

85. Paul Appealed His Case to Caesar

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how the Holy Spirit convicts those who are not Christians of sin, righteousness and judgment. We saw that as Paul spoke to the Roman governor Felix that this conviction of the Holy Spirit caused Felix to fear but it did not cause him to repent of his sin of unbelief. Instead, Felix kept Paul as a prisoner, even though he knew that Paul was innocent, because he hoped that Paul would give him money to gain his freedom. He also left Paul as a prisoner when Festus became the next governor. In our topic today, we will see that Paul appealed his case to Caesar.

In Acts 25:1-5, we read, “Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him, asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem—while *they* lay in ambush along the road to kill him. But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going *there* shortly. ‘Therefore,’ he said, ‘let those who have authority among you go down with *me* and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him.’” Here, we see that one of the first things that Festus did after he became the new governor was go to Jerusalem for a visit to that city. In fact, he had only been in Caesarea three days.

The high priest and the chief men of the Jews immediately spoke to Festus and spoke against Paul. Here, we see that the Jewish religious leaders did not waste any time but immediately began to speak against Paul to the new governor. Then, they made a request of the governor. They asked the governor if he would send soldiers to Caesarea to bring Paul back to the city of Jerusalem. Their plan was to ambush the soldiers that would be bringing Paul to Jerusalem and kill Paul. Here, we see that this is a very different plot than the previous plot. In Acts 23:12, we read, “And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.” Here, we see that the plot two years earlier was led by some of the Jews, probably the Jews from Asia. In contrast, this plot against Paul to kill him was led by the chief priest and the Sanhedrin.

Instead of honoring their request, Festus said that he would be returning to Caesarea in a short time. He told the chief priest and the Sanhedrin to send some men who had authority with him so that they could bring their accusations against Paul. He said that he would see if there was any fault in Paul. Festus realized that he would have a much easier time governing the Jews if he could please the Jewish religious leaders.

Acts 25:6-8 says, “And when he had remained among them more than ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought. When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove, while he answered for himself, ‘Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all.’” Here, we see that Festus stayed about ten more days in Jerusalem and then he returned to Caesarea.

Festus was very anxious to please the Jews and gain favor with them. As a result, the very next day Festus sat on the judgment seat and commanded Paul to be brought. The judgment seat was the official place where Roman trials were held. John 19:13 says, “When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called *The Pavement*, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha.” Here, we see that Pilate sat on the judgment seat, because it was an official trial of Christ. In the same way, when Festus sat on the judgment seat it meant that it was an official trial of Paul and Festus was ready to hear any formal accusations against Paul.

When Paul was brought before the judgment seat, the Jews immediately began to make charges against Paul. In fact, the Jews brought serious charges against Paul. However, they were not able to prove any of these charges. Lysias had sent a letter with the soldiers that brought Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea. Lysias wrote in that letter, in Acts 23:28-29, “‘And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains.’” Lysias said that Paul was not guilty of any crime that would result in death or even imprisonment.

When Felix found that Paul had committed no crime, he used the excuse that he would wait until Lysias came before he would make a judgment. Over the next two years, Felix talked with Paul many times. Acts 24:25-26 says, “Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, ‘Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.’ Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him.” Here, we see that Felix knew that Paul was innocent. Festus could also see that Paul was innocent. He could see that Paul had not violated the Jewish law. He had not defiled the temple. He had not committed any crime against Caesar that would make him subject to Roman law.

However, Festus was more concerned about gaining favor with the Jewish leaders than he was about carrying out justice. As a result, Acts 25:9-12 says, “But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, ‘Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?’ So Paul said, ‘I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar.’ Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, ‘You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!’” Here, we see that Festus wanted to do the Jews a favor.

As a result, Festus asked Paul a question, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?” Festus had just traveled the road from Caesarea to Jerusalem twice. If he was paying any attention at all as he traveled from Caesarea to Jerusalem, he recognized that there were places along the way where it would be possible to kill a prisoner. In his concern to please the Jews, he was willing to put Paul in a situation where it would be easy

for them to kill him.

Paul recognized that Festus was willing to sacrifice Paul's life in order to gain favor with the Jews. The nephew of Paul had told him about the plot of the Jews when he had earlier been in Jerusalem. As a result, Paul said, "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged." Here, we see that Paul claimed his right as a Roman citizen. Every Roman citizen had a right to appeal their case to Caesar. Paul went on to tell Festus why he had chosen to appeal his case to Caesar.

Paul said that he had done nothing wrong to the Jews and that Festus knew that very well. Paul had clearly recognized that Festus was trying to gain favor with the Jews. Here, we see that Felix and Festus both had the same defect in their character. Acts 24:27 says, "But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound." Both governors were willing to break the law in order to gain favor with the Jews.

Paul went on to tell Festus, "For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying." Paul was not afraid of death. In fact, he would later write, in Philippians 1:21-24, "For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. But if *I* live on in the flesh, this *will mean* fruit from *my* labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh *is* more needful for you." Paul was very willing to die for Christ. He said here that he was also willing to die if he was guilty of an offense and deserved to die.

However, Paul was not ready to let Festus participate in his murder by delivering Paul to the Jews. Paul made this clear by his statement, "I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar." Festus knew by this statement that Paul understood exactly what Festus was doing by asking him to go to Jerusalem to be judged. By his statement, Festus actually condemned his own character. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above *all things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" Here, we see that Festus showed the fact that his heart was deceitful and that he was desperately wicked. Once Paul had appealed to Caesar, Festus knew that he could not participate in the murder of Paul to please the Jews. Each of the Roman governors had a board of advisors that they consulted before they gave their final judgment. As a result, Festus talked to these advisors and then told Paul and the others there that day that Paul would be sent to Caesar.

In this topic, we see that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how the Lord used even the evil plan of Festus to carry out the plan of God to give Paul the opportunity to present the Gospel to the Roman emperor. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand how God defeats the evil plans of people.