

Punt or Pass? Acts 25

Mother's day...

Sara, willing to birth baby at 100 years old

Timothy mother and grandma spoken of for their faith

Elizabeth, JTB

Mary, gave birth to Jesus

Samuel mother, **Hannah** prayed with tears, stood her ground when falsely accused of drunkenness

Widow of Zapheth

1 Kings 17: 10 When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" 11 As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."

12 "As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die."

13 Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. 14 For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.'"

Mom was willing to put God first, and her son and her were saved from famine, later saved from death when the boy died...

Setting, Caesarea, Jerusalem, Caesarea again, AD 62

Characters, Festus, Paul, King Agrippa, Bernice his sister

Plot Paul is going to be under the scrutiny of new gov. Festus. The Jewish leaders try to seize the opportunity to kill Paul once again. King Agrippa and Bernice will come with a fan fare to see what all the fuss is about this preacher Paul anyway. With the continued persecution from the Jews will Paul finally have had enough, will he give up? It's 4th and 1 on the 50 yrd line, will Paul punt or pass? Will he go for it or give up?

Paul, was a missionary man, church planter, gospel preacher, doctrine writer, culture connector...of the gospel., Finder of common ground to connect the good news of Jesus resurrected to hearts of every human in the known world. The news he had to share was the greatest show on earth....it was the greatest "show" of hope! You would think this great news would be welcome news.

But that just isn't the way it was received. Isn't that the way it goes with us sometimes? We set out to help someone in need, we offer some good advice trying to help, friend takes it the wrong way, think we are judging them or attacking them, and they turn on us.

All Paul wanted to see happen is people coming to know Jesus, as their Lord and Savior. He wanted to mend the holes in the hearts of every person, Jew, Greek, Gentile, Roman... But that's not how the story went.

In fact the people not only rejected the message, they wanted to shoot the messenger, time and time and time again in fact! How would Paul deal with this? Is he finally at his breaking point? Will he just give up and let the foolish folks "have it their way"?

Maybe a question for us to ponder going through this chapter will be, how should I respond in the same position? Why was Paul able to withstand the onslaught of enemy attacks and still have compassion for the deplorable?

Paul was given a platform to speak from, a people to speak to, and he had good news to share! So do we.

Acts 24 Left off, Paul in Caesarea with Felix the fearful, Felix the governor, procrastinator, wicked seducer of woman, Drusilla King Agrippa the 1sts daughter.

Paul preached righteousness, self control, judgement to come. Paul in chains was actually Paul in charge.

At the end of last week's chapter there was a quick sudden shift in Roman leadership....Felix was out, Festus was in...

27 After two years went by in this way, Felix was succeeded by **Porcius Festus**. And because Felix wanted to gain favor with the Jewish people, he left Paul in prison.

Porky, Pig, festive pig

Three days after Festus arrived in Caesarea to take over his new responsibilities, he left for Jerusalem, **2** where the leading priests and other Jewish leaders met with him and made their accusations against Paul. **3** They asked Festus as a favor to transfer Paul to Jerusalem (planning to ambush and kill him on the way). **4** But Festus replied that Paul was at Caesarea and he himself would be returning there soon. **5** So he said, "Those of you in authority can return with me. If Paul has done anything wrong, you can make your accusations."

Festus was a different guy than Felix. He was a wise & good leader, first thing he does, 3 days in, goes to Jerusalem. Why? Seaside city for the landlocked land in the desert?

Jerusalem most important city in Israel. Festus knew the best way to lead a people is to be relational with the people. He heads to Jerusalem just 3 days after being in office to meet with the Jewish leaders.

What would be the first thing on the Jewish leaders minds? Felix was an unruly, unfair governor. Sure they would want to change many of the practices of the local Roman officials under the new leadership. Clean up the unfair treatment of the Jewish people, offer up some more protection from invading banditos...?

2 the leading priests and other Jewish leaders met with him... and made their accusations against Paul.

It had been two whole years since the religious leaders tried to take Paul into custody. The extremists, the zealots had already tried to plan an ambush with 40 skilled assassins, foiled by the leading hand of God. 2 years Paul had been in Caesarea in prison, on house arrest. 2 years the guy was off the streets, out of the picture, away from their personal "holy place" , Paul seemed like he was no longer a threat or influence....

First thing the religious leaders mention to the new administration is **PAUL**.

3 They asked Festus as a favor to transfer Paul to Jerusalem (planning to ambush and kill him on the way).

Festus was in Jerusalem, as leader governor of Israel, but make no mistake, he was also trying to gain the favor of the Jews. A good leader, ruler, diplomat, knows you can rule more effectively through good relations than with an iron fist....

The Jewish leaders see the opportunity, they have a trump card, wild card... Decide to use it to get Paul lured back to Jerusalem. But not for a trial. They know any fair trial will give Paul his freedom, he was after all, innocent.

So badly did the religious leaders want Paul out of the picture, they were willing to commit murder. *These were religious men, religious leaders.* Their actions show the danger of religion that is not in **true contact with God**. If your religion makes you a liar and a murderer, there is something wrong with your religion.

"We see a growth of corruption. In [Acts 23](#), where the plot to murder Paul was first launched, we find that it was the zealots who were responsible. Now, in [Acts 25](#), we find that the leaders are initiating the very thing they were only partially involved in earlier." (Boice)

Sin and selfish ambition don't just maintain their level, the depths of sin continue to sink to new lows.

There was a spiritual battle being waged here against Paul. It really makes no sense that these guys (religious leaders!) would be pursuing Paul so adamantly for so long, for nothing worthy of persecution!

Make no mistake, there is a spiritual battle being waged against the believer in Christ.

What about the non-believer? Is there a battle against them...sort of...**Prisoners of war!**

2 Timothy 2.24 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, **patiently enduring evil**, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and **escape from the snare of the devil**, after being captured by him to do his will.

The enemy takes his prisoners. Don't believe me? Look at the world we live in, opiate epidemic, teen suicide, hatred among races, anti this anti that, we live in a country that is anti everything, ME.com nation (entitlement is a prison cell).

Depression in western world is higher than that of 3rd world countries, RI rated highest depression rate in US, Mass not far behind (NE was highest region in the country!). If you think satan isn't on the move, taking prisoners, look again. Ask God to give you gospel lenses

...The religious leaders were under the influence of the enemy forces. The battle goes on, the war continues, the attacks keep coming, prisoners are held captive while the gates of hell charge forward...

I share these truths as arming information not for fearful intimidation. The enemy of God has no power over the believer. He may taunt, tempt, and tease, even tickle our selfish appetite....but gates of hell shall not prevail against God's church!

Jesus was victorious when He went to the cross...our Savior, our King, Lord, Leader, lover of our souls, He is the bright morning star, the defender of the weak, Jesus is our advocate when the devil speaks out in accusation against us. Not spirit of fear... the biggest, greatest fear known to mankind was squashed on the cross, and annihilated in the resurrection.

Whether it be it by miracle or the natural, God steps in and only allows what He knows will bring Him glory and our joy, through suffering and tragedy and difficulty comes great depth...the greatest growth happens when the roots grow the deepest. Tragedy, sorrow causes us to dig deep, reaching for the Rocks to cling to in the coming storms. What satan means for evil, God causes only good to come for the believer.

Festus, knowing their intent or not, didn't give in to their demands. He told the leaders, "If you have something to say against this man, come and make your accusations in the proper manner." Festus was a pretty stand up ruler.

6 About eight or ten days later Festus returned to Caesarea, and on the following day he took his seat in court and ordered that Paul be brought in. **7** When Paul arrived, the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem gathered around and made many serious accusations they couldn't prove. **8** Paul denied the charges. "I am not guilty of any crime against the Jewish laws or the Temple or the Roman government," he said. **9** Then Festus, wanting to please the Jews, asked him, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there?"

Jewish leaders follow Festus to Caesarea, hoping to "get Paul" somehow. So they falsely accuse Paul of all sorts of things, none of which they could prove.

Think about this, all this time, all these leaders, all this corruption, and none of them could come up with some believable accusations with corroborating evidence and a few witnesses to get Paul thrown in jail? It's only the Hand of God...

Paul points out the simple truth here.... I am not guilty, there is no evidence. Festus pulls a fast one here, trying to make the Jews happy, protect his political career, he tries to get Paul back to Jerusalem again to be tried...

10 But Paul replied, “No! This is the official Roman court, so I ought to be tried right here. You know very well I am not guilty of harming the Jews. **11** If I have done something worthy of death, **I don’t refuse to die**. But if I am innocent, no one has a right to turn me over to these men to kill me. I appeal to Caesar!” **12** Festus conferred with his advisers and then replied, “Very well! You have appealed to Caesar, and to Caesar you will go!”

It’s one thing to be tried for something you’ve done, to be charged with a crime you committed. It’s another altogether to be accused of something you didn’t do, especially when you are living uprightly! Paul says, I’m willing to die if I’ve done something punishable by death, but you know I haven’t, Festus!

I appeal to Caesar...send this case to the Supreme Court

Man, I bet Festus was relieved here when Paul, a Roman citizen appealed to Caesar, every Roman had the right to ask to be seen by Caesar for a fair trial. That’s what Paul did here.... But not for the reason we might think. Might think Paul knew his best chances at a fair trial given the option of Jerusalem or Rome, were in Rome.

Not the case, Paul’s character, disciple making history tells us a different story! Paul was obedient to God’s word, grateful to God, as a result, he loved God’s people. God’s word said, “**you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles**” (Matt 10:18).

He was on a mission to save... not himself, but to save others. This wasn’t a self preservation “act” this was a HS act, an **others based** motive filled Paul’s desire to go to Rome...he had a message to share, and he was willing to lay down his very life to share it! Paul was committed to God’s cause!

Festus may have been relieved to not have Felix’s mess on his plate anymore, but there is also a problem with this. How can he send an innocent man to be tried by Caesar himself without any valid charges? But help was on the way for Festus...

13 A few days later **King Agrippa** arrived with his sister, **Bernice**, to pay their **respects to Festus**. **14** During their stay of several days, Festus discussed Paul’s case with the king. “There is a prisoner here,” he told him, “whose case was left for me by Felix. **15** When I was in Jerusalem, the leading priests and Jewish elders pressed charges against him and asked me to condemn him. **16** I pointed out to them that Roman law does not convict people without a trial. They must be given an opportunity to confront their accusers and defend themselves.

Coming from north of Galilee, King Agrippa II & Bernice

Agrippa 2 was a king appointed by the Romans. Part of a line of Herods. Family dynasty of kings, that would end here at Herod Agrippa 2. He would be the last one of his family.

His Grandfather was **Herod the Great** who killed all the baby boys under age 2 in Bethlehem in an assassination attempt on Jesus’ life. **Herod Antipas**, the tetrarch, had JTB killed. His father was

Herod Agrippa that had James killed. This Herod Agrippa 2nd, was not the kind of company you may want to see if you were Paul!

Bernice, his sister, and Agrippa's wife!...she was also Drusilla's sister, remember Felix's wife. Bernice would marry, remarry, and marry again various kings, and leaders, she was an opportunist to say the least!

Festus explains the situation to Agrippa hoping he can help since Agrippa knows more about Jewish customs, being the king of the nearby region, maybe he could offer some advice?

17 "When his accusers came here for the trial, I didn't delay. I called the case the very next day and ordered Paul brought in. **18** But the accusations made against him weren't any of the crimes I expected. **19** Instead, *it was something about their religion and a dead man named Jesus, who Paul insisted is alive!*

There is the whole thing, the whole reason Paul was actually on trial. The point of contention, the tipping point of the scales... is **the resurrection of Jesus Christ**. There was a dead man named Jesus, who Paul insisted is alive! In fact it is the very reason Paul is able to go on, continue, & persevere. Because Jesus is alive, Paul presses forward!

Festus doesn't know what to make of this, he was at a loss!

20 *I was at a loss to know how to investigate these things*, so I asked him whether he would be willing to stand trial on these charges in Jerusalem. **21** But Paul appealed to have his case decided by the emperor. So I ordered that he be held in custody until I could arrange to send him to Caesar."

Festus seems to be consulting King Agrippa here, looking for some advice on how to rule well, fairly, legally, diplomatically (Happy Israel...happy pig!), and keep in good standing with the Caesar, Augustus, Nero...

22 "I'd like to hear the man myself," Agrippa said. And Festus replied, "You will—tomorrow!"

You see what is happening here? Paul's preaching, the message of hope was spreading like wildfire, all while Paul was on house arrest. Paul couldn't go to the world...The world was coming to Paul!

the gospel news was getting to the key leaders across the land. And all through what appears to you and me to be "such a tragic turn of events for such a faithful servant of God" . "Poor Paul", we might say... not so!

How do you look at tragedy and difficulties? What about when you are unfairly judged or accused? Do you see it as opportunity for the gospel to shine, or do you take on the Eor approach? "Poor me, I guess I'm just not meant for comfort and ease" NO, you're not!

I believe Paul had great joy bubbling up from inside him as he had opportunity after opportunity present itself to him to share the hope he has within him. Paul was on mission, I am on mission, you have been commissioned to be on mission...what will your answer be in the face of fiery trials?

What follows the next day is a fanfare of arrogance & extravagance, and grandiose pomp... The important people were coming, the king is coming...

23 So the next day Agrippa and Bernice arrived at the **auditorium with great pomp**, accompanied by military officers and prominent men of the city. Festus ordered that Paul be brought in. **24** Then Festus said, "King Agrippa and all who are here, this is the man whose death is demanded by all the Jews, both here and in Jerusalem. **25** But in my opinion he has done nothing deserving death. However, since he appealed his case to the emperor, I have decided to send him to Rome.

26 "But what shall I write the emperor? For there is no clear charge against him. So I have brought him before all of you, and especially you, King Agrippa, so that after we examine him, I might have something to write. **27** For it makes no sense to send a prisoner to the emperor without specifying the charges against him!"... We are going to see how Paul deals with all this next week. It is actually Paul's longest speech or dissertation in the entire book of Acts. We are going to find out how Paul responded to people being all over him, and the attacks of the enemy...

Paul has a captive audience, the stage is set, tune in next week, but before we go a message from our sponsors!

Take a few minutes to look at 3 stories in the Bible. All dealing with attacks from the enemy, each having a very different response and reason for the response...

Psalms 55, David's response to enemy attacks, self preservation, God's justice, destruction

1 Give ear to my prayer, O God,
and hide not yourself from my plea for mercy!

2 Attend to me, and answer me;
I am restless in my complaint and I moan,
3 because of the noise of the enemy,
because of the oppression of the wicked.

For they drop trouble upon me,
and in anger they bear a grudge against me.

4 My heart is in anguish within me;
the terrors of death have fallen upon me.

5 Fear and trembling come upon me,
and horror overwhelms me.

6 And I say, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest;

7 yes, I would wander far away;
I would lodge in the wilderness; Selah

8 I would hurry to find a shelter
from the raging wind and tempest."

9 Destroy, O Lord, divide their tongues;
for I see violence and strife in the city.

23 But you, O God, will cast them down
into the pit of destruction;
men of blood and treachery

shall not live out half their days.
But I will trust in you.

Peter James & John response to adversity, enemy attacks, destroy them, lop off an ear

James and John **Luke 9:51** When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. 53 But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. 54 And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55 But he turned and rebuked them. 56 And they went on to another village.

Peter **John 18:4** Jesus fully realized all that was going to happen to him, so he stepped forward to meet them. "Who are you looking for?" he asked. 5 "Jesus the Nazarene," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.) 6 As Jesus said "I am he," they all drew back and fell to the ground! 7 Once more he asked them, "Who are you looking for?" And again they replied, "Jesus the Nazarene." 8 "I told you that I am he," Jesus said. "And since I am the one you want, let these others go." 9 He did this to fulfill his own statement: "I did not lose a single one of those you have given me." 10 Then Simon Peter drew a sword and slashed off the right ear of Malchus, the high priest's slave. 11 But Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Shall I not drink from the cup of suffering the Father has given me?"

David was into self preservation, he wanted God to spare him, and then give them what they deserve, send them to hell Lord! David didn't yet know the gospel news of JC.

Peter, James John, they were into, "an eye for an eye", & they wanted to do the eye poking, ear plucking themselves, they seemed to want to send them to hell themselves! They hadn't yet received their orders to bring the gospel of love under persecution, no matter the cost.

But Paul's approach, his perspective was different from King David, different from pre-resurrection PJ&J. Paul's approach was one to save and see people, set free. But why? Why did Paul have a different perspective altogether? It was found in verse **19, it was something about their religion and a dead man named Jesus, who Paul insisted is alive!**

Paul saw his audience from a very different perspective than most. He saw his persecutors as victims of blindness rather than vicious scoundrels. They looked at Paul as if he was the prisoner, but in truth it was Paul who was free, and them that were prisoners... And he wasn't going home until he took as many prisoners as he could!

Matthew 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, **Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,** 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. God makes the sun rise on all people, just and unjust in the hope that they would reach for Him, grope for Him. knowing that He will be found by them...

Acts 17:26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 so that

they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us...

Paul's entire audience he saw as prisoners of war, rather than enemies to be conquered or destroyed.. Paul was there to win them back, to take back what the enemy stole and victimized. To give sight to the blind, hope to the hopeless, that's the cause of Christ. Paul has a captive audience here. He's Paul in charge not Paul in chains. He sees the crowd, they are in his sights. Ready, Aim..... next week, get ready for fire! Paul will share his testimony in the courts in the hopes that *they will be free*, not be freed himself!

How can Paul look at his situation and these people with such compassion? Because Jesus IS ALIVE. Because Jesus is alive, we are alive. *Because* Jesus is alive he has sent us to share the message of hope, in the hope that the prisoners will hear, believe, see, and be saved by our Lord and King, the true Father of light.

How will you treat the lost, lonely, sick, depraved...when they dump all over you this week? Put on your gospel lenses, see things for how they really are, put out your arms of hope in the form of a gospel life... Don't be afraid to share the joy you have found when the opportunity comes up, you have a captive audience in times of trouble. Use your time this week, God is with you!

Will Paul punt or pass...tune in next week!