

Acts 25-26 Who's on Trial

The title of our message today is Who's on Trial?

A) Today we are going to see Paul's last court hearing - recorded in the book of Acts

B) Takes place in the Beautiful Amphitheater that was built in Caesarea - overlooks the Ocean

C) Here we are going to see Paul - Share his testimony before Governor Festus -

1) before King Agrippa and his wife Bernice

D) All the who's who of Caesarea are there -

1) as well the Religious leaders in Israel who have come down from Jerusalem -

E) These are the men who are after Paul's blood

But in Reality it is NOT Paul who is on trial - it is the audience

A) The same thing holds true in our day and age!

B) The world is seeking right now to put the Church on trial - to put followers of Jesus on trial

1) IN THE COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION

C) But in reality - is not we who are on trial it is the world around us - the naysayers against Jesus

1) They are the ones being weighed.... Found lacking

There is much we can learn today from the Apostle Paul -

A) As he stands before this crowd who is wanting to Judge him

B) Some even are wanting to see him put to death

C) Seven things I want to draw your attention to today as we work our way through this story

- The Promise of Jesus
- The Persistence of the enemy
- The Protection of the system
- The Pomp of Royalty
- The Proclamation of the truth
- The Power of the gospel
- The Proper response to the gospel

But before we jump into this scene - let me remind you how we got here.

A) Paul had been moving in his Journeys toward Jerusalem -

B) He wanted to get there in time for the feast of Pentecost

C) One of 3 required feast - Massive Population - instead of 80k - more like 900K

D) This would be a great opportunity for him to talk to many of his Jewish brethren about Jesus

But as soon as he arrives- false rumors are spreading about him -

A) People are saying that Paul brought - gentiles into the temple.

B) That was against Jewish law - punishable by death

C) Remember the Romans - gave the Jews the right to enforce punishment in matters that related

1) to their Temple and their religion

Well A crowd gets a hold of Paul - trying to beat him to death -

A) That is when the Roman Commander who was over Jerusalem - intervenes

B) He finds out that Paul is a Roman Citizen by birth

1) so he has rights afforded to any Roman Citizen -

C) the right to due process -

1) The right to a Fair trial.

At this same time - while Paul is being held in the Barracks for his own protection really -

A) Jesus appears to Paul - Vision -

B) The Promise of Jesus - Ch.23:11 - **As you have testified for me in Jerusalem -**

1) **You will testify for me in Rome**

C) Paul grabs a hold of the promise of Jesus and from this point on -

1) he is going to have a confidence - Nothing is going to happen to him

D) Jesus said I am going to Rome - I am going to Rome -

For the rest of the book of Acts Paul is standing on this promise --you are going to Rome!

A)This promise will see him through these Court hearings -

B)Death threats - a ship wreck and a deadly snake Bite

C)Great example to us of what it means to stand on the promises of God

1)Last week - listen online

Well at this point the Roman commander - hears of some assignation plots that are being put into place A)A plan to take Paul - out

B)So he puts together a massive Roman escort to get Paul out of Jerusalem and down to Caesarea -
1)470 soldiers

C)To get Paul to Caesarea - where he can be Under the Protection of the Roman Governor Felix -

Felix allows the Jewish leaders to present their case - against Paul

A)And then Paul answers - preaches about Jesus - the Resurrection

B)Felix the Governor sees' there are NO charges being brought up against Paul -
1)worthy of death or chains

But because Felix wants to stay in good graces with the Jews

A)He keeps Paul under house arrest in the Palace for two more years.

B)That is where we left Paul last week - today we are picking up the story in Ch.25:1

C)Governor Felix has now been replaced by Festus -

The Persistence of the enemy V.1-9

Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem.
2 Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him, 3 asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem—while they lay in ambush along the road to kill him.

Two years have gone by - and you would think - Paul being out of sight - would also be out of mind.

A)Not so - the first audience these men get with the New Governor they are asking for Paul's head.

B)Here we see the Deep seeded bitterness in these men -

C)They will not rest until Paul is dead

We see a similarity in this to spiritual warfare.

A)The HATRED of the devil towards us NEVER diminishes.

B)He knows just how influential a Spirit filled believer can be.

1)So Always on the attack

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

C)Chess match ensues here between Festus and the religious leaders

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. 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, 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.” 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?”

D)Paul is no dummy - He sees through this mirage

E)He knows that if he goes to Jerusalem his life is in danger

1)So Paul is going to use his Roman citizenship - and Appeal to Caesar

The Protection of the system V.10-22

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

Paul knew his rights -

A) We need to know our rights as Christians

B) Let me read to you a list of cases that are in litigation right now -

1) Christians standing for their rights -

In Oregon: – September 2023

Couple denied foster care license because of Christian beliefs about sexuality and gender

In Vermont: February 2023

High school coach fired for saying males and females are biologically different –

In Wyoming

Christian homeless shelter threatened by government for only hiring Christian applicants – September 2022

C) Here is my point in all of these stories - literally 100's more like them -

1) Christians refused to back down and just go with the flow

D) Don't let the world squeeze you in to their mold.

Christian kids going to public schools have the right to pray in School - Bible studies in School

A) But on many public school campuses today - they can be bullied into thinking -

B) They are not allowed to do those things

C) Paul is using his rights as a Roman citizen

Why did Paul appeal to Caesar?

A) For one thing, he knew that his ultimate destination was Rome, not Jerusalem;

B) You shall speak of me in Rome - and the fastest way to get there was to appeal to Caesar.

C) Paul also knew that the Jews had not given up their hopes of killing him,

1) so he was wise to stay under the protection of Rome.

D) So By appealing to Caesar, Paul forced the Romans to guard him and take him to Rome.

Gov Festus is taken back by this V.12 he asked his counselors – Can he do that? Can he appeal to Caesar? - Yes

Acts 25:12 "You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!"

But now Festus has a problem on his hands - Paul as a Roman Citizen had the right to appeal to Caesar -

A) But Festus can't send him to Rome for no reason - and right now he has nothing to charge him with

B) According to Roman law, if a Roman citizen appeared to Caesar

1) that meant you had to get him to Rome.

C) And if he was sent to Rome, he had to be sent with a written account of the case

1) And of the charges against him. -Everything had to be documented.

So Festus was in a jam because, as far as he could see, there were no legit charges.

A) Paul's situation isn't a civil matter against Rome it is a religious matter - between the Jews

B) Festus knows that if he can't come up with some legitimate reason for sending Paul

1) he is going to be wasting the Emperors time and that is going to make him look bad

C) So Festus thinks – I am going to bring King Agrippa in on this – Get His help

1) Agrippa knows the Jews and their laws

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

Agrippa II was the last of the Herods

A)The first of the line was Herod the Great, who killed all the babies in Bethlehem when our Lord was born,

B)His son, Herod Antipas, had John the Baptist beheaded in prison.

1)His grandson, Herod Agrippa I, put the Apostle James to death with the sword.

C)Now his great-grandson, Agrippa II, has been appointed by the Romans to be tetrarch of Galilee.

Rome had given Herod Agrippa II legal jurisdiction over the temple in Jerusalem.

A)Agrippa knew the Jews and their laws

B)He shows up in Caesarea with his wife Bernice

She is described in literature as being a ravishing beauty- But she was Also his sister

A)So contrary to every law of the Jews, they were living together in an incestuous relationship

B)It is before this morally decadent couple, enslaved by their own lust and passion,

1)that the Apostle Paul is about to appear.

C)So they show up in Caesarea

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, 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. 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.' 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. **18 When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed,** 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.

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. 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."

So Festus is like - do you see my dilemma here?

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

The Pomp of Royalty V23-26:1

V.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.

A)So Festus decided to turn this into a spectacle - like the Grammy's - red carpet

B)Agrippa and Bernice enter in great Pomp - or pageantry -

1)Bernice who are you wearing today?

C)The Who's who of Caesarea would be there

And then Paul is brought in: Picture the contrast

A)Agrippa and Bernice would have entered wearing their purple robes of royalty and the gold crowns

B)Festus would no doubt have put on the scarlet robe which a governor wore on state occasions.

C)All the onlookers are dressed to impress -

D)Then Paul is brought in - He is dressed in the garb of a prisoner, and he is chained to two guards.

Paul was unimpressive in his personal appearance.

A)Historians verify that he was a short man with bowed legs, a long hooked nose, little hair,

B)Paul was horribly scarred, having been stoned and left for dead, beaten so many times.

C)Voltaire, the famous French atheist, called Paul - "an ugly little Jew".

So On One SIDE Agrippa – other Paul

A) One is on a throne, the other is in shackles

One wears a crown, the other is in chains.

B) Agrippa is a king, but in the slavery of sin.

C) Paul is a chained prisoner,

1) Who is rejoicing in the freedom of sins forgiven and liberty in Christ.

The Lord is giving Paul an audience with this crowd.

A) The Lord has given all of us an audience as well

B) It is the Sphere of influence he has put us in - the people we get to live before.

C) People we live with - work with - school with

1) Kids sports with - the Barista -

D) All a part of the Sphere - makes up our Audience

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

So Festus lays out the situation again to the King and to the crowd

A) Festus says to King Agrippa Paul has appealed to Caesar -

B) If I am sending him to Rome I need a reason.

Acts 26:1 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: **ESV made a defense {**

The Proclamation of Truth V.2-17

A) Think for a minute here about what Paul could have talked about.

B) He could have talked about everything that his accusers did that was unlawful

C) He could have talked about how corrupt the political and religious system was in Israel

D) But Paul isn't going to do any of those things -

1) NO he wants to point to how a Resurrected Jesus changed his life.

E) He is going to use this moment to point people to Jesus -

1) Paul Knows that Jesus is the answer for a lost world.

Paul is going to start with his own story: His own testimony - How Jesus changed his life

V2 "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, 3 especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews.

Paul so happy to talk to Agrippa?

A) "because Agrippa understood the Jewish culture, traditions, and religion."

Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently.

Paul's background - testimony -

4 "My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. 5 They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. Very Zealous

6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. 7 To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews.

And then addressing himself to the whole court he asked this amazing question: V.8 says, "Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?"

Certainly a Jew should not think it incredible,

A) For one their history was filled with testimony of the power of God – beginning at Creation

B) Deliverance from Egypt – Red Sea – manna -

C) Why should it seem like an amazing thing to you that God could raise the dead?" asked Paul,

D) The same question could be asked today.

E) People have trouble with miracles because they fail to comprehend the power and the reality of God.

You see, the difficulty of a task Can only be determined

A) when measured against the agent or being who attempts to accomplish it.

B) If you need \$20 - I can probably help you with that

C) But if you need \$20K - you are asking the wrong guy - I don't have that kind of cash

We are talking about the God who spoke the world into existence

A) And who sustains the world in place by his Word

B) Is there anything too hard for God?

C) It really is a question of how big is your God ?

D) So in essence - Paul is saying - I didn't believe that Jesus rose from the dead -

1) My God was too small - LITTLE BOX

9 "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. 11 And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; {Gun to the head} and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

So Paul is sharing his testimony of how he hated Jesus but then he gets to the day it all changed

A) Paul's Revelation

¹² "While thus **occupied**, - consumed as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, - **this is a radical point - I was a part of the very group that is trying to have be executed right now.** -

I was working for them in those days - but then something happened to me

¹³ at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. ¹⁴ And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? *It is hard for you to **kick against the goads.***' ¹⁵ - **Goad was a sharp stick used to poke a donkey to get it moving**

Paul was kicking against the conviction of the HS

A) The HS was poking at his heart to move him toward faith in Jesus

So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.

Here is what Paul is saying - the whole trajectory of my life changed that day.

A) Jesus was alive - I was wrong

B) Jesus is the messiah - he opened my eyes - He saved me and he was calling me to be his witness

C) He called me for this purpose: V.17-18

¹⁷ I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, ¹⁸ **to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light,** and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

The Power of the gospel V.18

A) V.i8 Paul gives in this one sentence - the power of the gospel to transform people

B) It Starts with opens their eyes

C)One of Satan's strategies is to blind a person to the reality of their own condition.

⁴Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God. 2 Corinthians 4:4 NLT

D)Look how long it takes an alcoholic to admit they have a problem, some never do.

1. To everyone else it is so obvious.
Their family and friends all know it.

E)But They keep insisting that there is no problem they can quit any time they want to.

Rarely do you hear a person admitting to a drug addiction.

A)You don't hear them say, "I am a drug addict."

B)They may admit to having a slight problem with drugs,

C)But they somehow feel that they are still in control, when the truth is they are hopelessly addicted.

1)Satan has them blinded

Satan loves to blind People to the fact that one day they will stand before God

A)And have to give an account for their lives.

B)People in their blindness are thinking - they are ok 1)or they have all the time in the world - to get their acts together.

C)Satan's Plan - No hurry - blinded - to the reality - that **It is appointed unto man to die once, and after that comes the judgment. Hebrews 9:27**

People are blind to the fact that unless a person is born again they will not enter the kingdom of heaven. ([John 3:3-5](#))

¹³**“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. ¹⁴Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.** Matthew 7:13-14

The truth opens your eyes!

⁶For God, who said, “Let there be light in the darkness,” has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. ~ 2 Corinthians 4:6

When your eyes are opened to the truth about God - they are opened to the truth about yourself

A)Isaiah - Woe is you and you - WOE IS ME

B)I AM NOT OK - UNDONE -

C)The first thing the gospel does is to bring us to the realization that we are not ok

D)Sick and need a doctor- A change is needed -

1)You are moving from Darkness to light

The gospel has the power to turn us from the power of Satan to the power of God

¹³For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, Colossians 1:13

Transferred Taken One kingdom and put in another

A)This is amazing we were enemies of God - we rebelled against him -

B)Our own rebellion is what put us in bondage to sin

C)But God the Father sent his son on a rescue mission to - rescue his enemies

1)Those who rebelled against him

D)Who does that?

He doesn't rescue us and then rub our rebellion in our faces - or make us his prisoners

A)He Rescues us - and then Forgives us of all of our sin

B)Removes all of our guilt and shame - He gives us a completely fresh start -

C)Makes us a new creation - Old things have passed away - all things are made new.

But it gets better - He provides us with an inheritance

A) That means we are family - Who would do that - rescue an enemy - forgive them ?

B) And then Write them into the will ?

³ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, **reserved in heaven for you**, ⁵ who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time 1 Peter 1:3-5

C) But it doesn't stop there - He sanctifies us - means we are set apart as something special

D) Behold what manner of love the father has bestowed upon us - called sons and daughters of God

Behold = to look at and be amazed!

A) The Love of God - the forgiveness of God - the restoration of God is so INCREDIBLE

B) That is the power of the Gospel

C) Note the last line of V.18 - It is available to anyone who believes - those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

Paul is saying this was my mission and message

¹⁹ "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰ but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. ²¹ For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill *me*."

²² Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—²³ **that the Christ would suffer**, that He would be the first **to rise from the dead**, and would proclaim light to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles."

One reason: Jesus suffered and died - 3 days later Rose and is ALIVE - he changed my life- all about the RESURRECTION!

This brings us to our final point for today - the proper response to the Gospel

A) Consider the responses - 1st Festus

²⁴ Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!" **CRAZY DUDE**

B) That unfortunately is the response to some people today - stay blinded -

1) Makes no sense to them - that God would do that

C) For some - still blinded in their own willful ignorance to the reality of God at all.

D) They ignore the facts that Creation speaks of a Creator - the design speak to a designer

E) They ignore the evidence of the empty tomb

Paul addresses that mentality

²⁵ But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. ²⁶ For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner."

The life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus was not a secret.

A) And Paul makes this very clear. He says, THE KING knows what I am talking about

B) People today must answer to the reality - Jesus was a real person - lived - died - Rose

C) Paul turns his attention to King Agrippa -

²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe." ²⁸ Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."

²⁹ And Paul said, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains."

³⁰ When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them; ³¹ and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, "This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains."

³² Then Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

King Agrippa, Bernice, Festus - had it all.

A) Everything this world says will make a person happy - Power - position - possessions

B) They looked free - but in reality that were the ones in bondage - Chained to their own sin

C) They were the ones on trial - Weighed in the balances and found wanting

D) Agrippa - said You almost persuaded me to become a Christian - Almost is never good enough

Hey - I was close to following Jesus - that should account for something.

A) Jesus said - No neutral ground. For me or against me

A Tech Genius, a High School student, and a Pastor were flying in a three-passenger plane.

The pilot said, "It's not looking good, guys. Our engines are cutting out and we're going down.

The problem is, we have only three parachutes—and I'm taking one."

Realizing one of them would be left behind, the passengers looked at one another.

A) Immediately, the Tech Genius grabbed a chute, and said "Sorry, guys, but I've got to take this because I'm the smartest man in the world," as he jumped out the door.

B) The pastor then turned to the High School student and said, "I'm old and have had a good life.

The Lord is real to me. I know I'm going to heaven.

C) So you go ahead and take the last chute. I'll go down with the plane."

D) That is when the High School student said - That won't be necessary, you see "The smartest man in the world just jumped out with my backpack."

Listen it is the people who don't believe in Jesus who are the ones who are on trial today.

A) Many of them - refuse to respond to the gospel and give their lives to Jesus

B) Because they have grabbed a hold of something in this life - they thought could save them

1) Bring them lasting satisfaction -

C) They have put their identity into something that they thought was going to be life giving

1) Instead it is sucking the life right out of them

D) They are on a road that is heading toward destruction

1) They are looking for a rip cord that isn't there

Super Bowl today - Going for the 49ers

A) I love their QB's story - last pick in the draft - MR. Irrelevant - no chance - led the team to the SB

B) Purdy says this all the time- My identity is not in being a football player - QB for the 49ers

C) My Identity is in Jesus

D) Doesn't matter what this life throws at you - I am in good hands

Just like Paul knew He was going to Rome - we know we are going to heaven

A) We know the work Jesus has begun in us - complete

B) We know where we stand - Blind eyes opened - taken out of darkness

1) transferred from the Kingdom of Satan to the Kingdom of God

C) Given an inheritance - Reservation with my name on it

D) That can be yours today to - BELIEVE