

Acts 25

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Date: 09 August 2015

Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 00] On page 934, Acts 25. Alright, let me read this for us, starting with verse 27.

When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Portius Festus, and desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison. Now three days after Festus had arrived on the province, he went up to Jerusalem, to hold Caesarea.

And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their peace against Paul and the Jews, asking as a favor against Paul and he summoned him to Jerusalem, because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way.

Festus replied that Paul was being come to Caesarea, and he himself intended to go there shortly. So, said he, let the men of authority among you go down with him. If there is anything wrong about the man, let them break charges against him.

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 at the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. When he had arrived, the Jews were come down, and Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many serious charges against him that they could not prove.

[1 : 10] Paul argued in his defense, neither against all the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar, have I committed any offense. But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem?

Can there be tried on these charges before me? But Paul said, I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, for I ought to be tried. To the Jews, I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well.

If then I am wrong, you are going to have committed anything for which I deserve to die. I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing but their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I have to as a Caesar.

Then Festus came and conferred with his counsel, answered, To Caesar, you have a meal. To Caesar, you shall go. Now in some days in the past, Agrippa the king and her niece arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus.

And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid a false case before the king, saying, There is a man left prisoner by feelings, 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.

[2 : 17] 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 of it against him. So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day, I took my seat to the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought.

When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. Rather, they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but who all asserted to be alive.

Being at a false side of investigating these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and we tried there regarding him. The colonel had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor. I ordered him to be held until I could save him to see him.

Then a crampus said to Festus, I would look at the man myself. Tomorrow's the end of the year. Well, here we are.

We're nearing the end of the book of Acts. And as Luke draws his account from the early church to a close, he's presenting us with the account of Paul's trials and defense. Five times, we find here, Paul will be brought before various authorities.

[3 : 31] And each time, he will offer a speech. And here in chapter 25, this is the fourth of these defenses. Next week, we'll get to the climax of Paul and chapter 26. But for now, you know, it's worth asking, isn't it, why is Luke spending so much time recounting this part of Paul's life?

Maybe you're wondering the same thing. I mean, for the last four weeks, if you've been following our sermon series, Paul has been in prison, defending himself against baseless charges.

I mean, for a whole month here at Trinity, it's like the record has been skipping. Each week, Paul in prison, in defense. And you know what? We have two more chapters to go.

Why is Luke spending so much time on this part of the story? Well, on the one hand, he's building a case for Paul's innocence, isn't he? That's pretty obvious. And in doing so, Luke is showing that not just Paul, but the church itself is innocent of any accusations that are being thrown against it as being perhaps bad for the state or bad for society.

But you know, more than that, we need to remember that Luke is writing his two-volume work, what we call the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles.

[4 : 45] He's writing this two-volume work to his young friend, Theophilus. And he's writing so that Theophilus and other Christians like him might have certainty concerning the things they've been taught.

That's what Luke says in the beginning of this whole work of the chapter 1. In other words, this is a work of discipleship. That is what he's writing. And so there are important things that we're meant to see in these chapters so that our grasp of the faith might grow deeper and more secure.

And I think one of the things that we see dealt with here in chapter 25 along these lines is the issue of injustice. After all, is it the injustice of the world and the injustice that we sometimes face in our own lives one of the things that can shake our faith?

When things aren't right, we can often wonder whether there's any substance to what we believe. So let's take a look at how this theme unfolds in chapter 25 so that we might grow in our certainty concerning the things we're being taught.

And I think as we open up this chapter, the first thing that we see is this. Don't let injustice shake your faith. Don't let injustice shake your faith.

[6 : 16] But chapter 25 opens. Did you catch that? Paul has been in prison for two years. And for no other reason than the fact that Felix was waiting for a bribe.

Paul is the evicta of injustice. There's no real case against him if you can follow it along. The authorities of Jerusalem are trying to condemn him for flouting the law, defiling the temple, causing civil unrest, but they can't prove any of these charges.

They don't have a single witness to bring before Felix or Festus here in 25. And Felix knows that none of these charges are true back in 24, but he leaves Paul in prison anyway, hoping to get some money out of all of his friends.

And that goes on for two years, and Felix finally is replaced by Festus. You know, historically, we know that Festus wasn't very much liked by the Jews, so they ended up petitioning Rome to have him removed.

They sent a delegation to the capital, made their case, and Felix was fired, so Festus gets the job. Not exactly the kind of shoes you want to be following him. And as soon as Festus arrives around 59 AD, the authorities in Jerusalem were making their move against Paul once more, again plotting to kill him in an ambush, just like they tried back in chapter 23.

[7 : 36] Of course, again, there's a deep irony here, isn't there, that the ones who are so zealous for the purity of the law are actually more than willing to break the law in order to get rid of Paul.

They're happy for the ends to justify the means. And isn't that so often the reality of the unjust world that we live in? But you know, at first, Festus seems like a breath of fresh air, doesn't he?

He refuses their request to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, and as soon as he gets back to Caesarea, he opens Paul's case and brings him in for the hearing. It seems that with Festus, someone is finally going to do the right thing for Paul.

But how quickly things change. In verse 9, Festus wares. He sees an opportunity to do the Jews' effect for him. He tries to send Paul back to Jerusalem.

And it seems like the doors of injustice are again closing in around Paul. Two years he's been waiting for his just acquittal, and now we think from back to the Romans.

[8 : 49] The world is an unjust place. Of course, we know that. You know, read a newspaper, watch the news, live your life, and you see injustice all the time.

And yet, isn't Luke taking all those special pains here to show us how Paul is personally undergoing injustice in these chapters?

It's almost as if to tell us that we shouldn't be shocked or surprised if the same thing happens to us. The world's an unjust place, Theophilus.

Don't be spiritually rocked or emotionally devastated or paralyzed to respond if some of that injustice hits you personally. In fact, you can expect it at some point or another.

Christians live in the world. And if the world's an unjust place, then it's something we don't experience injustice. And maybe all this seems obvious.

[9 : 58] And it is. But I wonder, friend, have you ever questioned your belief in Christ when you've seen injustice in the world or experienced it in your own life?

Has it ever rocked your certainty leaving a strain of doubt rippling in its wake? Well, Luke here is trying to give us a more robust and realistic picture of discipleship and what it means to really follow Jesus.

Creation groans under the weight of injustice and believers will often join in that group. Now, is that a cause to abandon belief in God?

Certainly not. After all, the very cry of your heart for things to be made right, the very cry of your heart for justice, your very deep sense that things are not the way they're supposed to be, all of that inner groaning is a sign that you're made in the image of the living God.

All of that is a sign that you're more than just a different matter and time and chance. all that's a sign to God's reality.

[11 : 17] After all, if life were just atoms colliding into atoms, what sense would we have that things should be different after all? The strong would eat the weak and that's not things would just be. We might not like it, but we couldn't say it's unjust.

We couldn't say it's not right. But friends, don't you see that injustice awaits in us? a deep echo of something that many of us have almost forgotten.

We see the injustice of the world and our heart cries out for something to be made right. It's a deep echo of something that we've almost forgotten. That this world is God's.

And God is a God of peace and justice. And as humans made in His image, we want the world to be put right with anger. Like watchmen long for the morning of the Psalms that said.

Like watchmen long for the morning we long for God's kingdom to come in place. So Luke's reminding us that the world is an unjust place.

[12 : 31] Not a reason to abandon faith in God but a reminder that we will often grow under its weight so don't let injustice surprise and appreciate your faith. The second point we see here is this that in this unjust world we are to pursue justice with integrity.

Notice how Paul in verse 8 responds to the charges. It's quite simple and straightforward isn't it? Neither against the law of the Jews nor against the temple nor against Caesar have I committed any offense. He calmly clearly and with integrity declares what's right and what's true.

You know this is not the fourth time as we've said that he's had to defend himself. This is the second time he's done it before this very same tribunal in Caesarea but isn't it amazing that again with the same sort of composure and integrity he lays out his case.

And notice he's not just out to sort of win an argument and to save his skin. Look at verse 11. I mean it's not if I'm a wrongdoer if I've done something that deserves death then I'm willing to accept that sentence.

He's perfectly willing to be justly tried in sentence. He cares about justice. Paul cares about what's right but he's also willing to pursue what's right through the means available.

[13 : 56] And so he appeals to Caesar. Seeing that Thessalonians is not going to judge his case with integrity he uses the means available to him as a running citizen to try to get a fair trial.

Send him to Caesar he says send him to him. And notice what Paul isn't doing here as he appeals to Caesar on the one hand he's not simply resigning himself to the injustice around him.

That could have been easy to do he could have said this must just be my fate and given up and gone to Jerusalem. And on the other hand Paul wasn't kicking and screaming and raging demanding his rights he wasn't disrespecting all the authorities around him Jewish or Roman he wasn't seeking any way possible to get out from under this kangaroo court I mean after all why not escape for jail if you're being adjusted to help or not break out why not escape at night why not pay the bribe if you're there under false accusations don't the ends justify the means hasn't all sense of justice utterly collapsed in this bond group of law but no Paul wasn't falling off either side of it he wasn't getting up and he wasn't angerfully using any means possible instead he was pursuing justice with integrity now most of us tend to tip one way or the other don't we some of us avoid conflict like the plague

I confess I often fall into that category we passively accept our faith never speaking up never standing up maybe we even kind of dress it up in theological language this must be the Lord's will we say but that's not the example we see here is it Paul believes in God's sovereignty oh yes but he still acts and pursues what's right but if some of us avoid conflict some of us are fighters and we'll do whatever it takes to stand up for what we think are our rights even if it means playing the game and bending the truth and fighting fire fire and yet the example of Paul here shows us a calmness confidence a courage to pursue justice with integrity but you know this way that

Luke is sort of showing us in the apostle Paul pursuing justice doing the right thing doing it with integrity it's hard isn't it I don't know about you but I often feel more like Festus in this story than Paul Festus starts out with really good intentions not willing to be swayed but when the pressure comes when faced with a hard but clear decision to do the right thing when the pressure comes he caves look again at verse 9 he knows the case against Paul is not a leg to stand on and yet he also sees that it would be advantageous to keep the Jerusalem of the four days happy why not do them a favor and get started on the right foot he thinks have they made life hard for his predecessor Felix have they got him fired why not do their good side

[17 : 56] Felix knows the right thing and he waves instead of pursuing justice with integrity he gives in the pressure and fear haven't you been there I know I have enough and look at the trouble it creates Festus drives his end all back to Jerusalem tries to win some favor with the local authorities and Paul appeals to Caesar and suddenly Festus is in trouble because as part of this appeal Festus has to send a report to the capital as to why this case is coming to the emperor and what's Festus going to say ah well I wanted to do the Jewish council a bit of a favor because you know you know how difficult they can be and Paul wouldn't go along with it so he killed to you so well here he is your problem now not exactly like I've had a legal breach that's going to make Festus a little problem clearly that's not going to work so Festus starts covering these tracks almost immediately look at verse 20 he says well I was at a loss

I'm investigating these things that's why I wanted to send Paul back to the first really Festus we know that was the real reason we wanted to do the Jews a favor friends haven't you been there you cave under pressure you don't do the right thing and suddenly the consequences start unfolding and you have to start weaving the story and backtracking and covering up and Festus is in a bigger pickle now than he was at Paul's hearing he was afraid of touching the anger of the authorities of Jerusalem now he's about to face the wrath of Rome itself unless he didn't come up with a story now what made these men so different Paul and Festus what gave Paul such courage while Festus caved it wasn't wealth that's not what Paul had going for

Festus was aristocrat Paul was a poor tent baby missionary was it status or power that gave Paul the upper hand Festus was a Roman leader one of the highest seeds of the empire Paul was a traveling rapper what was it what made Paul able to pursue justice with integrity while Festus wavered and caved out fear and is this a problem that in an unjust world where more like Festus and Paul you and I are good intentions often give way under pressure and very little seems to have there is a there is one last point that Luke wants us to see and the last point here in chapter 25 is this that in this unjust world

God is accomplished his just purpose and plan that's the difference between Paul and Festus one had come to see this truth with blazing clarity and the other had thought Festus was probably a good Roman and as a good Roman you appeased the gods and you did your best Roman civic life was very pragmatic ah but the God of the Bible was a different sort of God altogether the God that called him was the sovereign creator of all things who was able to use even injustice to bring about his purposes think of God's history with his people when Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery God was there to put Joseph in Egypt and then into power and the rest of his team when Daniel was sent into exile by the

Babylonians and he was thrown into a lion's den there God was working to exalt Daniel put him in a position of authority and broadcast throughout the Persian empire as a result of that event the greatness of Daniel's God God for think of when Esther was taken from her family and put into the king's herald even there God was worthy to make her the queen so that at the right time she could advocate for her people and save them from destruction this was the God that Paul had this is the God that Paul had now come to know in a new way you see now Paul had come to know what all this history was pointing toward now he knew about the one who brought

[23 : 36] Israel's history to its surprising finale now Paul knew Jesus God's very son and Jesus who was innocent in every way was betrayed and was unjustly condemned by his own people and was crucified in a miscarried pro-injustice class in and through that most severe and blatant act of injustice God was working his just delay and at the cross God was carried away our sin and our death and death Christ and God demonstrated that fact by raising Jesus from the dead overturning the just unjust verdict that had been cast and in overturning that verdict breaking righteousness and life and vindication to all the world you see this God that Paul knew was the God who worked out his just purpose in an unjust world and now

Paul had to know this God or better put to be known by this God in Jesus the crucified and risen world in verse 19 Festus recounts a little more of what Paul had said in his defense Festus is a bit confused he says it seemed to be all of us serving Jesus who was dead but he called out to be alive why was calling to pursue justice with integrity and not give into pressure or fear and what will allow us to do the same because in the light of the resurrection of Jesus our living king we can know that no matter what happens God is at work to bring about his just kingdom even through injustice and that means that the rulers of the nations are not beyond the control of the Lord of the universe you know as

Paul was in prison in Caesarea I wonder how often he remembered the words of Jesus that Ananias told him right after his conversion Jesus said to him Paul you're a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel and I will show you how much he has suffered a saving right here you see Paul's suffering wasn't in vain it was for Jesus sake he was testifying to kings our passage ends with Agrippa the Jewish king at the time wanting to hear Paul wanting to listen to what he has to say and hear the words of Jesus coming true testifying to kings and again I wonder how often the words that Jesus spoke to Paul in prison in Jerusalem just two years earlier was comforting to Paul during those years in Caesar take courage Jesus for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem so you must also testify in Rome you must testify in Rome no matter what happened

Paul knew that the Lord was in control and that no matter what happened he was going to testify to the grace of God in Christ see if you and Paul appeals to Caesar in our chapter here it's more than just a last ditch effort to try to save his skin it was Paul realizing that the words of Jesus were coming true this probably wasn't how Paul originally thought he was going to get there he probably wasn't thinking that his trip to Rome would be in chains but what Luke has been trying to show us through this whole section of Acts is that Paul's chains are the gospel's wings and the injustice that he suffered only served to advance the gospel and that gave Paul great reason not only to worship Jesus as the Lord of Lords but it gave him incredible courage not to cave but to waver in the face of injustice the Lord is my helper

Psalms 118 6 says what can man do to me who shall I fear friends if Christ died and rose again for me for you if his resurrection proves that he's going to work out his just life even through injustice what if we do you know if that truth goes deep for us just like it did for Paul and we'll find that in the face of injustice we don't need to avoid conflict and give in to passivity we'll find that the gospel actually gives us the confidence to appeal as a God like Paul because we know that we stand with the king and the guy that was a king and his just plan cannot be overthrown isn't that the confidence that we need and at the same time we need not fight fire with fire and use unjust means to fight injustice the gospel gives us the courage to suffer for the one who died and rose again stands with us and his kingdom will advance even through suffering there's the courage that we need and here's why we can do the right thing even under pressure even when it's hard because no matter what trouble may come as a result the risen

[29 : 22] Lord's working through to advance his kingdom in our lives and the world his kingdom of grace and of peace and of the justice our hearts are so warm Lord Jesus we thank you that in your resurrection there is great courage and great confidence for us Lord we confess this morning that we're often so fearful and so weak God that so many of our response fall so harsh and yet Father we thank you for your Holy Spirit that you poured out in the house through Jesus that helps us to see and to know that your kingdom is going for and that nothing is wrong God grant us the courage that we need and the confidence that we need in you

Lord Jesus so that we might be people of justice so that we might be people of righteousness and truth of mercy and compassion so that we might bind out of the hearts of the broken so that we might go to the needy and believe you to stand with them so that we might be able to face hope with calmness and composure and grace Lord knowing that the very people who often sit in the seat of judgment are really just like us or may this be the long end of the life of my everything I pray this in Jesus friends let's stand as the music scene comes out and let's use this closing song as an opportunity to respond and worship to Christ our King and let's return and proclaim thank you

Alleluia, sing to Jesus Here's the scepter, here's the throne Alleluia, here's the china Here's the victory in me alone I will come to thee to Zion Under thy almighty fire Jesus, our every nation That's redeeming us by his love Alleluia, God and so on

Are we glad in sorrow now? Alleluia, keep his spirit Faithfully, the blessed sound All the doubts of sight receding When the Lord is the Lord Shout out our hearts, forget his confidence I am with you evermore Alleluia, let our better Through all earth, our fruit are saved Alleluia, keep the simple

Will flee to you from day to day Intercessor, friend of sinners First redeeming early on me Where the Santa, Father, the Lord We are the best of sin Alleluia, keep the simple You, the Lord You, the Lord, the Lord We are the best of sin Alleluia, Lord, O Mary Heard your force to heaven Your crown You, with the end of the world As an angel

[34 : 52] And broken Broken death I bring thy feet I, O Spirit Be the song For the love In heavenly peace Amen, friends, well, that's the end of our service Feel free to stick around Fellowship up here Downstairs Don't forget The pick-up in the park Is happening In Worcester Square Right there, Worcester Square So, grab some lunch Take it over Have a good time Of just fellowshiping there Don't forget to come back tonight For our brief service We're working our way For the opening chapters Of the book Of Revelation And Greg's gonna pick up that tonight Let me end With a benediction From the book of the Decients A place where we've been landing Of the most these days At the end of our service Now to Him Who is able to do

Far more above And all we ask With faith According to the power Of work and fitness To Him The glory of the church And in Christ Jesus Through all generations Forever and ever Amen Friends, go on, please quase Thank you An ata■ Thank you.