

Thank You, Father, for this privilege of just spending some time with You. How grateful we are that Jesus promised if just two or three of us are gathered together in His name, He'd be there with us. And so Lord, we thank You for Your presence with us here tonight. And Lord, we pray that You will bring us into a real conscienceness of that presence so that those that might be weak or afflicted will just reach out for Your touch. We'll look to You, Lord, for the instruction in Your Word, sitting at Your feet, allowing You, Lord, to just minister to us tonight. Spending time with You, Lord, is always so good. So strengthening. So now, Lord minister unto us as we wait upon You and help us Lord, as we seek to minister to You by the expression of Your love, our trust, our commitment, our faith. In Jesus' name, Father. And Lord, we would remember Raul Rees tonight. We ask Lord, that You would comfort by Your Holy Spirit in the loss of his little grand niece. We ask Father, that for his niece and for all of the family that are feeling, Lord, this sense of sorrow and grief, that tonight You would minister to them Lord, as only You can at a time like this. Our words, Lord, seem to be so shallow and empty as we try to touch them with Your love, but yet, Lord, we realize there is such deep sorrow. And so we ask You to minister unto them Lord. Comfort as only You can. In Jesus' name. Amen.

We continue our journey through the Bible. As we noted in the twenty fourth chapter, the last verse, two years after Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea, and after Felix had been reigning for five years over the province, but two years from the time he met Paul, Porcius Festus came to replace him. The rule of Felix had been so abusive, so corrupt, that he was finally recalled by the Roman senate. And would have been put to death except for the interceding of his brother, Pallas, who was a close friend of Caesar Nero. And so he was spared the execution, but was banished. Now we know very little about Festus, even from secular history. The reason probably is that he only reigned for two years before he died. And so his reign was very short. Little is known about him. Most of the secular history from this period is found in the writings of Josephus, the Jewish historian, and in Tacitus, the Roman historian. And so not much is written concerning Festus.

*Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea (which was the Roman capital of the province) to Jerusalem.* He went up to Jerusalem to meet with the leaders of the Jews. It was a sort of political courtesy. A bit of diplomacy, going up to present his credentials to those in Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup>*Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul;* Now the high priest has now been changed. Ananias has died. And thus there is a new high priest. And the other chief priests informed Festus concerning Paul. Their hatred for Paul was so deep that after two years they were still plotting to kill him. They were determined that they were going to kill him. *and they petitioned him,* <sup>3</sup>*asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem--while they lay in ambush along the road to kill him.* They wanted to ambush him and kill him on the way to Jerusalem. You remember Paul left Jerusalem under a heavy Roman guard because there were forty zealots who had vowed not to eat or drink before they had killed Paul. I'm sure they broke their vow or they died, one of the two, but no doubt, broke their vow. But, there was still that deep rooted sense of hatred and anger against Paul. No doubt, because Paul was at one time, one of their number. It's an interesting thing that today the Jews are able to accept you as a Christian, if you are a Gentile. They often say that Jesus was the Gentile Messiah. And if you go over there as a Gentile Christian, they are very cordial, very kind, very friendly. And they can accept you as a Gentile. But if you are a Jew and you go over there as a Christian, you will meet with all kinds of persecution. They just can't stand that one of their number would become a Christian! They look at that as being a traitor. And so Paul, having been one of the number, now being a Christian, they were so angry that they were still two years later, just festering with anger, and plotting still to kill him. Now Festus, no doubt, perceived their anger and maybe even suspicioned their intent.

<sup>4</sup>*But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going there shortly.*  
<sup>5</sup>*"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."* That they might again, make their accusations against Paul, if there be any wickedness

in him. So Festus promised that he would hear the case. Come on down to Caesarea. He wasn't going to bring Paul up to Jerusalem.

<sup>6</sup>*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.* So he came on back to Caesarea and convened the court and brought Paul in. Now this is, just remember, he has only been in the province less than three weeks, just a little over two weeks, and he is facing his first problem. And that is Paul and the hatred of the Jews against Paul.

So he convened the court. <sup>7</sup>*When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many (and grievous) serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.* (No doubt, they took a long time because Luke says there were many serious complaints against Paul, but all of them unprovable. Just wild charges.) <sup>8</sup>*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."* answered Paul I haven't really offended the Jews, that is legitimately, nor the temple. I haven't profaned the temple. Nor have I sought to develop an insurrection against Caesar. I am innocent. These were no doubt the charges that they were making against Paul that he had profaned the Jews, that he had profaned the temple and he was trying to incite insurrection against Rome. So Paul flatly denies the charges.

<sup>9</sup>*But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor,* (Now herein lies the break down in Roman justice. It's supposed to be impartial. To be just, you are not to really be influenced by persons, nor are you to show favoritism. Nor are you to curry favor. But Festus, just being new in the province, just coming in, was seeking to curry some favor from the Jews.

So he *and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?"* So Festus promised that he would go and he would oversee the Jewish council as they would bring their charges against Paul. It was not justice. It was an attempt by Festus just to appease the Jews and thus gain their favor.

<sup>10</sup>*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.* You are a Roman judge. You realize that the charges that they have made have not been proven charges. I deny them categorically. And you know very well that I am innocent. And thus I should not be standing before their council in Jerusalem but before the judgment seat of Caesar.

<sup>11</sup>*For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; (If I am guilty, you can put me to death.) 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."* So Paul exercises his prerogative as a Roman citizen and that is to appeal to Caesar for the final decision. A Roman citizen, unless he was guilty of murder, could always make his appeal to Caesar if he felt he was getting an unjust decision from the court. Caesar reserved the right for the final disposition. And a Roman citizen had this privilege. Now Paul was getting the run around. Paul was innocent. He declared to Felix, you know these charges were not true. Not it's interesting to me. Paul said, look, if I have done something that, you know, deserves the death penalty, I'll die, but I'm not going to let you just turn me over to them. Put me in their hands. We are not to put ourselves deliberately into a position of jeopardy. There are some people that are almost deliberately trying to get into trouble. They almost court trouble and disaster. It's not wise. Paul said, live peaceably with all men as much as in you. Don't try to create a disturbance. Don't try to become a martyr. The man who seeks to be a martyr, never is. And Paul was not willing to be martyred by the Jews on unconfirmed charges. So Paul appealed unto Caesar.

<sup>12</sup>*Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council,* (He no doubt explained to them, he is a Roman citizen. It's been taken out of my hands. The moment Paul appealed to Caesar, it was no longer in the hands of Festus. Paul took it out of his hands. He no doubt explained the Roman law to the Jewish council that had come down from Jerusalem to make these accusations. He said, I can't do anything about it. I'm helpless. My hands are tied. As a Roman citizen he has the right to appeal to Caesar.)

So having conferred with the council he *answered, "You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!"* Now Paul earlier, had sort of laid out his travel plans. Going to Achaia and then to Macedonia and then to Jerusalem, but then he said but I also must see Rome. Paul had a desire to go to Rome. When he wrote his letter

to the church in Rome (Romans 1:10-15), he expressed his desire to see them face to face. That they might be mutually blessed by meeting together. That he might impart to them some spiritual gift. His longing was to go to Rome, the heart of the world government. He came to Jerusalem. There he was put into prison. And that night as he was sitting in the Antonio Fortress, the Jews, having rioted for the second day and vowing to kill him, the Lord stood by him and said, "Paul, be of good cheer. As you have born witness of me here in Jerusalem, so must you also bear witness of me in Rome." So Paul was assured that he was going to go to Rome. When Jesus said, you are going to bear witness of Me in Rome, you can be sure that you are going to get to Rome, some way or other. Now I'm sure Paul wasn't planning to get there the way he did. He was probably figuring on paying for his own transportation, but he got to Rome by courtesy of the Roman government. And they took him to Rome. But here he is on his way to Rome. Now it's interesting this is some two and a half years after he expressed his desire. It was two years after Jesus had said to him, you must also bear witness of Me in Rome.

It's interesting how that so often the Lord reveals to us a general overall plan, but yet many times there is an interval of time before God works out that plan. And sometimes in that interval of time, we begin to get a little impatient and we try to take things in our own hands. And we start to figure out how we can help God out as though God needed our help. Doesn't God want me to go to Rome? You know, well, let me figure out a way here, you know. And it's God's purpose, the Lord told me that I also had to bear witness in Rome, but the Lord has also His ways of fulfilling His purposes in our lives. And we've got to watch that bit of patience, because so often we can get ahead of God.

Now Moses knew that God had chosen that he should deliver the children of Israel from their bondage in Egypt. He knew that that was God's purpose for his life. He was forty years old. He went out and he saw an Egyptian beating up an Israeli slave. He looked around and didn't see anybody and he killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. The next day as he was going out he saw two Hebrews fighting with each other. And he went to break up the fight. He said hey, you guys are brothers. You shouldn't be fighting with each other. And they turned and they said who made you a ruler over us? Are you going to kill us like you did the Egyptian yesterday. Now the Bible tells us that Moses thought that they realized that God had chosen him to be their deliverer. Well God had! But Moses was jumping the gun. He was a little impatient. Moses was to deliver them, but not for another forty years! And so he was jumping the gun. It's interesting, knowing that God had chosen him to be the deliverer. In the flesh he was unsuccessful in even burying one Egyptian. When guided by the Spirit, forty years later, the Lord buried the whole army!

Oh what a difference it makes when I am doing something in the flesh and I'm doing something led by the Spirit! And so Moses found himself ahead of God because he knew that God had chosen him and ordained that he should deliver Israel. And throughout the Bible, we find so many times the revealed purposes of God and men, then trying to accomplish God's purpose, but not in God's timing. And there is a real art of waiting upon God for His timing. Not only to know the will of God but to wait upon God's perfect timing! And I've always found that God's timing is perfect. I can talk with great authority on this subject, because I have so many times gotten ahead of the Lord. I have been impatient. I've tried to do things and the energies and the abilities of my flesh, feeling that this is what God wants. Surely the Lord desires this. And I have bungled so many things when I try to do it myself. But then when you wait upon the Lord, you see Him work things out. It's always so smooth. It's always so effortless. It's always so perfect, when God does it. Contrasting the work of my flesh with waiting upon the Spirit and allowing the Spirit of God to work.

So Paul is now destined for Rome. To Caesar you shall go. <sup>13</sup>*And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice (also know as Beranice) came to Caesarea to greet Festus.* He's the new Roman governor. Herod Agrippa I was more or less the king over the Jews. He had studied Jewish law. He had studied the Scriptures. It was his duty to appoint for the Roman government, the high priest. And thus he was familiar with Jewish law. And the teachings of Judaism. His great grandfather, Herod the Great, was the Herod at the time of the birth of Christ. He ordered the death of the infants in Bethlehem, you remember, when Jesus was born, when the wise men did not return to him. Shortly thereafter, he died. His son, Herod Antipas, was the Herod who ruled over a third part at the death of Herod the Great. He ruled over the Galilee region. His capital was Tiberias. He had married his brother's wife, who name was Herodias. And John the Baptist spoke out against that relationship, which made Herodias angry. And so at an opportune moment, when Herod had been inflamed in his lust by the dance of his daughter-in-law, Salome. In a gesture of kind of grandeur or whatever, he said ask what you will up

to one half of the kingdom. And so she went to her mother and said, what shall I ask for? She said ask for the head of John the Baptist on a charger or plate. So it was Herod Antipas that had John the Baptist beheaded.

Jesus really had nothing to do with Herod Antipas. They said one time, don't you know that Herod is after you? Jesus said you go tell that sly fox that I have work to do. When Jesus was brought before Pilate, Pilate was trying to somehow absolve himself from judging Jesus. He knew Jesus was innocent. His sense of Roman justice demanded that he release Jesus, but the Jews were pressuring him. But when he found out that Jesus was from Galilee, he was glad because Herod was in town, Herod Antipas, the one who had ordered the death of John the Baptist. And so he sent Jesus to Herod Antipas. And Herod was glad about that. He was anxious to meet Jesus. He was hoping to see Jesus perform some miracle. But it's interesting that though he questioned Jesus and all, Jesus didn't say a word to him. He had nothing to say to Herod Antipas. He looked upon him with scorn.

Herod Agrippa I was the father of this Herod Agrippa. He is the second. His father was the one who had James, the brother of John, beheaded. And so they are a bloody family. They are familiar with Christianity. They are familiar with the religion of the Jews. Herod the Great knew of the birth of the Messiah. Herod Antipas had John the Baptist put to death. Herod Agrippa I had James the brother of John, beheaded.

Now this is Herod Agrippa II. He came with Bernice. Bernice was actually his sister. She also was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I and she was the sister of Drusilla, who we met last week who was married to Felix. And so there is quite an intertwining of family here. Bernice first of all was married off when she was just thirteen years old to a man by the name of Malcus. It is said that she was a woman of rare and extreme beauty. Malcus died after two years. She then was married to her uncle, who was also a Herod. He died after two years. Men could only handle her for a couple of years. Then she moved in with her brother. And there began to be rumors of an incestuous relationship. They were very close. There never was anything proven as far as the incestuous relationship, but it was commonly rumored, especially around Rome. Tacitus makes mention that all Rome was a buzz with talk of this beautiful woman, Bernice, who was living with her brother. But to try to sort of throw off the gossip about their relationship, she married again. And that marriage didn't work out so she moved back in with her brother, Herod Agrippa II. When the Jews revolted in 66 AD against Rome and Titus was sent to put down, Vespasian, first and then Titus, his son, were sent to put down the Roman rebellion, she played an important role in trying to dissuade the Jews from rebelling against Rome. During this time, she became the mistress, (she was some forty one years old, but according to the records, still a very beautiful woman) she became the mistress of Titus. And later on in Rome, she also was the mistress of Titus, but his wife got upset, so she left. But quite a woman. Lacking completely in morals.

So they came, Agrippa II and Bernice to greet Festus. He is the new governor of the territory. And though they came to greet him and <sup>14</sup>*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,* <sup>15</sup>*about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him.* <sup>16</sup>*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, (Now this indicates that when Festus first met them in Jerusalem, that they were wanting him to order Paul's death. They were pressing him to kill Paul. And so Festus explained to them Roman law. A man first has the right to face his accusers. To come against them face to face. And it's just not Roman law to put a man to death until he has had the opportunity of meeting the accusers, talking to them face to face.) and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.'* He has the right to give his side of the story.

<sup>17</sup>*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.* <sup>18</sup>*When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed,* (In other words, they really didn't have any real case against him. I thought that maybe there was something serious here. I thought maybe there was something deserving death, but really there were no charges like I supposed there would be. But he boiled down the whole issue. They had certain questions against him.) <sup>19</sup>*but had some questions against him about their own religion* (In the Old King James, the word is superstitious. This particular word, you remember, Paul used it in Athens. I perceive that you are very superstitious, but the same word is also translated, religion. You know, Paul wasn't insulting them. He was just



remarking that they were religious people. And so here he speaks of their, it was just questions about their religion.) *and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.* That was the crux of the issue. Paul's affirmation that Jesus was alive. Paul made that affirmation because he had personally met the risen Lord. He had talked with the risen Lord. And the risen Lord had talked with him. At one time Paul believed that Jesus was dead. He thought that this story of the resurrection was just so much hockum. And he was determined that he was going to stamp out this sect. And while he was on his way to Damascus to imprison those that called upon Jesus, he met the Lord personally. He said, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? Instant conversion. Who are You, Lord, that I might serve You? I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting. What would You have me to do, Lord? And so he met Jesus. Talked with Jesus. And on many occasions, Jesus had met Paul. Had talked with Paul. And thus Paul affirmed, Jesus is alive!

We sing that song, He lives, He lives. You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart. How do I know He lives? Well, I talked with Him this morning. And this afternoon. I've been talking with Him all day. Paul was affirming that Jesus was alive. The resurrection is the heart of the gospel! Without the resurrection there is no gospel! The cross has no power, no meaning, if Jesus did not rise from the dead. The whole Christian belief system is founded on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Peter said (I Peter 1:3), thank God, we have been born again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith. This is a living hope. The resurrection, it gives us a hope for the future. I have no fear of death. I have no fear of the future. Because I have a living hope because Jesus rose from the dead. And I know to be absent from this body is to be present with the Lord. And one day my spirit is going to leave this body and I'm going to move into the building of God not made with hands that is eternal in the heavens. The living hope because of the resurrection. That's the heart of the gospel! So they were striking against the heart of the gospel. They were saying that Jesus was dead. Paul was affirming that Jesus is alive!

<sup>20</sup>*And because I was uncertain (explaining to Agrippa) of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters.* <sup>21</sup>*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."* So he is explaining to Agrippa the situation. How they came down and they really didn't have any substance in their charges against Paul. When he questioned Paul, you will go to Jerusalem to face these issues, Paul appealed to Caesar.

<sup>22</sup>*Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself."* (So Festus said) *"Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him."* So Agrippa, because he was familiar with the Jewish Scriptures, familiar with the Scriptures concerning their Messiah, also familiar with Jesus, the stories of Jesus. His death. His resurrection. The stories of Jesus healing so many people. He was familiar with these as we will discover next week. So he was interested in hearing Paul. And so he said, I'll hear this case. And he said, okay, tomorrow. You're on.

<sup>23</sup>*So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp* (Now you have to picture, they have their purple robes on. They've got their crowns on. They've got the Roman guards standing by. You've got Festus dressed there in his red robe of the governor. And all of the pomp and ceremony of the Roman government at an official hearing), *and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, (The big wigs were all there.) at Festus' command Paul was brought in.* <sup>24</sup>*And Festus said (in the official kind of proclamation): "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. (This was their big plea. This guy doesn't deserve to live.)"* <sup>25</sup>*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.*

<sup>26</sup>*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.* Now you see, Festus was in a bind. Roman justice provided a speedy trial. It was not right to hold a prisoner without specific charges being laid against him. Even today, our law, coming much from the Roman law, a man is entitled to a speedy trial. You cannot be held over a period of time without formal charges being made against you. This is justice. And so Paul was being used as a political pawn. He was getting the royal run around. They

all realized this. When Paul appealed to Caesar, it then put Festus in bad light. Because Festus realizes that Paul is innocent of the charges that have been made. He has not done anything worthy of death. And to just send him to Caesar with petty little arguments over a religious issue would put Festus in a very bad light with Caesar. Caesar would realize that Roman justice was not being done in that province. It actually put his own position in jeopardy. So he, announcing the purpose of this hearing, is to help us to frame charges that when we send him to Augustus, Caesar Nero, we will have certain charges that will be laid against him. So that after examination has taken place, I may have something to write as far as the charges against Paul. <sup>27</sup>*For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him.*" I mean I'm in trouble if I do that. I've got to have some charges. So it's best for you to hear this case, Agrippa.

Well, as we will find out in our next lesson, Agrippa doesn't give him much help. He just says, you've got a problem, man. So we move on into chapter twenty six in our next session.

Father, thank You again for Your Word which a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. To guide us into all truth. Father, we thank You for the affirmation of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And we realize, Lord, that You've promised that if we would just confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord! And believe in our hearts that You have raised Him from the dead, we would be saved. So Lord, tonight, we acknowledge and we confess that Jesus Christ is our Lord. We offer ourselves as servants. To serve You and to obey You in all things. And Lord we believe with all of our hearts in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And we thank You, Lord, that we have that hope of salvation. That eternal life in Your kingdom. Father, if there are those who have not yet made the confession that Jesus is Lord. Those who are living in a dark, hopeless world. Those who are not sure about the resurrection. Lord, we ask that You would just reveal yourself to them even as You did to Paul and even as You did to us. And Lord, may they know the joy, the thrill, the blessing of serving Jesus Christ as Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.