

Another Opportunity

Acts 25:13-27, Sunday AM, February 5, 2023

Prelude – Scripture: Acts 25:9-27 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.”¹² Then when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, “You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go.”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.”

Festus made up his mind. Paul, you’ve appealed to Caesar, then to Caesar you shall go. But as we’ve seen, there is more in God’s plan than just to get Paul out of his tight situations or to reveal the next step of His plan. Today, we meet King Agrippa and Bernice, arriving at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. As they talk, they discuss affairs of state and Paul’s case surfaces. I’ve got this prisoner left over from Felix, charged by the Jewish religious leaders as deserving death because of some points in their religion and his tie to a “dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive.” It’s quite a story, Agrippa. Paul spoke to the Jews who then sought to kill him. A Roman commander saves his life, then seeks to find the truth by putting him in front of the religious leaders. There is no resolution, so he is sent to Felix under the protection of hundreds of soldiers because of a plot to kill him on the way. Felix hears the charges as does his wife but does nothing to either free OR condemn him. What do you do with something as crazy as this? Welcome to my world, King Agrippa. “I’d like to hear him.” “You shall.” Meaningless and hopeless for Paul? Yes, when you listen to the same lies against him, BUT what ELSE does Paul get to say? Would he EVER have had an audience for what ELSE he shares had it not been for the riot? No WONDER the Jewish leaders want to silence him. It seems everyone in high places talks about what they want silenced! I Peter 2 makes it clear that those God reconciles to Himself have been saved to proclaim His excellencies—chief among them, those seen in this glorious work of reconciliation. Do you see His glorious excellencies in your salvation? To whom have you spoken of them? What did you say and with what goal? Like Paul, look beyond your circumstances to care for the souls around you by living and giving the gospel.

*Hymn #307: Send the Light

As we progress through this account, don’t read passively expecting Paul to be godly and everything to turn out right. Fellowship with God fulfilling His will must be lived moment by moment. “Agrippa came together w 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.” Sobering, breath-taking, the result of words obeyed with precision. Intimidating for Paul? If you’ve read the ups and downs of his emotions in his letters, I think we can say, “yes.” Any calmness and resoluteness came from perceiving a higher glory and heeding a higher word. Remember God’s words to Ananias concerning Paul? “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel. Acts 9:15. Today, we will hear words for us too! “But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; ¹⁸ and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. Matthew 10:17–18 Hard words, but listen also for enabling words from the same higher throne. Look there!

*Hymn (Powerpoint): There is a Higher Throne *Pastoral Prayer: Pastor Jahn Choir: God’s Own Lamb Scripture: Matthew

10:16–42 “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷ “But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; ¹⁸ and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ “But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. ²⁰ “For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. ²¹ “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. ²² “You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. ²³ “But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes. ²⁴ “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. ²⁵ “It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household! ²⁶ “Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ²⁷ “What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. ²⁸ “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ “So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. ³² “Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. ³³ “But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. ³⁴ “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ “For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; ³⁶ AND A MAN’S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD. ³⁷ “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁸ “And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁹ “He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. ⁴⁰ “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. ⁴¹ “He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. ⁴² “And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.”

Offering: *Doxology:

All this pomp, just to say, I need help knowing what to say to Caesar ²⁷ “For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him.” Whatever games they play, Paul has another opportunity to live fellowship with Christ—the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering. This mess is NOT without purpose. As Pastor preaches, don’t forget the sobering passage we heard from Matthew concerning the high cost of following Christ. You WILL be rewarded, but it WILL mean some of what you think it could NEVER mean—pain in even your closest family. Why? Your faithful testimony not only proves you are His, BUT it also is a testimony of God’s glorious character and salvation to those who have yet to worship His majesty and submit to His Lordship. How do you live in line with this seemingly impossible calling? Work to maintain your fellowship with God as outlined in this hymn.

*Hymn #321 (Red): Nothing Between

Message: Another Opportunity Acts 25:13-27

*Hymn #375: Jesus Calls Us

The Lord's Table

A privileged time as we reflect on what we've been given through Christ. A sobering time? Perhaps as you recognize things between you and God and how easy it is to trample on the grace of God and obscure His intent. While you need to work to maintain this fellowship, it is NOT secured by you, but secured by the love that calls you to Himself. Praise Him for that love that gives security to face your sin with the gospel of Christ so you live to proclaim His great goodness.

***Hymn (Powerpoint): My Savior's Love** (What Tongue Could Tell)

Prayer