Acts 25:6-7

About eight or ten days later Festus returned to Caesarea, and on the following day he took his seat in court and ordered that Paul be brought in. (7) When Paul arrived, the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem gathered around and made many serious accusations they couldn't prove.

Once again Paul is put on trial and once again, he is surrounded by unbelieving Jews who are determined to kill him. They surround him and accuse him of serious crimes, but they have no witnesses to prove that he actually did those things.

Acts 25:8

Paul denied the charges. "I am not guilty of any crime against the Jewish laws or the Temple or the Roman government," he said.

Paul knew that his conscience was clear before God and man. Festus was getting nowhere with this trial. He knew that Paul had not committed any crime that he could be punished for. But he wanted to please the unbelieving Jews and do them a favor, so he thought Paul might like to travel to Jerusalem and have another trial there.

Acts 25:9

Then Festus, wanting to please the Jews, asked him, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there?"

The Holy Spirit gave Paul wisdom and the ability to remember God's words to him. God had given Paul specific details about where he would testify and share the Good News. [Flip back to chapter 23...]

Acts 23:11

*That night the Lord appeared to Paul and said, "Be encouraged, Paul. Just as you have been a witness to me here in Jerusalem, **you must preach the Good News in Rome** as well."*

Paul knew God's plan for him was to go to Rome. So, Paul knew it was not God's will for him to go back to Jerusalem since he had already had a court hearing there two years earlier.

The Holy Spirit gave Paul the wisdom and boldness to tell Festus that he wanted to go to the highest authority. He asked to stand before Caesar, the supreme ruler of the Roman Empire who lived in Rome.

Acts 25:10-11

But Paul replied, "No! This is the official Roman court, so I ought to be tried right here. You know very well I am not guilty of harming the Jews. (11) If I have done something worthy of death, I don't refuse to die. But if I am innocent, no one has a right to turn me over to these men to kill me. I appeal to Caesar!"

Paul knew the Jews were planning to ambush and kill him if he went to Jerusalem for another trial. And since there had already been two trials that failed to convict him, it was his right as a Roman citizen to have his case stand trial before Caesar. This was like you and me demanding to have our case tried by the supreme court in the United States of America.

Festus talked with his advisors.

Acts 25:12

Festus conferred with his advisers and then replied, "Very well! You have appealed to Caesar, and to Caesar you will go!"

It was God's plan all along for Paul to go to Rome. Nothing could stop God's plan!

A few days later, King Agrippa and his sister Bernice visited Festus. Festus talked with Agrippa about the situation with Paul.

Acts 25:14-15

During their stay of several days, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. "There is a prisoner here," he told him, "whose case was left for me by Felix. (15) When I was in Jerusalem, the leading priests and Jewish elders pressed charges against him and asked me to condemn him.

He explained that Paul had not been accused of any crimes that could be proven.

Acts 25:16-18

I pointed out to them that Roman law does not convict people without a trial. They must be given an opportunity to confront their accusers and defend themselves. (17) "When his accusers came here for the trial, I didn't delay. I called the case the very next day and ordered Paul brought in. (18) But the accusations made against him weren't any of the crimes I expected.

Festus told Agrippa that the real issue the Jews had with Paul was that he was teaching the people about a man named Jesus.

Acts 25:19-20

Instead, it was something about their religion and a dead man named Jesus, who Paul insists is alive. (20) I was at a loss to know how to investigate these things, so I asked him whether he would be willing to stand trial on these charges in Jerusalem.

Festus told Agrippa that Paul didn't want to go to Jerusalem for a trial, but asked to go to Caesar. This made King Agrippa interested in what Paul had to say.

Acts 25:23-24

So the next day Agrippa and Bernice arrived at the auditorium with great pomp, accompanied by military officers and prominent men of the city. Festus ordered that Paul be brought in. (24) Then Festus said, "King Agrippa and all who are here, this is the man whose death is demanded by all the Jews, both here and in Jerusalem.

Governor Festus said he needed advice from King Agrippa.

Acts 25:25-27

But in my opinion he has done nothing deserving death. However, since he appealed his case to the emperor, I have decided to send him to Rome. (26) "But what shall I write the emperor? For there is no clear charge against him. So I have brought him before all of you, and especially you, King Agrippa, so that after we examine him, I might have something to write. (27) For it makes no sense to send a prisoner to the emperor without specifying the charges against him!"

Festus was required to write a letter to the emperor that would explain why he was sending Paul to him. Since there were no real charges against Paul, Festus didn't know what to write. So, he asked King Agrippa what to write in the letter; what crimes to list.

So far Paul has sat before Felix and Festus. Neither of these governors were able to convict Paul of any real crime. Now Paul has a hearing before King Agrippa.

The story of Paul before King Agrippa continues in chapter 26.

Rather than going through the whole chapter verse by verse, let me tell you about it and jump to the most important verse.

The King allowed Paul to speak freely before him. Paul began by telling his whole story, how he was brought up as a devout Jew, trained to be a Pharisee and like many Jews, was against the teachings of Jesus. In fact, he had been zealously hunting down Christians and bringing them to jail for punishment.

Then one day Paul was on his way to Damascus in Syria to hunt down and arrest Christians when suddenly he met the Lord Jesus.

Acts 26:12-15

“One day I was on such a mission to Damascus, armed with the authority and commission of the leading priests. (13) About noon, Your Majesty, as I was on the road, a light from heaven brighter than the sun shone down on me and my companions. (14) We all fell down, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is useless for you to fight against my will.’ (15) “Who are you, lord?’ I asked. “And the Lord replied, ‘I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting.

Paul was thrown off his horse and blinded by a great light and then he heard a voice speaking to him.

Acts 26:16-18

*Now get to your feet! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and witness. Tell people that you have seen me, and tell them what I will show you in the future. (17) And I will rescue you from both your own people and the Gentiles. Yes, **I am sending you to the Gentiles** (18) **to open their eyes**, so they may **turn from darkness to light** and **from the power of Satan to God**. Then they will **receive forgiveness for their sins** and be **given a place among God’s people**, who are set apart by faith in me.’*

What did God want Paul to do? [Let the student discover the text.]

- Vs 17, **I am sending you to the Gentiles**—God wanted the message about Jesus to go to both the Jews and the Gentiles, or non-Jews. God wants everyone in the whole world to know Jesus.
- Vs 18, **open their eyes**—God wanted Paul to help people to know and understand the spiritual truth about Jesus.
- Vs 18, **turn from darkness to light**—God wanted people to turn *from the power of Satan to God*.
- Vs 18, **receive forgiveness for their sins**—
- Vs 18, **given a place among God’s people**—

God’s message to all people is the same whether they are Jews or Gentiles. His heart’s desire that all people everywhere receive the forgiveness of sins so that they might have eternal life with Him in heaven.

How do we receive eternal life? By faith in what Jesus did for us on the cross. You must trust that when Jesus was crucified on the cross, that satisfied the Father’s angry wrath against your sin. Jesus is the answer to your sin problem. There is no other way to the Father.

So, here we leave Paul for this week. Next week he starts his journey to Rome. He has been treated unfairly. He had three phony trials; no charges could stick against him. Meanwhile, he sat in jail waiting to go to Rome which he knows is God’s will for his life.

If you and I were in Paul’s place we would probably be angry and frustrated. But Paul waits patiently on the Lord. He does not fret over his unfair treatment.

If you are a believer, the Holy Spirit can enable you to be patient and trust the Lord when you are facing difficulties. Whether it is being treated unfairly or waiting for God to answer your prayer about some other difficulty, you can be still and trust God during that time.

If you have not yet put your trust in Jesus, you won’t have the power of the Holy Spirit to help you when you face difficult situations.

God loves you and has sent His Son Jesus to die for your sins. He was buried and rose again the third day. Because Jesus died in your place you can have a right relationship with God by trusting in Jesus.

Once you believe in the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes and lives in your heart. With the Holy Spirit living in your heart, you will have the power to live a life that pleases God and He will give you peace when you are facing difficulties.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, thank You that You have not left us to handle life alone in this world. You sent us the Holy Spirit who helps us, who guides us, and protects us. Help us to tune our spiritual ears into Your Voice so that we don't miss a single thing You want to tell us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

GAME CENTER

Use the following questions in a game or discussion.

1. What is the name of the governor who replaced Felix? (Vs 1. Festus)
2. How long was Paul in prison while Felix was governor? (2 years)
3. Why did the Jews want Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem? (Vs 3. They planned an ambush; they wanted to kill him.)
4. Who gave Paul the ability to be patient and trust the Lord as he sat in prison? (The Holy Spirit.)
5. Why weren't the Jews able to prove Paul had committed the crimes they were accusing him of? (Vs 8. They had no witnesses to prove that he actually did those things.)
6. Why didn't Paul want to go to Jerusalem? (Paul knew that God told him He would testify in Rome.)
7. Why did Paul request to go to Caesar? (Vs 11. Paul knew the Jews were planning to ambush and kill him if he went to Jerusalem for another trial. Because Paul was a Roman citizen it was his right to have his case heard by Caesar himself. This was like demanding to go to the supreme court in the USA.)
8. What made King Agrippa interested in talking with Paul? (Vs 18-19. Agrippa was interested when he heard that the accusations against Paul had something to do with religion and a dead man named Jesus.)
9. Why did Festus need King Agrippa's advice? (Vs 25. Festus had to write a letter to Caesar to state the charges against Paul. Since there were no legitimate charges, Festus didn't know what to write.)

