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Acts 25-26

Acts 25:1-3 *Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him, asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem - because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way.*

Acts 25:4-6 *Festus replied that Paul was being kept in Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. "So," he said, "let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him." After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought.*

Acts 25:7-8 *When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove. Paul argued in his defense, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense."*

Why do people who reject Christ love to slander Christians?

They don't respond to the truth of the gospel in Jesus

They do not want a God to exist who holds men and women accountable

They reject the reality of moral absolutes, so they can live as they want

They don't want to be in fear of a divine penalty, judgment, or eternal darkness

Acts 25:9-12 *But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?" But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar." Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, "To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go."*

Festus wanted to work Paul's situation for his own benefit

He had to respect Paul's Roman citizenship

But in wanting to get Paul back to Jerusalem, Festus was participating in the charade

We all get defensive when accused, but especially when we are falsely accused

But Paul is just stating the facts, and using the legal options he has in defense

Festus (who died in office on 2 years after) was in a pickle

He couldn't just convict and sentence Paul; that would offend Roman justice
He couldn't release Paul; that would offend the Jews
The only option Festus had was to give Paul what he wanted, a direct appeal to Caesar

Acts 25:13-21 *Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus. And as they stayed there for many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a man left prisoner by Felix, and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him. So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. Rather, they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them. But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar."*

Agrippa's great-grandfather was the one who tried to kill the baby Jesus
His grand-uncle had murdered John the Baptist, and his father killed James
The Romans considered Agrippa an expert on the Jewish religion

Bernice was Agrippa's sister, married to her uncle. Later she was Emperor Titus' mistress, but he had to send her away because even Rome was shocked by her lack of morals

Acts 25:22-23 *The Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he said, "You will hear him." So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in.*

Acts 25:24-27 *And Festus said, "King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate charges against him."*

Acts 26:1-3 So Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.” Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense: “I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.”

Paul begins by describing his upbringing as a Pharisee

Acts 26:4-8 “My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O King! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?”

Then Paul describes his fanatical persecution of Christ

Acts 26:9-11 I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.”

Thirdly, Paul describes his conversion and emphasizes his commissioning as an apostle

Acts 26:12-14 “In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. At midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’”

Acts 26:15-18 “And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles - to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’”

Acts 26:19-23 Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to

God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

Acts 26:24-27 *And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.” But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.”*

Paul here is brilliant - trying to get Agrippa to agree to something as a starting point Paul believed that the OT prophets taught 3 events:

That the Christ would suffer

That He would be the first to rise from the dead

That He would proclaim light first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles

And this is why Paul thought the resurrection of Jesus was so important, the very heart of the gospel

Skeptical people always end up saying that a person devoted to religion is crazy Even Christians may say that of another Christian who is more enthusiastic for Jesus

Acts 26:28 *And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?”*

Agrippa tries to duck the question by asking one of his own

Acts 26:29 *And Paul said, “Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am - except for these chains.”*

Paul tells Festus that he is not crazy. The life and acts of Jesus did not “happen in a corner.” Agrippa, sitting next to him already knew a lot about Jesus, especially the rumors of His resurrection

Acts 26:30-32 *then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, “This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.” And Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”*

What would Paul say to people today?

To unbelievers, he'd say “I wish you knew Jesus like I do”

And to Christians, he'd say, "Even if others think you're crazy, keep serving Jesus!"

Most of us will never find ourselves even close to the situation Paul was in
Many because they will avoid a confrontation over faith
Or others, because they avoid unsaved people

Paul, you or I, can only handle a hostile situation like that, if we know who Jesus is
and who we are because of Him