

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Paul Before Festus, Part 1

Scripture: Acts 25:1-7

Code: 1794

This morning, we come, in our continuing study of the Word of God, to the book of Acts. What a marvelous book. We find ourselves drawn into Acts 25. Perhaps you don't have a Bible with you. I would suggest that maybe there is one near you between the chairs, or maybe someone next to you would be happy to share with you from their Bible.

We come to Acts 25, and as we do, we are in the midst of the life of the apostle Paul. In fact, we are examining the last years of his life, which were spent as a prisoner--a prisoner first in Jerusalem, then in Caesarea, finally in Rome, at which point he was executed. He has, for the most part, as far as we know it, completed his missionary journeys. Though there may be a period of time later on, in his imprisonment at Rome, when he was able to do a bit of mission work, for the most part, from now on, he functions as a prisoner. The Holy Spirit has chosen to detail for us, at great length, the trials and defenses of the apostle Paul during this period.

Really, from the time we looked earlier at chapters 21-22, we were made aware of the intricacy with which the Holy Spirit presents to us Paul's trials and defenses. They really run right on out to the end of the book. I suppose you can't help but wonder why it is that chapters 21 through 28 would be so heavily saturated with the various defenses Paul made before the various tribunals and judgment seats of men.

I mean, during this period of time, there is a very evident lack of any doctrine being taught, for the most part. There is some later on, near the end of the book. But as you look at chapters 24-26 particularly, and even 22-24, there is no great, cataclysmic salvation story to tell, no one getting saved here in chapter 25. There is no church founded, no great missionary enterprise embarked upon. There is no doctrine taught at all in our passage this morning, or the entire of chapter 25, for that matter--just one allusion to the gospel in verse 19. But for the most part, it's just more of that historical narrative that becomes so typical in the book of Acts.

I had to ask myself the question, I was forced to in my own mind, "Why does God tell us all of this trial business over and over again, detailing accusations, court procedures, and defenses on the part of Paul?"

I realize that we have reached a strategic point in Paul's life. First of all, he was mobbed in Jerusalem; they tried to kill him. Then the Romans rescued him and he gave the first phase of his defense to the Jewish crowd that had tried to kill him. Then the Romans didn't know what to do with him, so they decided they'd take him to the Jewish high court, the Sanhedrin, and try him there. He gave his second defense there and left them in chaos. After that, it was decided by the Romans that he should be taken to Caesarea and tried before Felix, who was then the governor of the province of Judea, for Judea was a Roman province. He was then given opportunity to testify before Felix, which he did, and gave the third of his defenses.

It would seem that we had heard the accusations three times, we had heard the defense three times, and yet, the Holy Spirit leads us into chapter 25. The same thing occurs again--Paul is lead before the next governor of Judea by the name of Festus and gives again his defense. If that's not enough, he does the same thing again in chapter 26 before a king by the name of Agrippa. Again and again, then, the apostle is seen defending himself in his trials.

Now all through this narrative of trial and defense, there is nothing said doctrinally, at least developed as such. There is no great salvation story; there is no church founded; there is no great mission project that is undertaken; it's just a history of trials and defenses. As you look at it, you have to say to yourself, "I don't understand the mind of the Holy Spirit, at least at first." So I began to look, and look closely, as I've endeavored to do in the last weeks that we've been involved in this. I thought, The only thing I can see here, again, are the underlying truths that God has planted beneath the surface of the ground. If you just run by this portion, just run across the top, you don't see what's growing underneath. It's like carrots: the good part is hidden.

As we look at this passage again this morning, we're going to see some divine principles that are under the ground, and I'm here to pull up the carrots. You say, "What are they?" They're like signposts. You know, when you go somewhere, it's good when you arrive, but it's kind of fun to watch yourself getting there, isn't it? I mean, you see the little sign on the freeway that says "So-and-so, 80 miles" and the next time it's 63 miles, and you're moving toward it. Let me just give you some signposts. These are the places we're going to arrive at, and I want you to know where we're going so when we get there, you'll recognize it.

We're going to arrive at some profound principles this morning that are underneath the ground of this passage. But that doesn't make them any less important. They're only underneath in the sense that the truth is underneath and the illustration of it is on top. I learn by illustrations, don't you? What are

the principles in the passage? We won't get through all of them, but we'll get through all of them today and next time and some times after that.

Let me suggest the ones I saw here. First of all, I see the tremendous truth of the power of an innocent and blameless Christian testimony. One of the things that we learn again and again with the apostle Paul is that every time he was tried before a court of the world, he was always rendered innocent. That the best courts in the world acquitted that man of any crime is important. They tried to get everything against him, particularly the Jewish people. They couldn't find one thing to blame him for and his innocence stood as a tremendous rebuke of their own sin. The power and the impact of a blameless life--that's a tremendous principle.

The second principle I see--and these are just signposts; we'll develop them when we get there--is the hatred of religious people toward Christianity. You know, it is amazing, but the most volatile hostility in the world toward Christianity comes from religion. The reason for that is, Who is the master of all religion? Satan. Satan is fighting God, and Satan is fighting Christ. And since Satan is the one who developed all systems of religion outside of Christianity, all counterfeit systems are spawned by the angel of light, then you'd better believe that all false religion is going to fight the truth.

Historically, the greatest persecutors of Christianity have been religionists. Whether it was Judaism, which is as pagan as the worship of anything else outside of Christ, or whether it was Caesar worship (which persecuted Christians), it was always a worshipful or a religionists' mask that covered the face of persecution. We see that here. Don't expect religious people to be tolerant; they're not, because Satan is the head religionist and he's absolutely and totally intolerant toward Christ and Christianity.

Another thing that we see here that I think is interesting is the binding power of sin. Have you ever noticed that when someone begins to sin and becomes a captive to that, the habit becomes almost unbreakable? That's what Paul meant when he talked about being a slave to sin. We see in this portion the tremendous binding power of sin.

Another thing that we see here--and this is a signpost to look for--the typical pattern of persecution from the world. We see again how Spirit-filled, effective Christians always create problems in the world, because the world can't stand what their lives bring out in them. It is the rebuke of a godly life.

Another principle that we see here is the courage of a committed Christian. One of the lost virtues for many Christians, I think, is courage. Courage is the outward side of faith on the inside. Courage is just the legitimizing of my faith; if I really believe God, I'll step out, right? Courage is in response to

faith, and we see here the tremendous courage of Paul. I mean, he did things that showed unbelievable courage, all because he believed God.

Another thing that I think the Holy Spirit wants to show us under the ground here, and we're going to try and uproot it a little this morning, is that Christianity, for all time, stands unaccused. One of the early criticisms of Christianity was that it was a political activism, a revolutionary thing, a political overthrow orientation. As I've said before, in the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit records all the trials of Christians before the Roman world because they always come out innocent. The testimony stands for all time that in the early years, the founding years of Christianity, the church was innocent of any political activity to overthrow any government. That's important for the world to know. Unfortunately, through the centuries, some Christianity has become politics, as in Ireland today. It's to the defamation of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Another principle that I see in the passage is the principle of the power of the totally committed life. We wonder, I suppose, what one person can do. If you look at Paul long enough, you'll see what one person could do. He affected everyone. From the simplest man on the street to the palace of Rome, his was the impact of a totally dedicated life.

Another principle that we're going to see this morning is the principle of the providence of God, the marvelous way in which God works out all the human circumstances to get His own results. Boy, what a fantastic principle this is, and you'll see it this morning. Another principle we're going to see, and this won't be until next time, is the pattern of behavior for the Christian in the world. Those are signposts; they're all lessons in this section. We see the illustration, and the illustration gives to us the principle. We're going to see it as we move.

Now as we look at the text in chapter 25, the first twelve verses deal with Paul before Festus. We'll be considering the first twelve as a unit, and they deal with Paul before Festus. Now, Felix had been recalled to Rome. Felix was the prior procurator, or governor, of Judea, assigned by the Roman government to rule over the Jews there.

Felix had bungled about everything. He was in the great tradition of the rest of them who had bungled it. He had been cornered, as had Pilate, by the Jews. Finally, he was so inept and had made such a mess, that the whole of Judea, according to the historians, was in an uproar. Riots were going on everywhere, villages were being burned, looted, and plundered all over the place. They decided it was time to get rid of Felix, so Rome recalled him in dishonor in A.D. 59 and replaced him with a man named Porcius Festus. That is the indication of Acts 24:27, "After two years," that means two years of

Paul being in prison there, "Porcius Festus came into Felix's palace."

Felix had left Paul bound a prisoner, even though he had never been accused of anything, because he wanted to pacify the Jews. So Festus inherits not only the political problems of Felix, but the prisoner of Felix, namely Paul. Historians don't tell us a lot about Festus other than to say that, for the most part, he was a good administrator. Josephus, who is probably the most informed and most widely read historian of that period of history, makes the statement that Festus was better than Felix and better than Albinus. Albinus was the governor who followed Festus. (Festus died after only two years in office.) Apparently, he was not a procrastinator like Felix. He was one who dealt with things as swiftly as possible, and we'll see that in this account in Acts 25.

Let's jump into the action. As we do, I'm going to give you four points in the twelve verses, but we only have time for two this morning. The first is this, and this is our outline, point one: the assassination plotted. The second point we'll get to will be the accusation presented. First of all, the assassination plotted. As we come to verses 1-5, we see the assassination plot toward the apostle Paul unfolding.

We have to feel a little badly for Festus because of his predecessor's incompetence; he left him a legacy of profound hate. Festus had to suffer from the tremendous hatred that the Romans felt coming from the Jews. They hated any of their oppressors, so the Romans got it. Then, the incompetency of all the governors didn't help it at all. So Festus was definitely in a hot spot. To see how he responds to his situation, let's begin in verse 1.

"Now when Festus was come into the province"--Judea was considered a Roman province--"after three days, he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem." Festus arrives on the scene in Caesarea, which was the Roman headquarters. They had taken over the palace of Herod and turned it into the Roman praetorian, where the governor lived and from where he ruled and operated. He spends three days there getting everything organized and whatever he had to do: pushing the parchments around his desk, finding out who was doing what, and whatever orientation he needed.

After a brief three days in Caesarea, he recognizes the need to go to Jerusalem. So he ascends, and remember, you're always going up to Jerusalem, since it's elevation was so great. He ascends from Caesarea to Jerusalem, and he does this because he recognizes that the first thing he has to do in office is conciliate the Jewish population. The animosity toward Felix, the animosity toward the Romans, was extensive, great, hot; there was hostility. He recognizes that he must go to Jerusalem, the national center of Israel, that he must acquaint himself with the high priest, with the Jewish

council, the Sanhedrin; he must become well aware of the customs and politics as they exist in the situation into which he has been thrust. He knows these contacts are important, and he must establish a warm, working relationship with the high priest and the Sanhedrin.

The Romans, you see, were a little afraid of the Jews. The previous Roman governors had been really cornered by the Jews. They were masters of blackmail; they had blackmailed Pilate into crucifying Jesus Christ. The first thing Pilate ever did when he got to Judea, he blew it. He bombed out from the very beginning. He came riding into Jerusalem with idols all over his armor, and then he wanted to hang idols all over the place, images of Caesar and so forth, and the Jews were upset about it. He refused to take them down, and they reported him to Rome, so Rome ordered him to take them down.

At the very beginning, then, the Jews put him under their thumbs. Then he did a lot of other dumb things, too. He tried to pressure the Jews and threatened to kill them, and when they forced the issue, he wouldn't do it. So again he was under their thumbs. So when it came time to crucify Jesus Christ, they had him where they wanted him. All he had to do was fail to do what they wanted, they'd report him to Rome again, and he'd be through. They had Pilate cornered from the day that he arrived.

You know something, they had Felix in the same bottleneck. Felix was slammed into a corner with the apostle Paul. He was afraid to do what was right with Paul, because if he did, the Jews would be upset with him and he'd really be in trouble, because he couldn't handle them. This isn't anything new for the Romans; they were afraid of history.

If you go back to the intertestamental period, the 400 years between the Old Testament and the New Testament, in that 400-year period Israel is, for the most part, dominated by Greece. They had sent a character in there by the name of Antiochus Epiphanes. That means Antiochus the Great One; he was a modest fellow. The Jews called him Antiochus Epimanes, which means Antiochus the Madman, which didn't go over really big with him. But there was a running fight.

There was a man named Judas Maccabeus and his sons who fostered a revolution, and it was pulled off successfully. So because of the power that they knew the Jews had in a revolution, if they ever got it together, they were very afraid. Every Roman governor was really walking a tightrope. So when Festus arrives here, he knows that it is strategic at the very outset that he conciliate these Jews. At the same time, that he not get himself under their thumbs. So he immediately goes to Jerusalem to work on it.

Watch what happens. The first thing that happens when he gets there is in verse 2. "Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews." Now what's that? The chief ones of the Jews are the Sanhedrin, the chiefs of the Jews, the main ones. Remember, the Sanhedrin was the council made up of the high priests, the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes--seventy-one members to rule in Israel. So they informed him against whom? Paul. The first thing that they say to this new governor is about Paul. You know how much time has gone by? Two years. Two years have gone by and still, the first thing they say to this guy when they open their mouths has to do with Paul. It's been burning in their minds for two years--two years!

You say, "What did they want?" They besought him. What did they beseech him for? Verse 3: they desired "a favor against him." One thing they didn't want in Paul's case was justice; they just wanted a favor. Justice would have released him and they didn't want that; they just wanted a favor. "That he would send him to Jerusalem." Oh, that sounds nice and innocent. "Would you mind sending your prisoner to Jerusalem?" Meanwhile, they were laying in wait to kill him with an ambush.

Now, they were really trying to take advantage of the new guy. Festus is hot right off the Roman griddle. What does he know about Israel? This is a brand new ballgame for him. He arrives on the scene, and they realize he's naïve, theologically disoriented. More than anything else, he knows what messes Felix made and wants to conciliate the Jews. They were sharp; they were ready to trap this guy in the very beginning. In the back of my mind, I can't help but think that if he did do that, or if he ever executed Paul--and later on in his rule they wanted to get him--they would have been just as likely to report to Rome that he should be replaced because once, in their history, he had executed an innocent man. That's how they operated; they would have used this.

Oh, they wanted Festus to take Paul up to Jerusalem. It sounds innocent. They were the court; after all, they could try him. You know what amazes me here? That after two years, this is still on their brains. Paul has been in jail for two years and hasn't done anything; they've been living two years without the man, but they are absolutely paranoid about anybody who preaches Christ. Believe me, I think word probably kept trickling back from Caesarea, because if I know Paul, those were years of plenty of teaching and ministering, as well as being ministered unto. So the word is probably floating around Jerusalem about how great Paul is doing down there, living in the palace.

The possibility of a new governor brought with it the possibility of release, and they were afraid of that. Isn't it amazing that these religionists were the great, volatile antagonists to Christianity? Here, folks, is the principle that I told you we'd arrive at: the hatred of religious people. Isn't it amazing?

They claimed to love God, and God is love, and they have murder on their minds. It's amazing how ethical religion is until it comes into conflict with another system, the truth. Isn't it amazing that the real struggle isn't between all the false systems? Have you ever noticed how wonderfully they get along? It's always that the false systems are fighting the truth.

So here they come, and their only desire is a favor, not justice. They wanted that new governor's inexperience and desire to gain their favor to play to their benefit in the execution of Paul. Friends, anytime you see hatred like this, it smacks of Satanic origin. The reason religious people hate the truth is because religious people are in Satan's system, and Satan's system is against Christ's system.

The reason they despised Paul was not because he was that kind of a person. No, he'd lived his whole life as a Jew before his conversion, and they had loved him. In fact, he was chosen for their court and the leader of all the persecution. He was a friend to everyone, a student of Gamaliel, one of their top boys. But after he became identified with Jesus Christ, they immediately hated him, not for his sake but for Christ's sake. This is the hatred of religionists toward the truth. If you read in the New Testament, you're going to find out that the greatest persecution that comes toward the truth comes from false doctrine, false teachers who slander us so that the truth is evil spoken of. Paul said that to Timothy. Satan's hate goes on.

Let me take you to a passage to illustrate it. If you were to give me a definition of the world: when I say the word *world*, which is the Greek term *kosmos* in the Bible, what do you think of? Immediately, you think of Satan's evil system, right? But let me hasten to add this: when you think of the world as Satan's evil system, don't just think of bars and crime and prostitution and immorality and war and anything else. When you think of the world, think primarily of religion. That is the pinnacle of the development of Satan's system, for he is an angel of light and his ministers are angels of light, 2 Corinthians tells us. So when you think of the world, don't necessarily think only of the immoral system, but of the "ethical religionists' system."

Notice John 15:18. "If the world"...or the system..."hates you, you know that it hated Me." Listen, most of the hatred toward Jesus Christ did not come from atheism, it came from Judaism. Yes. "If the world hates you, you know it hated me." What part of the world hated Him? Was it the prostitutes that hated Jesus, the criminals? You don't read any of that; it was the religionists that hated Him because Satan is behind all false systems. "The world hates you because it hated Me...If you were of the world, the world would love its own."

Isn't it amazing? If you're a part of the world, they love you. Oh, man, if you're a part of the big beer brotherhood of Hamm's, oh, everyone is your buddy. Right? All you've got to do is drink Hamm's and you're a part of the brotherhood. You can just get bombed like everyone else and just be one. You see, there is a certain mentality in the world that is inclusive if you do what the world does. Believe me, the implication is that if you don't drink beer, you're out of it, fella. You're not in the big beer brotherhood. The world has ways of standardizing its own.

So he says, "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world, I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." The world hates us because of Christ. Now the world may hate you just because you're a cantankerous, stinky person; don't confuse that. That's something else, and you'd better work on it. The hatred that our Lord is talking about here is the fact of the world's animosity toward the truth of Jesus Christ. The only way that can happen is when you really live that truth, right?

He says in verse 20, further, "remember the word that I said to you, 'The servant is not greater than his lord.' If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you. If they have kept my sayings, they will keep yours also. All these things will they do to you for My name's sake, because they know not Him that sent Me." Watch, all religious systems claim to know God, but the facts are, they don't know God. That's why they don't know Christ; that's why they despise Him and all those who follow Him. In verse 22, Jesus says, "If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin, but now they have no cloak for their sin." In other words, what sin? General sin? No, of course they had general sin. What is the great and climactic sin? Look at John 16:9, what is it? They sin why? "Because they believe not on Me." Jesus says, "If I had never come and confronted them, I would never have unmasked the truth that they are not believers."

Verse 24. "If I had not done among them the works which no other man did, they had not had sin," that is, the sin of rejecting full revelation in Christ. Christ said, "I manifested Myself, made them responsible, and have shown them to be what they are by their rejection of full truth." In fact, He says at the end of verse 25, "They hated Me without a cause," just because of their sin. The world hates people who stand in open opposition to it, believe me. Again, this drags us into that other principle: the terrible rebuke that a godly life offers against an ungodly world. That's how your life should affect the world; it ought to be a rebuke.

A friend told me the other day that he had shared Christ with a fellow so frequently and showed such concern that the person became so angered with him and so upset with him and so volatile against

him that he wouldn't speak with him. This went on for months and into years. The upshot of the thing is that, just recently, the wife of the person received Jesus Christ. All that upset her husband so much; must be something. She began to read the Bible. That's the beginning, and now they're praying for him. You see the rebuke of a godly life.

A good illustration is of Aristides, a man who lived in Athens years ago. He was called Aristides the Just, and "just" means righteous in Greek. Aristides the Just. He was such a good man that that's the name people gave him. He was just a good, honorable man. The people of Athens, the council of Athens, voted to have the man banished from Athens. Someone said to one of the citizens, "Did you vote for the banishment of Aristides the Just?" History records this reply: "Yes." The man asked him why, and he said, "Because I am tired of hearing him always called 'The Just.'" Isn't that good? He can't stand anyone who is good.

It is dangerous to live a godly life in an ungodly system. It stands as a conscience; we are the world's conscience. We prick the world; we are its conscience. Do you know what the world is like without a conscience? Look at the Tribulation. The conscience is taken in the rapture and all hell breaks loose. We prick the world; we're its conscience.

So we see a principle here, don't we? We see a principle here in Acts 25 when we see these people. For two years, this has been eating away at them. It's two years of hatred and venom towards Jesus Christ to be meted out against His apostle, Paul. Listen, religious systems hate the truth.

Let me show you another principle here. We may never get back to the text, but the principles here are very important. The second principle I just gave you was the power of a godly life to rebuke a godless world. Let me give you a third principle, and that is this: sin enslaves. Can you imagine these guys, for two years being eaten up by this?

I spoke in Bakersfield at a convention on Friday night for the Mennonite Brethren Church at their Pacific District Conference. All of them were there, a tremendous crowd of them met in this huge fairgrounds place. I was speaking on the church and the principles for the church, some of the things that we have here in our tape album. I was talking about the fact that God ordained, in the church, leadership and followers. There are those who rule and those who obey; those in authority and those who submit. There are elders and the flock. I said, "It's the same in all of God's economy, whether in the home, where the wife submits to the husband, or the children submit to the parents. It's the same principle." I went on from there.

The only thing I said about the home was that one, little, tiny passing comment. I finished up and some men came up and thanked me, and I was busy shaking hands. This woman came up, a young woman about 25 or so, and she was livid. I mean, she was furious. I could just see it and was saying to myself, "Well, I'm about to get unloaded on." Whenever I go to speak somewhere, I usually take one of the kids, so Marcie was there, just kind of looking. I could just see the darts coming out of this lady's eyes. She came up to me and said, "That was terrible!" Everyone around, all these dignified folk, wanted so badly to protect me, but there was no way. She said, "I resent what you said about women submitting to husbands. I am a liberated woman!"

You know what I thought? I thought, "Woman, you are not liberated. You are so uptight it's unbelievable!" She was nearly clenching her teeth while saying, "I am a liberated woman!" Man, if that's liberation, give me slavery! I said, "What's a liberated woman? Someone who disobeys the Word of God?" She said, "I don't disobey it; you misinterpret it." I said, "It's amazing what people mistake for liberty." She's a slave. She is a slave to disobedience, and if she thinks that's liberty, she's trapped into the deceitfulness of sin, isn't she? She's no liberated woman. It's sad.

You see, that's the deceitfulness of sin. You think you're free, but you're enslaved. Listen to an old story I heard about the eagle who soared so beautifully across the sky and would keep flying and flying. As an observer watched, he got lower and lower and lower and lower, and finally its wings began to fold and flap, and it began to fly like a sparrow. Then, all of a sudden, it smashed into the side of a cliff. The man walked over and picked it up, and there, clutching its breast, was a rodent who had sucked its blood. That's like sin. We think we soar, and little by little the blood is being drained out of us.

It enslaves, and that's what I mean. It enslaves. Look at these people. For two years, Paul has been in jail and free to love; they have been free and slaves to hate. One of the worst slaveries is slavery to hatred, did you know that? Like McMillan says in his little book, "It's not what you eat that ruins you, it's what eats you." It's what tears you up on the inside, and the greatest thing is hate. When you feel hatred or bitterness toward someone, that is self-destruction. Sin enslaves. Romans 6:16 says if you obey sin, you become the slave of sin.

Just think about something like hate; if you want to find out what hate does to people, go back to Genesis 4 and find out about Cain and see what hate did to Cain. If that isn't a good enough lesson, go to Esau and watch hate drive a man through his whole lifetime. If that doesn't satisfy you, go to the sons of Jacob and find out what hate did to those people, hate toward Joseph and the results of it. If

that doesn't do it, go find a man named Saul and see what it did to him. He hated David, and it drove him to the place where he killed himself. If that isn't convincing enough, find Absalom and see what hate did to him in 2 Samuel 13. If that doesn't convince you, read the book of Esther and find out how hatred drove a man named Haman to be hanged of his own gallows.

Sin is a cruel master and sin is a binding slavery. What starts out as a simple little activity becomes a habit and becomes slavery. That's the deceitfulness of sin, and you see it here. It's been two years and they are preoccupied with the same hate. That's sin. Now friends, listen to me. When you begin to see that, you begin to know that it's true when the Bible says that the only one who can break the power of sin is Jesus Christ. There is no human resource that can handle that kind of enslavement. That's why, when we tell you to come to Jesus Christ and give Him your life and sin's power is broken, we mean something. Those who have hated are all of a sudden able to love.

That's another principle. Look at verse 4 and see what happened. It seems a fair request to ask Festus to take Paul along to Jerusalem; it doesn't seem that big of a deal. But I think Festus is a fairly intelligent guy, he may have suspected something, but I don't know. I doubt it. He says in verse 4, "Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly for there." He's in Jerusalem and says, "I'm going to leave him in Caesarea; I'm not going to bring him here. But I am going down there," verse 5, "let them therefore, said he, who among you are able, go down with me and accuse this man if there be any wickedness in him." So he's saying that if there should be any accusation to be made, come down there and do it down there. Let's do it right.

It's amazing. You say, "Well, he had an instinct for justice." That's probably true, or he would never have been in that position. Rome knew that. He probably had a sense of personal honor. From what we know about history, the man was a credible character. But I'll tell you something, when you begin to look at all of the evidence, it's amazing that he didn't take Paul to Jerusalem. You see, it seemed a rather insignificant kind of thing to take him there. It wasn't that difficult. After all, the execution was going to be an ambush anyway, so he wouldn't have known about that.

So why didn't he obey them? What does he know about Jewish procedure? He had no background; this may have been the right procedure. Number two, more than anything else, what does he want to do? Make friends with the leaders. Number three, he doesn't know Paul from anyone else, so what does he care about him personally? You see, all of the human factors would have told Festus to take Paul to Jerusalem--big deal. That's what the wish was. From the beginning, he wanted to establish it on the right foot, so why didn't he do it? I'll tell you why he didn't do it: the providence of God.

Here's another principle; we've just uprooted another one. Who is running the show? Festus? God. Now I'm going to tell you something exciting. Did you know that God ordains the attitudes and actions of men to bring about His own ends? Did you know that, even in government, did you know who was really coordinating the last election? God. You say, "You mean God let those people get into office?!" Absolutely! Absolutely. Now, you may wonder why God does what He does, but you can still trust Him. Just chalk it up to your ignorance, not His ineptitude, will you?

You say, "Oh, the way the world is going! Oh, it's terrible: inflation, politics, everything is going wrong!" You know what I say? God is at work, praise the Lord! Isn't it exciting to see Him going where He's going? I never worry about politics; I never worry about the economy; I never worry about the world because I trust God, and God's running it. You say, "Oh, MacArthur, that's kind of a weird theology. How did you ever come up with that?" I'll tell you.

Let me give you a couple of interesting illustrations. John 19:10. Here, Jesus is before Pilate, a former governor of the same sort as Felix and Festus. Jesus is before Pilate, and Pilate asks for some answers, but Jesus doesn't answer him. That was an affront, because Pilate was a big wheel, but Jesus didn't even answer his questions. He just totally didn't even answer them.

Verse 10. "Pilate said to him, 'Speakest thou not unto me?'" He wasn't used to this; he was big stuff. "You're not speaking to me? Do you realize what you're doing?" Listen, he says in verse 10, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee and power to release thee?" "Don't you know, sir, that your life is in my hands?" Jesus did answer then. Verse 11. "Thou could have no power at all against me except it were given from above." That's a good answer. "You know something, Pilate? You're not even running this operation. God is."

In Acts chapter 2, have you ever read that verse? "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as you yourselves know...Him being delivered by Pilate." Is that what it says? Nope. "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." Who is running it? God is. Well, that's interesting.

Listen to this. In John 7:30, it says they tried to lay hands on Him but they couldn't because His hour wasn't come. Isn't that interesting? God was timing things. Look at Luke 22:53. "When I was daily with you in the temple, you stretched forth no hands against me." In other words, "The whole time I was

moving through, you never could lay hands on Me." But He says, "This is your hour." Here He was, they had tried to catch Him, but they couldn't. He would pass through their midst. Then He says, "Now you may take Me." God was ordaining the whole thing. Fantastic.

Let me show you an illustration in Genesis 45:7-8. You remember the brothers of Joseph sold him into slavery? They sold him to a caravan going to Egypt, and he wound up with Potiphar, then Pharaoh, then became a ruler. His brothers arrived, and Joseph talks to his brothers. Look what he says. "God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance."

You know who really got Joseph into Egypt? Not his brothers, but God. You know what would have happened if Joseph had never gotten to Egypt? All of his brothers may have died in the famine that came and the Messianic line would have been obliterated. So God, to preserve the Messianic line, had to preserve that family. So God sent Joseph, in advance, to Egypt to make sure that when the famine came, Joseph would have Egypt all stacked up with extra wheat. Remember? He interpreted the dream, made sure they had enough, and had enough to give to his family. That's sovereignty; that's God's omnipotent providence.

Notice verse 8. "So now, it was not you who sent me here, but God." Boy, is that straight. That's providence. That's God using the natural circumstances to effect His supernatural desires. I want to take you to a passage that is really startling for its repetition. We're developing this principle of God's sovereign providence.

I want you to watch something here, and I think you'll get the message. Daniel is talking to the biggest chief in the world, Nebuchadnezzar, the head of the whole kingdom of Babylon, in this particular verse. Nebuchadnezzar had a tremendous idea that he was a great ruler. Then the vision came that it would be Nebuchadnezzar, then it would be followed by the Medes and the Persians, then by the Greeks, then by the Romans: the four great world empires. But whatever the world empire is, notice verse 17 at the last three lines or so.

Daniel 4:17. "That the living may know that the most High"...that's God..."rules in the kingdom of men." Do you know who is running the politics of the United States of America, behind the scenes, to effect His own will even through the evil of men? God. "The most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever he will." That's what I'm telling you folks; the powers that be are ordained of God. You may not understand what God is doing, but you can trust Him.

Now look at the end of verse 25. This is interesting. "Until thou know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomsoever he will." Does that sound familiar? It's the same phrase as 17. Look at verse 32, the last of the verse. "Until thou know that the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever he will." Now, if God says something once, it's important. If God says something three times, wow! Are you ready for four?

Verse 35. "And all the inhabitants...are reputed as nothing: and he does according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." You say, "That's enough, I'm convinced." No, no. Daniel 5:21, the end of the verse. Here was the convincing of Nebuchadnezzar himself. "Until he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and...appointed over it whomsoever he will." There you are, folks. Five times, four with the same words; once with a varying way of saying it. Five times does God say He rules the kingdoms of men. That, to me, is the greatest political fact in existence: God is ruling.

I'll tell you, beloved, isn't it exciting to be a part of His kingdom? God is in control of destiny. You say, "Why didn't Festus do what they wanted?" I'll tell you, because God was in control, and if Paul had gone to Jerusalem, that would have been an ambush and the death of Paul. God wasn't ready for that because God made a promise that Paul would get to Rome.

Verse 5. "Let them, therefore, who are among you who are able." Notice the phrase "who are able." That has reference to those who are powerful; the word is *dunatos*. It means "powerful ones," or "influential ones," or "in positions." "You chief ones, you come on down with me to Caesarea and accuse him there, if there be any wickedness in him." So the assassination is plotted.

The second point, and we'll just look at it briefly. The accusation is presented in verse 6. "And when he had tarried among them," and the best manuscripts say he stayed in Jerusalem not more than eight to ten days, "He went down to Caesarea; and the next day, sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought." I like his immediacy, don't you? He got at it. So he got down there, asked for Paul to be brought, and said, "Let's get this case going."

Verse 7. "When he was come down, the Jews who came down from Jerusalem stood round about"...like wolves around a lamb..."and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul." Stop right there. The accusations are coming, and do you remember what they were? You have to go back to Acts 24:5. Here are the same accusations two years earlier. Here are the three accusations. "A

pestilent fellow, a mover of sedition among all the Jews," that is, he's stirring up Jewish revolution against Rome, insurrection. Two, "A ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes"; he's a heretic. He's not only a political activist, he's a heretic. Verse 6, three: "He has gone about to profane the temple." That's sacrilege. So he's offended Rome, he's offended Israel, and he's offended God. He's a criminal against the state, against religion, and against God Himself. Three accusations. All three were lies, false, but the accusations were presented.

If you want to find out what happens, you'll have to come back next time. That's all the time we have. I trust that God will use these principles that we've seen as we've gone through this to speak to your hearts. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for showing us divine principles, for helping us to dig them out. Thank You for helping us to understand more about You, more about men, more about Satan, more about sin, more about the holiness of our lives and how they can affect the world. May we so live to please You. May we be obedient to You, submissive sheep, going where the Shepherd leads, being innocent and yet powerful, without sin, yet rebuking it. May we be like Jesus Christ. May we be resources for those whose hearts are filled with conviction and seek to know the truth. We thank You in Christ's name, Amen.

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