



Acts Chapter 25

Theme of Acts: The Holy Spirit and the Birth of the Church

Personal Reflection

Complete this section in one sitting or little by little during the week. Begin with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit into your time. Spending time in the Bible, studying the original intent, meaning and cultural context helps you to understand how it applies to you now.

Further Study

Complete on your own or with your small group.

Read Acts 25 Click on any Bible verse in the study to read it or use your own Bible.

Song for the week: Closer - Brandon Lake

Song links: https://youtu.be/H3zzhyqC_4E?si=Gn_mGBIN199bP0Ny

Personal Reflection

First Paul went to Jerusalem with gifts for the believers there but was arrested after the Asian Jews incited a riot against him, falsely accusing him. While in Roman custody in Jerusalem Jesus appeared to Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." However it was another two years that he spent in Caesarea in jail while Governor Felix continued to hold him, not having yet decided his case and wanting to grant favor to the Jews. *Optional, read Acts 23:11, Acts 24:22-27*

We do not have trials to decide outcomes when it comes to most of our actions. Consider how you would feel if you were unfairly judged for something and had it held against you. How might you behave?

Contrast your possible behavior with Paul's actions. How do his choices sharpen you to handle the judgements differently?

Flavius Josephus, born in AD 37, is viewed as a primary source of Judeo-Christian history. He described Festus as fair and reasonable. In spite of how Felix left things for him, Flavius jumped in. After only three days he went to Jerusalem, considered by many to be the most important city of the province, which "hints at the good and energetic leadership of Festus (*Enduring Word*)."

In Jerusalem, the religious leaders had not forgotten about their accusations against Paul though it had been two years. They brought him up to Flavius wanting to harm Paul.

Josephus was an extra biblical source (outside or beyond the Bible) who lived during the time of Paul. How does his chronicling people during that time affect your faith in the truth of the Bible?

Felix had a reputation as did Festus. We are always building our reputations, either for good or bad. What behaviors and choices are you making to build a positive reputation?

“Paul’s generous imprisonment in Caesarea was actually a providential provision of protective custody against the murderous intentions of the religious leaders. It was also a season of rest and replenishment after his years of hard missionary service, preparing him for the challenges in the years ahead (*Enduring Word*).”

Shannon said that “coming before Jesus with nothing and waiting while I calm down enough to feel His love for me at first seemed like a waste of time ... It feels selfish, wasteful, inefficient. But what I am learning is that those are the ways of the world that have negatively imprinted on me and I am working to shed them completely.”

Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still and know that I am God.” When you are in a season of rest and replenishment, know it is an important season not to be wasted. Paul was not idle; he continued to share the gospel. And he was protected and rested from travel.

When you are in a season of rest and replenishment, is it easier for you to fight it or to lean into it? If the latter, what actions or thinking can you change to stop fighting the rest? If you find it easier to lean into what God has for you in rest, what encouragement could you give others who fight against it?

Festus held the first court, ordering Paul be brought to him, when he was back in Caesarea. He did not waste time as Felix had done. Festus heard from those accusing Paul and Paul’s response of innocence. Wanting to please the Jews, Festus suggested Paul go to Jerusalem to stand trial.

Paul recognized the danger, perhaps he heard of the plans to harm him or he remembered the previous times. It had been two years and the unjust prosecution was not forgotten. Malice can be relentless.

As Paul was a Roman citizen he appealed to Caesar - who was in Rome. “The reason why Paul made this appeal was that he saw that justice would not be done to him by the Roman governor ... It was in this mysterious way that Paul’s long-cherished desire to see the Roman church, and to preach the gospel there, was to be gratified (*Barnes Notes on the Bible*).”

King Agrippa and Bernice came to pay respect to Festus. King Agrippa came from a long line of Herods. His great grandfather ordered the murder of the Jewish male babies when Jesus was born. His grandfather oversaw the trial of Jesus. His father had James the disciple executed. Eventually for not giving God glory, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died - in this very town of Caesarea. *Optional, read Matthew 2:16-18, Luke 23:8-12, Acts 12:1-4, Acts 12:17-24*

Festus told King Agrippa that the Jews made accusations against Paul that he did not expect; instead the charge “was something about their religion and a dead man named Jesus, who Paul insists is alive.” King Agrippa told Festus, “I’d like to hear the man myself.” *Optional, read Acts 25:18-22*

Consider the connections that King Agrippa’s family had to Jesus. What might he have been thinking or feeling at hearing the name of Jesus?

Bernice also had a sordid past. “After her first husband died, Bernice married her uncle Herod. After he died, she was romantically involved with King Agrippa, who was also her brother. It is when she is with Agrippa that she hears Paul passionately tell his testimony of how God changed his life. When Agrippa

listened to Paul, he said, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.' But from Bernice, we get no such exclamation (*Virtuous Girls*).

Years before when Paul was blinded by Jesus, Jesus told Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel (*Acts 9:15*)." Paul sharing the gospel with King Agrippa was the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy.

Paul knew that it was his job to spread the good news of Jesus. Some people eagerly listened, some believed, some rejected Jesus. "Regardless of the response we receive, we must do as Paul did and faithfully share our testimony. We must tell of the salvation that is fully and freely offered to all – including the King Agrippas and Bernices of the world – if only they would accept it (*Virtuous Girls*).

Just as it was with Paul, it is our job to tell others the full gospel, the good news of Jesus - Jesus is fully God and fully man. He lived, died in our stead, paying the price for our sin. He rose again and went back to heaven. Believing in Him as God and accepting His free gift as payment for our sins, we are born again into relationship with Him. Sometimes we can be tempted to believe that someone's salvation is up to us. We forget our part is to tell and it is the Holy Spirit's job to convict people of truth, sin and their need for a Savior. *Optional, read John 16:7-10*

How does Paul's approach of telling everyone the gospel and trusting God to do His part encourage you?

Putting it into practice:

With honest introspection, we all know we fall short of the glory of God and are sinners. *Optional, read Romans 3:23*

Just as we did in church, reflect on your current quiet time with Jesus.

Are you consistently meeting with Jesus? Not because it is a work to do, but because it helps you know Him, to be in relationship with Him.

Are you coming to Him with your own agenda? That's okay, but are you also paying attention to what He may want to tell you? In quiet He may draw your attention to nature and remind you He is creator and cares for His creation; including you. In quiet, the Holy Spirit may provide the peace that you seek.

Do you have a dedicated spot to meet with Him? Consider the spots in your life where you meet your friends, family and those who are important to you. Having a "unique spot" invites relationship.

Are you listening for that gentle whisper? The Holy Spirit will remind you of Scripture. *Optional, read John 14:26*

Purpose to spend time with God this week much as you would with anyone else who is important to you.

Jesus said, "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends (*Revelation 3:20*).

Further Study

Paul was on his third missionary journey, staying in Corinth, when he wrote to the believers in Rome. Though he had not yet met them, he had heard of their faith, was praying for them and wanted to visit - so that he could encourage them and that they could encourage him. *Optional, read Romans 1:8-13*

Is there anyone you are praying for who you have not yet met? How does praying for someone - whether you know them or not - affect your thinking and feeling for that person?

As a small group you have been praying for each other. Discuss how praying together has impacted your group and your relationships.

You have also been praying for One Hope and our pastors. The Holy Spirit is often at work in both those we are praying for and in us. Discuss what the Holy Spirit is doing in you as you pray for our leaders.

You have been praying for our country as well - for those affected by storms and for our nation's leaders and the upcoming election. How has turning these over to God helped you? (Perhaps less concerned, maybe more empathetic, less judgemental ... focus on how time in prayer together is being used by the Holy Spirit in you).

God answered Paul's desire to go to Rome which dated back to when he was in Corinth. When in Jerusalem, Jesus told Paul he would go there. It had been over 2 years. God answered the prayer and Paul was headed to Rome.

God always hears us. Sometimes He says yes. Sometimes He says no. Sometimes He says wait. Be still and know He is God. Wait.

What could you tell someone who feels unheard by God or is still waiting for an answer? What encouragement could you offer? If none, remember sometimes it is our admitting to not knowing but still holding on to faith that helps others.

Reading the Bible (or listening to it if that is easier for you) teaches us about God. As we study, and perhaps memorize, the Holy Spirit can bring scripture to mind to speak to us.

How has reading the Bible and learning what it said affected your faith and relationship with God?

Have you had a time recently when the Holy Spirit used a scripture to encourage you? If so and you are comfortable, consider sharing it with the group to also encourage them. It is your testimony of God's work in you!

Pray

Continue to pray together for each other, our church and our country.