

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

OCTOBER 3RD–4TH // THE BOOK OF ACTS

TRIAL BEFORE FESTUS (ACTS 25:1–12)

Paul had been in the custody of Governor Felix for two years in Caesarea, awaiting some sort of trial or resolution to his case.

- The real reason Felix had kept Paul in custody for so long was that he was hoping Paul would pay him a bribe, and he wanted to appease the Jews.
 - But Felix had been relieved of his duties as governor and succeeded by Porcius Festus.
- Within three days of being appointed as governor, Festus traveled to Jerusalem to try to resolve this case.
- Relations between Israel and Rome had been extremely tense during the rule of Felix.
 - Festus seems like the perfect politician—willing to consult with the local authorities while, at the same time, trying not to offend anyone. He's tactful, calculating, and careful.

The Jewish leaders who wanted Paul dead seemed to want to take advantage of Festus's inexperience by trying to convince him to transfer Paul to Jerusalem (v. 3).

- This was only because they were planning to ambush and murder Paul!
- The ones who wanted to ambush and murder Paul were deeply religious men who were trying to protect their religious movement.

If the fruit of your religion is that you're a liar and murderer, something is deeply wrong with your religion.

- When our religion becomes more about being right and trying to attack, slander, malign, and harm our enemies, we've completely lost the heart of God and the point of our faith.
- Legalists and hardened religious folks are usually blind to their own legalism and hatred.

PURE AND UNDEFILED RELIGION (JAMES 1:27)

The Latin root word for religion is *religare*, which means “to bind or tie back together”—meaning that pure, undefiled religion is supposed to restore broken people back to God through Christ.

- We're restored to glorify and enjoy God.
 - We're restored to reflect the image of Christ and display the fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- Festus refused to transfer Paul and stated that any legal proceedings would be done in Caesarea.
- After around eight to ten days, Festus returned to Caesarea and heard Paul's case.
 - The Jews from Jerusalem brought charges against Paul that couldn't be proven at all, even though their charges were very serious (v. 7).

- This is often how slander and criticism work.

The charges were: offending the law (21:28), defiling the temple (24:6), and planning treason against Rome (24:5).

- Paul was innocent and denied them all.
- Festus is just trying to be a good politician and keep relations between the Jews and Romans at peace, so we get the picture that he's not all that interested in justice taking place.
- Paul is simply a pawn in a political game.

So Paul pulls out all the stops and says the words, “*I appeal to Caesar*” (v. 11).

- To us, that may mean very little, but to any Roman citizen in that day and age, it meant everything.
- An appeal to Caesar was a right given to Roman citizens that protected them from mistreatment and legal injustice in all parts of the empire.

When someone “appealed to Caesar,” they had the right to go to Rome and take their case before the highest court in the Empire.

- Jesus had already told Paul that he would go to Rome to testify of Him (23:11), and now we're seeing that plan work out.
- Who's in control over this whole thing? Paul? Felix? Festus? Caesar? Or God?
- Peace in trials comes from trusting God's control.

APPEAL TO CAESAR (ACTS 25:13–22)

After Paul made his appeal to Caesar, Herod Agrippa, the King of Judea, arrived in Caesarea with his sister Bernice.

- Why need a king when you have an emperor and a governor?
- Agrippa was a “puppet king”—Rome ruled over Israel economically, politically, and militarily, but for the purpose of keeping the peace, they would appoint Jewish kings/rulers.

Herod Agrippa II didn't technically rule over Judea, but he'd been appointed by Emperor Claudius as the “Curator of the Temple.”

- He had the authority to appoint or dismiss a high priest and was also responsible for the temple's treasure and priestly garments.
- Agrippa was considered by Rome to be an authority on Jewish religion, which is probably why Festus brought Paul's case before him.

So Festus presents an abridged version of the case against Paul to Agrippa, starting with Paul's first visit to Jerusalem.

- Festus admits his confusion to Agrippa in v. 18: they “brought no charge against him of the evils I was expecting.”
- The real reason Paul was on trial was Jesus (v. 19) and whether Jesus was everything he claimed to be.

SO WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT THIS JESUS?

Festus is at a loss, and apparently so is Agrippa, so he requests to be able to hear Paul himself.

- This issue brought up in the presence of these rulers is the question we all must have an answer for—what do we do with this Jesus?
 - Hopefully, this is why you're here today. You want to know how to respond to the claim that He rose from the dead.
- The Jewish religious leaders responded to Jesus by killing Him and then insisting He was dead after He wasn't.
- This is most likely because acknowledging Jesus would have required change, humbling themselves, and allowing Him to be in control.
 - If we're being honest, these are the exact reasons many of us don't allow Jesus to rule and reign in our own lives.

WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT THIS JESUS?

We can flat-out reject Jesus and refuse to place our trust and belief in Him, or we can reject Him in a more subtle and acceptable way.

- That is seeing Him as little more than our advisor (one we consult only when we need guidance or advice) or our butler (a means to an end to get into heaven, to get wealth, health, peace, and happiness in this life).

THE RESPONSE OF SURRENDER (MATTHEW 16:24)

Jesus proved once and for all His identity as the Sovereign and perfect King over all the universe when He conquered death.

- If we truly believe this claim, the only response that makes sense is to surrender our lives to His will and follow Him as a disciple.
- If we truly acknowledge Jesus as King over our lives, we must give up being ruler.

PRESENTATION TO AGRIPPA (ACTS 25:23–27)

There is a definite parallel between Paul standing before Herod Agrippa II and Jesus before Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6).

- In both cases, the prisoner was first brought before a Roman governor and then brought before the Jewish king.
- As Agrippa and his sister Bernice enter the audience hall, they come with “great pomp,” military tribunes, and an entourage.

What's humorous is that Agrippa has no real authority over the military or “prominent men,” but he still makes a great show of displaying his false power.

- Then Festus brings in Paul and presents his case before Agrippa, but this time changing some of the language in Paul's charge to appear more merciful and just as a ruler.
- He states that he decided to send Paul to Rome.

Wait, what? The decision to send Paul to Rome didn't actually belong to him. It was a right afforded to any Roman citizen, and Festus had nothing to do with it.

- The whole hearing was a charade and display of narcissism, vanity, and false power by two rulers who didn't have as much authority as they hoped to appear to have.
- Meanwhile, there's Paul, chained and silent.

Picture the scene for a moment: Paul witnessing a display of power from those he knows could kill him, but at the end of the day don't have the authority they claim.

- Paul had seen the resurrected, glorified Christ on three separate occasions (Acts 9; 22; 23) and had seen a vision of the “third heaven” (2 Corinthians 12:2) that was so glorious he called it “inexpressible” (2 Corinthians 12:4).

This display of power, glory, and authority is probably not all that impressive to Paul.

- Why? Because he has seen real power, real glory, and real authority through actual visions of the resurrected Christ.
- So with confidence, courage, and calmness he faces his accusers, knowing they don't have as much authority as they claim
- Real power is seen in meekness, not swagger.

Paul recognizes and understands that even the most daunting and “powerful” human leaders have no real authority over his fate.

- They're subservient to the direction of higher leaders who direct them in their decision-making.
- Because of Paul's appeal to a higher authority, he knows his fate is secure and has confidence and peace.
- But there's even a *higher power* than Caesar.

The final authority in Paul's life is the one who knows all things, holds all things together, and can command with one word everything and everyone on the earth.

- Every other authority is simply a “puppet king”—someone with limited authority under an ultimate authority (God's)
- Confidence and peace in life come from knowing and trusting God's control.

SURRENDER IS NOT A BAD WORD.

- We don't have to live in so much anxiety over the outcomes of our lives when we've surrendered control of them to God.
- God is not shocked by anything that happens to us, and He's always completely in control.
- While we may not understand why God allows things in our lives, if we know His character, we know it's for a purpose, and He's good.

WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT THIS JESUS?

- The reason so many of us are frustrated, angry, dissatisfied, bored, and anxious is that we keep thinking holding on to control over certain areas of our lives will bring us peace.
- This never works because we can never truly be in control.
- The only path to peace is through recognizing Jesus as Lord and surrendering to His will.

DEAD RELIGION LOVES CONTROL.

- Dead religion seeks to control others by mandating external rules and standards.
- Dead religion seeks to control ourselves by managing our external behavior instead of surrendering our hearts to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.
- Dead religion ultimately seeks to control God by trying to earn His favor through performance.

LIFE WITH JESUS SURRENDERS.

- Life with Jesus *restores broken people*.
- Life with Jesus surrenders to His Lordship and follows and obeys as a disciple.
- Life with Jesus surrenders to His ability to work and change people far better than we can.
- Life with Jesus surrenders to God's plan over our lives and the fact that He's in control, not us (or anyone else).

WHAT IS GOD INVITING ME TO SURRENDER?

- Is it a certain situation or plan I've been trying to control that's outside my control?
- Is it a certain person I've been trying to control instead of giving space for God to work?
- Is it a certain part of my life (sin, habit, hurt, hangup) that I have yet to truly surrender?
- Isaiah 55:8: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways...”