

The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it –
but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

Vance Havner

Text

Acts 25:1-27

Topic

After two years in a Caesarea prison cell Paul is brought out to be questioned amidst all the pomp of a formal state function

Title

Pomp in Circumstances

Acts 25:1 Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

Acts 25:2 Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him,

Acts 25:3 asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem - while *they* lay in ambush along the road to kill him.

Acts 25:4 But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going *there* shortly.

Acts 25:5 "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."

Acts 25:6 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.

Acts 25:7 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,

Acts 25:8 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."

Acts 25:9 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?"

Acts 25:10 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.

Acts 25:11 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."

Acts 25:12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, "You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!"

Acts 25:13 And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus.

Acts 25:14 When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying: "There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix,

Acts 25:15 about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him.

Acts 25:16 To them I answered, 'It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.'

Acts 25:17 Therefore when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in.

Acts 25:18 When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed,

Acts 25:19 but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

Acts 25:20 And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters.

Acts 25:21 But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar."

Acts 25:22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him."

Acts 25:23 So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus' command Paul was brought in.

Acts 25:24 And Festus said: "King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer.

Acts 25:25 But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him.

Acts 25:26 I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write.

Acts 25:27 For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him."

Introduction

I was researching items that are kept safe and rarely put on public display. I came across a 1992 article about the Emancipation Proclamation, the Civil War document signed by President Lincoln

that proclaimed most of the slaves of the southern states free. The article read (in part),

Handled with white gloves and under careful guard, the fragile original of the Emancipation Proclamation was removed from its darkened vault on Friday in preparation for a rare, five-day exhibition.

Subsequent showings of the safeguarded document are almost always described as ‘rare displays.’

I was thinking about things kept safe until brought out for public display because God did something like that with the apostle Paul in chapter twenty-five of the Book of Acts. With the Jews still intent on murdering Paul, God kept him safe – albeit in a ‘darkened’ Roman prison cell. Over a two-year period God brought Paul out occasionally to display him to governors and kings, culminating with Paul’s appearance at a state dinner with all the dignitaries of the province.

God does the same in our lives though we may not recognize it. He designs your circumstances to keep you safe. He arranges situations in order to show you to others.

I’ll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 God Works To Safeguard You, and #2 God Wants To Showcase You.

#1 God Works To Safeguard You (v1-12)

We left Paul in a prison cell in Caesarea. According to all accounts it was not a very comfortable imprisonment. When we see him standing before King Agrippa in the next chapter he will mention that he is in **chains** (26:29).

Paul was being kept safe...by God. After two years absent from Jerusalem and having planted no new churches or preached no new sermons in synagogues the Jewish leaders were still bent on murdering him. If they were willing to ambush him while in Roman custody how much easier would it be to do so if he were free and without Roman protection.

You are in no less peril. You have enemies both without and within. The world and the devil are constantly plotting to ambush you. Your own flesh works to destroy your walk with God.

God works to **safeguard** you. Trouble is, it can seem to you as if you are in some kind of prison cell. You might not recognize God's protection because you find it personally unpleasant. And in your case you may not understand the danger God is protecting you from.

Let's overview Paul's situation and make the application to ourselves.

Acts 25:1 Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

Acts 25:2 Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him,

Acts 25:3 asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem - while *they* lay in ambush along the road to kill him.

Festus took over for Felix as governor of the region. He went to Jerusalem to make nice with his new subjects. The Jews saw it as an opportunity to take advantage of Festus' inexperience.

It wasn't enough for them that Paul was in a prison cell. They wanted him dead.

Your enemies want to destroy your life. They will never relent until you go home to be with the Lord. You grow stronger in the Lord but they never weaken. You must remain vigilant. You cannot ever let down your guard.

Acts 25:4 But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going *there* shortly.

Acts 25:5 "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."

This was power-politics. Festus wanted to please the Jews but he needed to establish that he was in charge.

Paul had no say in these matters even though they affected his very life. You may feel as though you are in some circumstance that is beyond your control. Things at work or at home or in church even

may seem to be holding you back. God is in control! He is working even in the lives of nonbelievers to safeguard you.

Acts 25:6 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.

Acts 25:7 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,

Acts 25:8 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."

Paul was seriously mistreated. His rights were violated; his freedom restricted. His situation wasn't about rights. It was about his being kept safe. God was safeguarding him.

Your children often feel they are being mistreated, do they not? You're just "too restrictive." But you know that you are trying to keep them safe in a dangerous world.

God is doing the same with His children. If you're feeling mistreated or restricted it is probably for your own good.

Acts 25:9 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?"

Acts 25:10 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.

Acts 25:11 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."

Going back to Jerusalem meant submitting to a lower court, the Jewish Sanhedrin. He knew their verdict already – guilty! The sentence would be death. Paul instead invoked his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to a higher court.

Was he wrong in demanding his rights? He was exercising his rights within the will of God for his life. He wasn't trying to save his life. The Lord had clearly told Paul he would go to Rome and preach the Gospel. We see him acting with wisdom within the will of God.

You have the 'right' to remain in God's will. Too often we demand our rights in order to get free from God's will. I would cite unbiblical divorces as an illustration. The marriage seems an oppressive prison but there are no biblical grounds for divorce and no physical abuse that would advise separation. Still one or both Christians demand their legal right to divorce. It's hard for them to see the marriage as God's safekeeping – usually because they are only looking at themselves and their own happiness or unhappiness.

Acts 25:12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, "You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!"

The **council** here refers to Festus' legal advisors. There was no way around Paul's legal appeal. He was on his way to Rome and now he would be guarded all along the way!

Any biblical boundaries God has placed in your life are His safeguard. His rules for marriage, for parenting, for employers and employees, and for life in the church are all safeguards. Ignore them and you are 'free' but your enemies are lying in wait to ambush you.

Ambushes can be subtle. You can make a choice that is not in and of itself wrong or sinful but not really God's will for you.

For example: I've seen doctrinal ambushes. A Christian suddenly starts getting hammered by a friend or family member who has just embraced a particular system of theology. In-and-of itself the system is not evil or heretical. But I've seen whole churches destroyed and families torn apart by those who mean well but end up stumbling others.

Think very carefully about your circumstances. Chances are God has designed them to safeguard you from ambush. Do not be so quick to escape what you feel is restrictive. It may be for your own good and God's glory.

#2 God Wants To Showcase You (v13-27)

I get the idea of a showcase from the word in verse twenty-three translated **pomp**. It's the Greek word *phantasia*. It means *splendor* and refers to a showy display. We get our word *fantastic* from it.

A fantastic, showy state event was held. Governor Festus invited King Agrippa and Bernice. The chief military captains were there. All the prominent businessmen and politicians were there in their finery. In the end it was Paul who was showcased. Brought out in chains he nevertheless was the ambassador of the risen Savior, the true King of Heaven and earth.

Let's survey the situation.

Acts 25:13 And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus.

This **Agrippa** was the son of Herod Agrippa the First who had martyred James and imprisoned Peter. He was too young and inexperienced to take over immediately when his father died. He bided his time ruling lesser territories until ultimately given the rule of Judea and the Jews.

Bernice was Agrippa's sister. Historians suggest they had an incestuous relationship.

Acts 25:14 When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying: "There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix,
Acts 25:15 about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him.
Acts 25:16 To them I answered, 'It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.'
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Acts 25:18 When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed,
Acts 25:19 but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.
Acts 25:20 And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters.

Acts 25:21 But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar."

Festus was Agrippa's superior but he was in a tough spot. He couldn't send Paul back to Jerusalem; but he really shouldn't be sending him to Rome. He had nothing to charge him with. It was an altogether embarrassing start to his tenure as governor.

Festus needed help. Agrippa had a better handle on Jewish affairs and more political pull with influential Jews.

By the way. Just because a citizen appealed to **Caesar** it didn't mean he or she would actually be tried before the Caesar. It meant they were appealing to the highest court. And when Festus used the word **Augustus** he was using it as a title for the current Caesar, Nero.

Acts 25:22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him."

Acts 25:23 So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus' command Paul was brought in.

Acts 25:24 And Festus said: "King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer.

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Acts 25:27 For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him."

What an amazing understatement! It was more than **unreasonable to send a prisoner** and not **specify the charges**. It was stupid and showed incompetence.

God has a very developed sense of humor. Here were gathered all the powers of Roman and Judea in all their **pomp** with all their trappings. The occasion, however, was the result of their own ignorance. It's comical.

Paul was brought in to their pomp. No matter what they might think this gathering was about Paul. It was about the man of God. It was God's gathering to put Paul on display. The thing that was truly *phantasia* (fantastic) was the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

The man or woman of God is the pomp in any circumstance!

Nonbelievers may lord over you. They may be more successful than you. They may have more of the world's trappings than you. They may receive more accolades than you.

But when God looks upon any circumstance it is **you** that is showcased in order to reveal Jesus Christ.

You are safeguarded. Maybe not in the way you'd like.

You are showcased. Doesn't matter if it's obvious to others or not.

You must conclude that you are precious to God.

Trust the Lord's boundaries and restrictions. He's only acting as a good parent should.

Thank the Lord in every encounter. It's an opportunity to reveal His grace to those who are lost in the false glitter and glamour of the world. - being changed to bring change -

