

Acts 25 Serving a King – Living in a Democracy 11/6/16

Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. ² And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him,³ asking as a favor against Paul^[a] that he summon him to Jerusalem—because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way. ⁴ Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. ⁵ “So,” said he, “let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him.” ⁶ After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. ⁷ When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove. ⁸ Paul argued in his defense, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense.” ⁹ But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, “Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?” ¹⁰ But Paul said, “I am standing before Caesar’s tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. ¹¹ If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.” ¹² Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, “To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.” ¹³ Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus. ¹⁴ And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul’s case before the king, saying, “There is a man left prisoner by Felix, ¹⁵ and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. ¹⁶ I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him. ¹⁷ So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. ¹⁸ When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. ¹⁹ Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive.²⁰ Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted

to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them. ²¹ But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar.”²² Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I would like to hear the man myself.” “Tomorrow,” said he, “you will hear him.” ²³ So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. ²⁴ And Festus said, “King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. ²⁵ But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. ²⁶ But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. ²⁷ For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him.”

(Pastor prays)

The next time we meet together as a church, the elections and, mercifully, all their ads, will be over. There will be a new President-elect along with many other new government officials. Depending on how the elections go, our religious freedoms will continue to be restricted, maybe even abolished. And depending on who's elected, we must decide *now* how we're going to live *then*. How are we going to serve a monarch – a king? We are living in an eroding democracy. I really think it's God's kindness to us to have us in Acts 25 two days before such an election. We need guidance on how to live and confidence in what we believe to bolster our hope for a good tomorrow.

While reading about Paul and his ministry, I was struck by the number of politicians who come in and out of his life, all of them having a direct influence on his well-being and none of them controlling his destiny: Not Ananias, the high priest. Not Felix or Drucilla. Not Festus. Not Agrippa or Bernice. Not even the mad man Nero who's the Caesar in Rome that Paul appeals to. It's important for us to *get* this: that although elections have consequences, those consequences don't change our mission. We live in our Father's world but it's a world that has fallen, afflicted and saturated with sin. The whole creation groans. The very air we breathe--and Dasani water we drink--is putrefied with sin so that even the best intentions and noblest acts and rarest things of

beauty are garnished with squalor, a squalor that has seeped into the pores of our skin and chambers of our hearts so that we are totally, thoroughly and wholeheartedly sinful.

But God in His goodness has given us one precise beaming laser of hope: Jesus Christ, who, although Himself fully God, took the form of man and lived the one perfect life, gaining righteousness, then (knowing crime must be punished), died in the place of sinners and, through the resurrection of Christ, broke the curse of sin and death; and now Jesus is King and offers life to sinners living in this sinful and fallen world.

That is the sum total of Paul's life and he lived his life in real time and political upheaval and he did what I want to do, he served a King – King Jesus, regardless of who sat on the puny earthly throne. I'd like to read a little, set the context and draw out a few points of application. (Pastor reads v. 1-12). If Jesus is Lord, there are some things to remember:

A Blameless Life Is an Honor to God

Remember, several times now Paul has been on trial and now, once again, Festus has Paul on trial. Notice how the events unfold. Start in v. 6-8, *6 After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. 7 When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove. 8 Paul argued in his defense, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense."* Then we will see it again at the end of the chapter in v. 26-27. *26 But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. 27 For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him."*

Festus has Agrippa listen to Paul just to see if he can come up with some legitimate reasons to punish him but he never does. He's being mistreated because he believes in the atoning work of Christ and the power of the resurrection. Listen, you can never underestimate the power of an innocent and blameless testimony. What I mean is that your *life* is proof that you follow Jesus Christ. Press it a little further. Our lives should

be so solid, our work as employees so good, our behavior as children and respect as spouses, our lives should be so *solid* in every way that any accusation against us is false.

The only accusation people should be able to make against us is they can't stand our Christianity. This is something to remember if you are in a heated political debate at work or in your neighborhood. The election will be over Tuesday and you will still be neighbors and co-workers with people who need Christ. God put you in people's lives as a witness. You are the word of the Gospel to the people in your life, so remember: a blameless life is an honor to God and a platform for the Gospel.

Political Drama Affects Us But Doesn't Control Us

To see this, you have to look at the big picture of Paul's life. His life, especially the last few years, has been dominated by politics. A high priest made accusations, Felix put him in jail for 2 years. Politics. Festus comes to power and presses him to yield to the Jews. Politics. Then he has Agrippa listen to him because Paul has appealed to Nero – a mad politician. It feels like his life is being bounced around by politics and it would be real easy, it could be real easy, to lose hope, especially where we find him. He's appealed to Nero. Go read about Nero sometime. It's times like that, and times like this, when it is good for us to be reminded: God is governing the world. The Bible is overwhelmingly clear that God governs and works things – all things – for His own glory. Isn't that what God says in Isaiah 46:9-10? *remember the former things of old;*

for I am God, and there is no other;

I am God, and there is none like me,

¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning

and from ancient times things not yet done,

saying, 'My counsel shall stand,

and I will accomplish all my purpose,'

We serve a King who is in control. Isn't that what Daniel said in Daniel 2:20-21?

Daniel answered and said:

*“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
to whom belong wisdom and might.*

*21 He changes times and seasons;
he removes kings and sets up kings;
he gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to those who have understanding;*

Yes, you should vote, vote Biblical pro-life convictions, and then trust a sovereign God, Why? Because Proverbs 21:1 says, *The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.* We cast our vote and trust. Proverbs 16:33 says, *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.* And as a Christian, this logic and approach to life frees us from worry and assures us in times of great stress.

This truth tells us we can live like Paul in a time of political and social upheaval. We can wake up with resolve in the morning in the face of sorrow and heart break. Remember what Jesus said about the ruling goodness that doesn't stop with elections. The sovereign rule of God extends to our day-to-day lives. R.C. Sproul said, “there is not one maverick molecule.” Jesus said in Matthew 10:29, *Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.*

So in the middle of panic and pain, elections and work, and sickness and death, you can trust Him, a good and holy creator who created you in His own image to live for His glory. But because of your sin, you are unable to do that. He has provided Jesus, who lived perfectly and died sacrificially. God raised Him from the dead.

Believe. We live in a democracy and I thank God for that. We live in a democracy...but we serve a King.

(Pastor prays)