

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

WHEN GOD TAKES YOU THE LONG WAY (Part II)

Acts 23:23 - 26:32

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There are four points to today's message which is a continuation of last week's message. Last week, I told you that:

- Paul was transferred to Caesarea.
- Paul appeared before Felix.

This week, I will share with you that:

- Paul appealed to Caesar.
- Paul questioned King Agrippa.

INTRODUCTION: To recap, Paul is imprisoned in Caesarea because the Jews accused him of a bunch of nonsense. The governor, Felix, heard the case presented by the Jewish leaders and listened to Paul's defense.

However, he never made a ruling. Time passed, and he left Paul in prison. A new governor comes to power, and his name is Porcius Festus. The Jews waste no time approaching him with their request to put Paul on trial. So...

PAUL APPEALED TO CAESAR

Before I read the scripture, I want you to understand the order of the Roman government leaders at this time:

- First, you have the governor – Festus
- Next in line you have the king – Agrippa
- Then there's the emperor – Caesar

SCRIPTURE: Acts 25:9-13

Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?”¹⁰ Paul answered: “I am now standing before Caesar’s court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well.¹¹ If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!”¹² After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!”¹³ A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus.

EXPLANATION: In chapter 23 of Acts, we read that certain Jewish men had taken an oath that they would not eat until Paul was dead. I wonder what happened to those men. It’s been two years, and we can assume they have eaten. However, their murderous desires have not changed. They could not kill Paul when he was in a Roman prison. So, hoping to ambush Paul on the way, they asked Festus to transfer him to Jerusalem to stand trial there.

As you may have gathered, justice during this time was hardly fair or consistent. These governors were tasked with the difficult assignment of keeping the peace and maintaining Roman law. Paul was in jail under two different governors and neither could find any reason to convict him. However, releasing Paul would anger the Jews, and angry Jews would disrupt the peace. Felix had already lost his position. Festus was in no hurry to follow.

So, Governor Festus walked a tightrope of pleasing both Rome and the Jewish leaders, because he represented so many Jews in his district.

- In an effort to compromise, the governor gave Paul the choice of returning to Jerusalem for trial.
- As a Roman citizen, Paul had the right to appeal to the highest possible authority, the emperor named Caesar. If a Roman citizen was accused of a crime, certain regulations were in place to make sure that they were treated fairly.
- Paul knew that if he was tried in Jerusalem, the outcome would not be good, so he decided to invoke his right to appeal to a higher court.

The Lord told him he would testify in Rome. So, Paul made a calculated decision to get himself removed from this jurisdiction. His appeal guaranteed he would be taken to Rome.

ILLUSTRATION: A young woman named Kylie was doing poorly in one of her college classes. One day the professor mentioned that he welcomed in-person office visits. The professor encouraged students who were having trouble to come to him and discuss the issues. Kylie decided to take him up on the offer. She made an appointment and talked with the professor about her grades. Kylie doesn't remember what he said, and she can't remember doing anything differently in the class in regards to her studies, but somehow Kylie managed to increase her grade. Because Kylie expressed a genuine concern for improvement and took the time to seek the professor's advice, she found favor in the eyes of the teacher who then rewarded her efforts.

If Kylie had chosen not to heed his advice and speak to him, would she have had the same result? If she complained about his teaching method or talked about him behind his back, would she have gained his favor?

APPLICATION: Paul was in a predicament. It wasn't the first, and it wouldn't be his last. Even when he knew he had done no wrong, even when he recognized the corruption of the political system in which he was entangled, Paul acted and spoke with self-restraint and respect for those who were listening.

As believers, we know the proper way we should treat one another and the way we should be treated. Unfortunately, the Bible makes it clear that this world is not our home, and trouble is inevitable. How do we handle it when we are mistreated? What do we say when things don't go our way? Probably all of us want everyone to know we were wronged, and we want the wrong against us to be made right!

These are little troubles, especially when compared to Paul's imprisonment, but we face aggravations every day. Paul provided an example of how to handle difficult people and situations. Even when he invoked his right of appeal, he didn't complain. He didn't accuse. He didn't threaten. He spoke calmly and respectfully.

EXPLANATION: Now, there is a little twist to the story, which is very, very interesting! So Festus was a new governor. Well, King Agrippa and his wife came

to see him before Festus could have Paul transferred. Festus discussed the case with King Agrippa, and the whole company once again listened to Paul's defense and testimony.

NEXT, WE SEE THAT PAUL QUESTIONED KING AGRIPPA

SCRIPTURE: Acts 26:22-32

But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—²³ that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”²⁴ At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.”²⁵ “I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable.²⁶ The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”²⁸ Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”²⁹ Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.”³⁰ The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them.³¹ After they left the room, they began saying to one another, “This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment.”³² Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

EXPLANATION: Governor Festus ruled over Judea, and King Agrippa II ruled over the territories outside of Judea. Although they had important titles like governor and king, really they were little more than puppets for the Roman government.

King Agrippa II was the eighth and last ruler of the Herodian dynasty (family of Herod rulers). He was also the brother of Felix's wife, Drusilla, and of the woman who accompanied him on this trip, Bernice. History records that King Agrippa II and Bernice were involved in an incestuous relationship. I'm sure Paul knew this when he appeared before the group.

King Agrippa was familiar with the Jewish faith and Paul likely knew that. When Governor Festus accused him of being insane, Paul turned his attention to the king.

Since Paul's arrest at the temple, he had spoken to multiple groups of people including Jewish religious leaders, Roman guards, two governors, and now a king. He presented his defense, but he also used the opportunities to witness. However, he never really gave what we would refer to as an altar call until now. Paul, recognizing that his time in this court was limited, asked King Agrippa's opinion on the message he'd just heard. Notice that King Agrippa failed to answer. Instead of answering Paul's question, he diverted attention away from himself by asking another question.

Could King Agrippa have been under the conviction of the Holy Spirit? There is no way for us to know, but Paul did what he needed to do. He told him about Jesus and gave him the opportunity to respond.

CONCLUSION: God was taking Paul to Rome, but he was taking him by a long, hard road. The way in which Paul handled his difficulties provides an example for us to follow when our journeys seem long and hard.

We may not know or understand it, but God always has a reason for allowing trials. Sometimes, it may be that our trials are opportunities for us to share Jesus with someone. Therefore, we should be ready to share his word and our testimonies. But, remember, it's hard for people to take us seriously as followers of Christ if we are reacting with impatience, frustration, and anger. Our responses to difficult people and circumstances should be different than how the world reacts. Before they will listen to what we have to say, they will be watchful. So, we must be self-controlled and respectful. Then, when God opens the doors for us to speak and points us in the right direction, we must remember that no person is beyond redemption. While we cannot make them choose to follow, we, like Paul, can share the gospel message and give them the opportunity to respond.

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Thanks to Jennifer Anderson for her editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Nashville, Tennessee
USA