

Acts 25:1-22

An Appeal And A Discussion

? Can you think of an example in which you, or someone you know, faced a problem that could be turned into an opportunity?

Acts 25:1-12 (NIV)

¹Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, ²where the chief priests and the Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul. ³They requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way. ⁴Festus answered, "Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. ⁵Let some of your leaders come with me, and if the man has done anything wrong, they can press charges against him there."

⁶After spending eight or ten days with them, Festus went down to Caesarea. The next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him. ⁷When Paul came in, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him. They brought many serious charges against him, but they could not prove them.

⁸Then Paul made his defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar."

⁹Festus, 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?"

¹⁰Paul 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. ¹¹If, 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!"

¹²After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!"

Previously in Acts

Paul, who was a Roman citizen, was saved by Roman soldiers from an attack in the temple. In Acts 23, the Romans bring Paul before the Jewish council to find out why the crowd wants to kill him, but the meeting is interrupted by a disagreement. A group of men plot to kill Paul when he comes back to the council, but Paul's nephew hears about the plot and informs the Roman commander, who immediately ships him off – with an armed guard – to Caesarea. Felix, the provincial governor, then keeps Paul in prison for the next two years in order to curry favor with the Jews. Felix has just been succeeded by Festus, who is making his way to Caesarea to meet Paul.

? How does it feel when you're accused of doing something you didn't do or when you have to answer for something to an authority figure?

Reminder: God is sending Paul to Rome. Acts 23:11 reads, "The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, 'Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.'"

? Paul has been in jail for two years under the previous governor. How do you think God turned Paul's prison sentence into an opportunity?

? Festus tries to hand Paul over to the Jews, in order to keep the peace. How do modern Christians sometimes make compromises in the name of keeping the peace?

Acts 25:13-22 (NIV)

¹³ A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. ¹⁴ Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. He said: "There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner. ¹⁵ When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him and asked that he be condemned.

¹⁶ "I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over anyone before they have faced their accusers and have had an opportunity to defend themselves against the charges. ¹⁷ When they came here with me, I did not delay the case, but convened the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in. ¹⁸ When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. ¹⁹ Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive. ²⁰ I was at a loss how to investigate such matters; so I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. ²¹ But when Paul made his appeal to be held over for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him held until I could send him to Caesar." ²² Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear this man myself." He replied, "Tomorrow you will hear him."

Take Me To Your Leader
We don't know a lot about Festus, but we do know that he was regarded as more fair and decent than Felix – the man he replaced. In verse 19 we learn that Festus doesn't seem to know much about Christianity, but he has already gleaned the central message of the Gospel from Paul.

? Place yourself in Festus' place. You are newly placed in authority. The "religious leaders" come to you and warn you about certain members of the church. What would you do?

? How do you think God used Festus when bringing Paul before Agrippa and Bernice?

? How has God used other people to reveal His purposes in your life?

? How can we prepare ourselves to be used to reveal God's purposes in the lives of others?

Matthew 10:18-20

¹⁸On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, ²⁰for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

? Considering Matthew 10, in what ways does the Holy Spirit give you the words to witness to others?

? Are there opportunities in your life to witness to others that feel difficult or dangerous to you?

For Discussion and Accountability

? What problems, difficulties, or challenges in your life might be opportunities in disguise? How can God use these problems for His purposes?