

# “PREACHING THE LIVING CHRIST”

Acts 25:13-22

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## INTRODUCTION

For a long time now, Paul had been a prisoner – first under Felix and now under Festus. It may have seemed to others that the Lord had forgotten him. But Paul knew better, for the Lord had come to him in a vision assuring him that he would bear witness to the gospel of Christ in Rome. His opportunity now was coming closer. Paul had appealed his case to Caesar. Festus had agreed.

However, soon after Paul’s appeal, Festus received some Royal visitors – Agrippa and Bernice. From the context here in Acts, one might receive the impression that this Royal couple was quite noble in both character and position. When Paul addresses Agrippa, he certainly does so very respectfully and intimates that Agrippa has significant understanding of Jewish theology. However, history tells us otherwise concerning the character of this couple. Once again we see how God enables Paul to deal with various persons, both ordinary and significant, with wisdom and grace.

Although this section is primarily a review of the early part of chapter 25 as Festus gives a report of Paul’s situation to Agrippa, Luke gives us a very significant point in verse 19. Paul was so faithful in preaching the gospel and proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that even a pagan king was able to understand the central point of the truth of Christianity: that Jesus Christ who was killed, (as we know for the sins of the world) and was really dead, had come back to life through a powerful resurrection.

The resurrection of Christ is the essence of Christianity; without this truth we have no faith and are of all men most miserable!

## WE MUST PROCLAIM THE RISEN CHRIST

In this passage we notice four things: *the character of Roman law, the character of the rulers, the character of Paul’s case, and the character of the gospel.*

### I. THE CHARACTER OF ROMAN LAW

Verse 16 gives us some interesting information concerning Roman law. Custer in his commentary remarks that the world has been profoundly affected by Roman law, and that we are still indebted today to the Roman legal system. It is very interesting to see how the Lord in his sovereign power utilized the Roman legal system to accomplish his purpose in getting Paul to Rome and in giving him the opportunity to spread the gospel in the most significant places and with the most important people. **We need to realize that God still intends to use us today, if we will submit our hearts and lives to him and trust him to use us!**

We also need to learn how to handle accusations brought to us from the practical system found in Roman law; we must never accept accusations at face value until we give the accused an opportunity to meet his accusers and to defend himself.

## II. THE CHARACTER OF THE RULERS

*So, what do you think about a person who becomes intimate with his own sister?*

We already saw in our last study that Festus was a very unsavory character. Yet Paul treated him with the dignity that his office deserved. But what do we know about Agrippa and Bernice?

### A. Agrippa

- He was the son of Agrippa I who had killed James the apostle.
- He was only 17 when his father died; he was in Rome being trained by the Emperor Claudius at the time and was too young to be given a significant responsibility.
- Later when Herod, King of Chalcis died, a region north of Israel in southern Lebanon, Agrippa was made the ruler of that area.
- Later yet he was given more significant territory somewhat similar to the region ruled by his relative Herod Philip in the days of Christ.
- He was also given responsibility over the Jewish high priesthood and given supervision of the temple and custody of the priestly garments.
- He was a “Jew” and had significant understanding of their customs and teachings. Yet as a true Herod, he was thoroughly Roman in his interests and sympathies.
- He has angered the Jews in some significant ways: he expanded his palace in Jerusalem to overlook the temple grounds, and he made frequent changes in the high priesthood.
- Luke is accurate in calling him a king, but is careful not to call him the king of Judea which he was not!
- Note that he had an intimate acquaintance with the Caesars, and now Paul gains and acquaintance with him! **Isn't our God good?**
- Before this man Paul makes his most elaborate defense and attempts to win him to Christ!
- However, **he was not a good man** as we will see.

### B. Bernice

- She was Agrippa's sister-- along with Drusilla and Mariamne.
- At the age of 13 she married her uncle, Herod king of Chalcis.
- When he died she went to live with her brother Agrippa with whom she lived as his paramour. This relationship was a public scandal even to the Romans!
- Because of the scandal she left her brother at Rome to marry a ruler of Cilicia.
- She soon deserted him and went back to live with her brother.
- Later she was the mistress of the Emperor Vespasian, and also became mistress to his son Titus. Once Titus became Emperor, the scandal in Rome led her to depart.

THIS WAS THE COUPLE BEFORE WHOM PAUL WAS ABOUT TO SHARE HIS TESTIMONY AND THE GOSPEL!

### III. THE CHARACTER OF PAUL'S CASE

Agrippa paid his respects to the new ruler Festus as was commonly done by other petty rulers in the empire. While he was spending a significant time in Caesarea, Festus, looking for ways to entertain Agrippa and Bernice, thought it good to share Paul's case with him – especially due to Agrippa's expertise in Jewish matters.

- Notice his apparent disdain for Paul in verse 14 by calling him “a certain man.”
- Verse 15 adds the additional point that the Jews sought a “sentence of condemnation” against Paul when Festus had gone up to Jerusalem. Evidently that was their first approach prior to their request for Paul to be brought up for trial to Jerusalem.
- Felix refused on the basis of Roman law – verse 16.
- Once returning to Caesarea, Felix shows his diligence in bringing a swift trial for Paul—verse 17.
- He notes that their charges against Paul were totally unexpected for him – he surely had thought that Paul must have been some kind of rebel causing insurrections in the region.
- The case was not a real concern to Festus because it seemed to be about points of Jewish religion; he uses the term similar to the one found in acts 17:22 that can be translated either “religion” or “superstition.” He surely would not use it in the sense of “superstition” when talking to Agrippa who was also a Jew.
- He understood Paul's most important point of his teaching – that Jesus Christ was no longer dead but alive! (v. 19)
- He says his motive for recommending that Paul go to Jerusalem was his uncertainty about the investigation of Paul's case (v. 20); however, verse nine shows that his real motive was to do the Jews a “favor.”
- He mentions Paul's appeal to Caesar and that he granted his request and kept him in custody – verse 21.
- Agrippa expresses his interest in hearing Paul's case – making a polite request (v. 22).
- Festus promises that tomorrow he would get to do so.

### IV. THE CHARACTER OF THE GOSPEL (19)

- A. Festus understood that Jesus had truly died.
- B. Festus also understood that Paul strongly affirmed that he was no longer dead, but alive!
- C. Clearly, the resurrection of Christ was the central focal point of Christianity; this fact is seen by the antagonism of the Jews to Paul's message of the resurrection, and also by these Roman authorities understanding the importance of Paul's teaching of the resurrection.
- D. We cannot truly preach and properly represent the gospel of Jesus Christ without preaching not only the substitutionary death of Christ, but also the justification of both his sinlessness and his victory over sin and death through his resurrection – a clear proclamation of God's satisfaction with his atoning work and his triumph in providing eternal salvation to those who believe on him.**

## CONCLUSION

The book of Acts is coming to an exciting conclusion. Paul's circumstances may not have been very exciting at the time, but the opportunities God was giving him and the opportunities that lay ahead of Paul must have been more than exciting, they were downright thrilling and overwhelming!

What is the essence of life? Why does God have us here in this world? Why did he not take us to heaven as soon as he saved us? Do you think it is because he has something significant for us to do while we are here?

We have seen the character of Roman law, the character of the rulers, the character of Paul's case, and the character of the gospel. Now we need to ask ourselves the question, "Is our stand for the gospel of Jesus Christ so clear and solid that everyone around us recognizes that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important truth that governs our lives and our proclamation?"

*You should not be living in order to make money, establish a career, build a family, and make the world a better place to live. Your motivation in life should be the same as that of the apostle Paul.*

**YOU MUST PROCLAIM THE RISEN CHRIST.**