

Study of Acts – Discussion Notes Chapter 25

Introduction

At first glance, chapter 25 seems like brief filler between Paul's trial in Caesarea and his departure for Rome. But upon careful study, there are powerful life changing lessons we can learn from this chapter.

In chapter 25, Luke gives us an uncharacteristic summary version of what took place between Festus, the Jews and Paul. However, there are several key phrases that Luke points out that must not be missed. They are powerful lessons to Christians of all ages. Let us explore.

Content

1. Having the courage to face the future (vs. 1-12).

Why did the high priest and Jewish leaders want Paul transferred back to Jerusalem to stand trial?

They still wanted to kill him in an ambush. They felt threatened not by Paul but by the message Paul was preaching. One can't help but wonder if a small voice in them was telling them Jesus was the Messiah and they just refused to believe it. In their mind, if they could kill the messenger, they would kill the message. History has certainly proven them wrong on that.

Read verses 10 and 11 very carefully.

¹⁰ But Paul said: "I am standing at Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as even you can see very well. ¹¹ If then I am doing wrong, or have done anything deserving of death, I do not refuse to die, but if there is nothing to what these men accuse me of, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar!" Acts 25:10-11 HCSB

What do you find so courageous about Paul's statements in these verses? How could these statements have gotten him in deep trouble?

Paul was not intimidated by Festus or the high priest and Jewish leaders. His remarks could have triggered the wrath of Festus in an instance. But Paul had courage and did not fear any of them.

But it is Paul's statement in verse 11 that is the most powerful. He says, *"If I have done anything deserving of death, I do not refuse (object to) dying."*

We should each take a moment and consider the courage and faith that exist behind that statement; *"I do not refuse to die."*

This was a man who had completely trusted in the power of Jesus Christ. Paul had nothing to fear; he feared neither life nor death. Remember his confession in Philippians 1:21, *"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*

We can't really live until we are free from the fear of dying. We get caught up in life on earth as if it were all we have before us. Often we face sickness and the challenges of life with little courage; it is as if we have no faith or hope in Christ. The assurance of the resurrection of Christ and our own resurrection should free us from the fear of death and the fear of living.

One commentator put it this way, "We want to live physically however long the Lord has planned for us. Until that is settled in our minds, every sickness, problem, crisis and disappointment will be a little death."

We can't say "for me to live is Christ" until we really believe that "to die is gain."

Certainly the Lord expects us to take care of our bodies by being good stewards of life. But at the same time, He does not expect us to live so cautiously that we miss the adventure of living while we are alive. This is especially true of our spiritual life although there should be no separation as believers.

We tend to think of our time on earth as the best part of eternity and we think of death as the tragic time of eternity. We need not dread or fear death. We can live life with adventure and courage knowing that even more life awaits us after death. Like Paul, we can celebrate the resurrection!

2. The irony of the will of God (vs. 13-27).

Who was Bernice in relation to King Agrippa?

She was his sister whose marriage had failed and she was living with her brother King Agrippa II. Why does that matter? It goes to show that regardless of the social status, people's lives are in desperate need of Jesus Christ. We will discuss that more in a moment.

What does Festus say about Paul in verses 18 and 25-27?

Festus is acknowledging that he has no real charges to present against Paul. He realizes the Jews have presented nothing of substance and he finds himself sending a man to Rome to appeal to Caesar when there are no charges to send him on. What a quandary!

What picture does Luke paint for us about the hearing in verse 23-24?

Luke describes a big formal gathering of Festus, King Agrippa, Bernice and all the big wigs of Caesarea. Luke says they entered with great pomp into the great Hall of Audience. Surely they were wearing their finest robes and made a grand entrance to hear what this one man had to say.

Now consider the array of social statuses of all to who Paul is about to witness. I wonder how King Herod Agrippa II would have felt if he had realized that his visit with Festus and his big event on this day was actually fulfilling prophesy of Jesus of Nazareth.

¹⁶ "Look, I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as serpents and as harmless as doves. ¹⁷ Because people will hand you over to Sanhedrin's and flog you in their synagogues, beware of them. ¹⁸ You will even be brought before governors and kings because of Me, to bear witness to them and to the nations. ¹⁹ But when they hand you over, don't worry about how or what you should speak. For you will be given what to say at that hour. *Mathew 10:16-19 HCSB*

In chapter 26, we will read of Paul's testimony before King Agrippa II. We will consider and discuss Agrippa's response to Paul and consider the implications. But for now, let us consider the irony of God's will as it unfolds before us.

In a strange way, the Herods were intertwined in the life of and followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

- King Herod Agrippa II's grandfather was the very king who feared the birth of Jesus when told about Him by the wise men. His fear of the threat to his power prompted him to murder the male children in the vicinity of Bethlehem.
- John the Baptist was murdered by Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great who was also present in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion.
- Jesus appeared before Herod who wanted to see Jesus perform some miracle. When Jesus refused, Herod ordered his soldiers to mistreat him (Luke 23:6-12).
- Herod Agrippa I had James executed, imprisoned Peter and was later eaten with worms as a punishment for allowing people to worship him as a god (Acts 12:20-23).

- The very great Hall of Audience in which Paul now stood before Agrippa II was built by Herod the Great.

Bernice was Agrippa II's sister. She had married Agrippa I's brother. When he died, she lived with her brother until she married another king, King Polemon. After that marriage failed, she returned to live with her brother Agrippa II.

The point is that if any family ever needed the saving grace of God, this family did and had every opportunity to receive it. They were a family of power, incest and moral corruption. Yet on numerous occasions they had every opportunity to believe and receive the only thing that could satisfy their soul. Next week we will study yet another missed opportunity.

Conclusion

We all experience anxiety in life. But if you think about it, we are anxious about having some new aspect into our life and we are anxious about losing some familiar aspect of life. We resist change coming in and change going out of our life.

We talked about how Paul was courageous because he did not fear death and thus he was able to live life in the fullest. I said "We can't really live until we are free from the fear of dying."

How can we as Christians obtain such faith and courage to not fear death? How does one get to that place where "for me to live is Christ and to die is gain"?

The answer lies in trust. We will never learn to trust Christ until we learn to step out in faith and do things that are beyond our own abilities. Like a child learning to walk or a child learning to ride a bicycle for the first time. A child does not know how to do it but they trust Mom and Dad will be there to catch them when they fall.

Illus: The first time I rode the homemade trolley in the woods as a child. After I found the courage to take the first ride, I could not get enough of it.

Will you trust in Christ and live life to the fullest without fear?