

Acts 25:1-27: Jesus Promises You Perfect Peace...If You Trust Him

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I. Introduction

How are you in a crisis? Do you panic or do you keep your head about you? If your life was on the line, do you think you could remain calm enough to make the right decision? Or would the fear and anxiety of the moment make you crumble, leave you paralyzed unable to think of nothing but the catastrophe in front of you? Is it possible to face a crisis with absolute calm? How?

II. Acts 25:1-27: Paul Said, "I do not object to dying?" Could You Say Something Like This?

25:1-12, Paul had been in Roman custody two years even though governor Felix found him guilty of nothing. But because he needed to curry favor with the Jewish leaders, who complained to Nero about his rule, Felix left Paul bound. Nero removed Felix from office and replaced him with Festus. As the new governor of Judea, Festus knows that he needs to have an amicable relationship with the leaders of Israel. So three days into his rule, he traveled from his capital Caesarea to their capital Jerusalem. It's been two years since the leaders of Israel sought Paul's death, but they haven't forgotten. In fact, it's the first thing they bring up to the new governor. They're in essence telling the new governor, "If you want this relationship to start off well, hand over Paul." They were hoping to repeat their assassination plot but this time with success (23:12-15). But Festus didn't acquiesce. Instead he urged them to go down with him to Caesarea and accuse Paul before his judgment seat. About ten days later Festus returned home. The next day he held court, which means that this is an official trial with legal ramifications. When he had Paul brought in the leaders of Israel surrounded him and began hurling accusations at him, repeating the capital offenses mentioned by Tertullus earlier and likely adding others. But they couldn't prove any of them! Meanwhile Paul calmly refuted their charges: he had broken no Jewish law, no Roman law, nor defiled Israel's temple. He was guilty of nothing much less a capital offense like treason.

This trial is falling apart. Festus was hoping to somehow legally turn Paul over for execution. But Israel's leaders failed to prove their case against Paul who'd broken no Roman law or any Jewish law. His only choice is to acquit this Roman citizen, but he doesn't. Instead, he tries something else. If he can convince Paul to go back to Jerusalem of his own will and be tried there, Festus can still save this opportunity to win favor with Israel's leaders. So he gives Paul the impression that he would be the judge at the Jerusalem trial, knowing full well that he'd only be a spectator at any trial held by the Sanhedrin. Paul reminds Festus of his duty: Festus is Caesar's representative; as such, Paul is actually standing at Caesar's judgment seat, the proper place for this trial. And since he's broken no Jewish law much less any Roman law, no one, not even Festus, can hand him over to the Sanhedrin for trial. Therefore Paul appealed to Caesar, a technical phrase that took the matter away from any Roman judge and essentially kicked it up to the Supreme Court of Rome: Caesar himself. Festus had no choice but to say, "To Caesar you shall go!"

Paul said something very interesting in his defense, "If I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, *I do not object to dying.*" Paul is standing before a judge who can take his life, yet he was absolutely calm. He was ready to die if he actually deserved it. Could you say something this critical this calmly? You might be thinking, "Paul's safe; there's no danger here. Jesus already guaranteed his safety all the way to Rome, Acts 23:11." True, but is this the way we face mortal situations where everything is going wrong? The judge is siding with the prosecution!! Would it make you doubt Jesus' promise or would you trust what He told you?

25:13-27, Festus' refusal to set Paul free put him in a bind. How will he explain to Caesar sending him an innocent Roman for trial, on what charges? So he looks to king Agrippa II for help who was there with his sister Bernice to greet the new governor. Agrippa II was the son of Herod Agrippa I (who had jailed Peter and killed James, Acts 12). He was the half-brother of Drusilla who married governor Felix. After his uncle Herod of Chalcis died in 48AD, he was made king of Chalcis, a small province in northern Palestine which included authority over Israel's temple, including appointing its high priests. In 53AD he was forced to give up the tetrarchy of Chalcis but Caesar Claudius made him ruler over the tetrarchies of Philip the Tetrarch and Lysanias. In 53AD Nero added several cities to his domain around the Sea of Galilee. His sister Bernice was quite infamous. She'd been married to her uncle, Herod of Chalcis. After his death, she lived with her brother Agrippa in an incestuous relationship. Perhaps to silence the gossip, she married Polemo, the king of Cilicia province. But when Agrippa II became king, she left Polemo and went back to living with her brother incestuously. She also later became the mistress of both Emperor Vespasian and Titus, his adopted son.

After many days, Festus laid Paul's case before Agrippa but he lied in his description of the case to protect himself. He tells Agrippa that Paul was a hold-over from Felix's reign. When he was in Jerusalem, the Sadducees and Pharisees wanted from him a judgment of death against Paul. He explained to them that Roman law forbids condemning a man before facing his accusers face to face in order to respond to the charges. He then described the trial he had in Caesarea. He made it crystal clear that Paul's accusers failed to prove their case against him, that he had committed a capital offense against Roman law. Instead it was a religious dispute involving a dead man named Jesus, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. He then says that the reason he suggested Paul be tried in Jerusalem before the Sanhedrin was because Festus was ignorant of their religious dispute. This was a lie. From start to finish Festus was looking for a way to hand Paul over and his suggestion for a Jerusalem trial was not due to his ignorance, true as it was. It was in order to do the Jews a favor, 25:9. But when Paul appealed to Caesar, Festus had to send him to Caesar. Agrippa then said that he wanted to hear Paul for himself. So Festus arranged it the next day.

Agrippa and Bernice entered the auditorium with a lot of pomp and circumstance. They had quite an entourage: five commanders or chiliarchs (since there were five cohorts stationed in Caesarea) and the prominent VIPs of Caesarea. Festus then had Paul brought in and began to address the audience recounting once again Paul's case. In this description of it, Festus shortens his account, leaving out the parts which reveal that he's a self-serving politician who wanted to condemn a Roman citizen to death to gain political favor with Israel's leaders. However, what he does say reveals his utter failure as a Roman governor, although he paints it as if he was handed an impossible enigma by circumstances and Paul which he now didn't know what to with. Festus said that he found in Paul nothing deserving of death. Then why didn't he set him free?!! His answer? Because Paul appealed to Caesar, therefore, Festus' hands were tied. Thus, he needs Agrippa's help to formulate charges against Paul. To add insult to injury, Festus adds that he thinks it unreasonable to send Paul to Caesar without specific charges. What?!! How about it being unreasonable to send an innocent man to Caesar period!!!

Do you get it, the peace that Jesus is offering you? How do we not give up? How do we not panic? How do we not get anxious? How do we go where Jesus is leading us even though it makes no sense, even though it looks like disaster is waiting? Do you get what Jesus means when He says, "I promise you peace, if you trust Me (Isaiah 26:3; Philippians 4:6-7)"? How do we trust Him when things aren't working out at all and it looks like they're about to get worse? Paul was certain that Jesus would save him because that's who He is, the Savior, a Savior who keeps His word. He'd rescued Paul many times before (Acts 14:1-7, 19-20; 16:16-40; 17:1-15; 18:1-17; 19:21-41; 20:7-12; 21:26-40; 22:17-21; 23:1-35; 24:1-23) and if He promised that He would do it again, then Paul knew he could trust Him. Do you know Jesus like that?



III. Conclusion

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."