



10/13/2019  
Acts 25-26:11

## BIG IDEA

Faith is not passive.

## LOOKING BACK

*As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.*

*Invite members to share any questions or points that came up in their family discussions regarding last week's study. Invite them to share ways God continued to speak to them as they sought to apply those truths throughout the week.*

- When you were in school and had a group project, were you the type of student who did most of the work, did your part and your part only, or let someone else do it all?
- What about now? Are you most often active or passive in important moments, even though there's not a "grade"?

Last week focused on the providence of God. In this week's sermon we've seen the underlying promise of God being a motivator for active faith. Paul constantly faced opposition in his missionary journeys, yet his trust in God motivated him to remain active in his mission of taking the gospel to all nations.

## LOOKING IN

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.*

| *Ask a volunteer to read Acts 25:1-12.*

- What motivated Paul to appeal to Caesar? What do Paul's actions and attitude here tell you about his faith?

The chief priests wanted Paul transferred to Jerusalem so that they might ambush him on the way and kill him. We don't know why Festus wanted to "do the Jews a favor," it is likely that he simply wanted to curry their favor for political gain. Whatever the motive, Festus, on the chief priests' request, asks Paul if he would be willing to stand trial in Jerusalem. Paul refuses and appeals to Caesar. It is possible that Paul was aware of the chief priests' plan to ambush him or that he feared that he would not get a fair trial in Jerusalem. Neither of these answers, however, get to the heart of Paul's motive in appealing to Caesar. In Acts 19:21, Paul, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, said, "I must visit Rome." The love of Christ compelled Paul to preach the gospel "where Christ has not already been named" (Rom. 15:20).

- Who is someone you know who confidently carries out God's call on his or her life, even in the face of difficulty?
- What does it look like in real world terms to really trust in God? Give some examples from your own life.

| **Ask a volunteer to read Acts 25:13-27.**

The Jews' dispute with Paul had always been over theology, particularly interpretation of the Old Testament. Festus had expected a more serious charge, like stirring up revolution. He came to understand that the major issue was whether Jesus, who had died, was now alive.

- This Agrippa was the son of the Herod in Acts 12:1-23. Look back at that passage. Why would he be especially interested in hearing from Paul?
- When you have questions about your faith, to whom do you turn? Why? How else do you seek input?
- Was Paul's getting to Rome something that simply happened to Paul or something in which he actively participated with God (Was it God's providence, Paul's actions, or a combination of the two)?
- In your own life, do you tend to sit back and passively wait on God or to actively join Him on mission? Why?

Festus had not previously made it known publicly that he thought Paul was innocent. Since Paul had made his appeal to Caesar, Festus was now free to admit, without repercussion, that he believed the charges were groundless. Regardless of the fact that he believed Paul was innocent, he made a strictly political move by not letting Paul go. Little did he know that decision only enabled Paul to get to Rome as has been his laser-like focus.

- What does it teach us about God that he used these worldly rulers to act out his plans for gospel advancement? How should that knowledge impact us in our own life and faith?

Paul pointed out that the trial was legally questionable, because his main accusers—the Asian Jews—were not present (24:19). Thus, Felix adjourned the proceedings and ordered Paul to be put back in prison. He was aware of Paul's innocence, but he did not want to antagonize the powerful and influential Jewish leaders by setting him free. So, he acted cowardly with a selfish political motive—he delayed his decision about the case. Paul languished in prison as a result.

| **Ask a volunteer to read Acts 26:1-11.**

- What about Paul's past might have held him back from actively living out his faith?
- From Paul's words here, how would you characterize his view of his past? Why did he bring it up at all?
- What are some key words or phrases that describe your life before Christ, or when you attempted to do life without Christ? What is the right view and expression of your past as you actively live for Christ now?

## LOOKING FORWARD

*Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.*

- What obstacles or hangups tempt you toward a passive faith and relationship with the Lord?
- How does Paul's story in Acts 25-26 challenge and encourage you?

## FAMILIES

Use the following questions and truths to disciple your children throughout the week.

Share about a time when you responded to a difficult situation by being passive in your faith and a time when you responded to a difficult situation by being active in your faith. Point out that when we come to Jesus for salvation, we also come to Him as Lord. He saves us, and He is also our boss. It's a double deal.

| Read James 2:14.

- When is it hard for you to show your faith in the way you speak and act? How is God speaking to you about that in our study of Acts 25-26 this week?

## PRAY

Thank God for actively demonstrating His love for us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Ask Him to give you the strength and courage to actively demonstrate your love for Him, even in difficult and scary circumstances.

## COMMENTARY

| Acts 25:1-27

25:1-2 Porcius Festus wasted no time in attempting to cement relationships with the Jews. Roman procurators always had to establish a working relationship with the high priest in the Sanhedrin, or governing Judea would be a nightmare. Festus faced an even greater burden—succeeding the very unpopular Felix whose behavior toward the Jews had antagonized the local countryside for years. Virtually unknown before his time in Judea, Festus' tenure was so short that Luke's account in Acts represents the most we know of this "foot soldier for Rome." He seems the perfect politician, quite willing to consult local authorities while trying not to offend anyone, an appropriate posture since his predecessor had just been summarily fired by Nero. Why does Luke use "chief priests" in the plural? It may reflect the ongoing influence of Ananias, even though Ishmael, the son of Phabi, now sat in the head chair. Imagine all the local and regional matters the Sanhedrin would have had on its hands during the transition of a Roman procurator. High on that list loomed their constant nemesis—Paul—who, for two years, had languished in the prison of Herod's palace at Caesarea.

25:3-5 Will the Jews never tire of these execution plots? Whether they hoped to use Festus' inexperience against him (and against Paul), we cannot know. They were not the least bit bashful in asking for a favor from a Roman official whom they had just met; a favor linked to a murder conspiracy with which they had now become quite comfortable. In chapter 23 they had merely agreed to a murder plot presented by the Asian zealots; here they themselves apparently designed the strategy. Festus apparently had no desire to rescue Paul; he just wanted things done decently and in order. The prisoner was already in Caesarea; he had barely had time to acquaint himself with the two major cities of his jurisdiction; he was hardly in a position to make promises to a group of religious authorities—but a man's life could be at stake.

25:6-9 Paul had no reason to be on trial here at all. Felix's incompetence in failing to declare an acquittal when he had no evidence to retain the prisoner now caused another trial for the apostle. Luke paints an angry picture of Jewish officials circling Paul and hurling charges, yet none of the charges could be sustained by either proof or witnesses. We assume the charges have not changed: offending the law (21:28); defiling the temple (21:28; 24:6); and planning treason against Rome (24:5). Paul denied them all (v. 8) and for the first time argued that he had not offended Caesar in any way.

Still Festus wanted to get this thing out of his hair. Doing the Jews a favor would be a good way to start his stint in Caesarea. The key words in verse 9 are before me which clearly suggest political compromise. If the Sanhedrin had its choice, it would have tried Paul and brought a charge of capital punishment for his

desecration of law and temple. Nevertheless, getting him out of Caesarea gave them an opportunity to carry out the conspiracy mentioned earlier in the chapter. Festus thought he could mediate the situation by choosing Jerusalem as venue but presiding over the trial himself. He obviously never considered the Jews capable of a murderous ambush.

25:10-11 Things were getting shaky. One could not trust a politician in the first century, especially when the issue of favoritism kept surfacing during his early days in office. Paul had finally come to the bottom line and wanted to silence this talk about going back to Jerusalem once and for all. Let's not miss the contrast here with Jesus' trial at which he stood silent in the face of all charges. Paul was not only verbal, he became downright defiant in telling Festus that he knew very well that these trumped-up charges were nonsense.

Was Paul wrong because he didn't behave like Jesus? Jesus was headed for the cross, and he knew it; any discussions with Pilate or anyone else would have been futile in the Father's plan. Paul, though not afraid of dying, certainly did not have that in his plans at this point. If he would have to face a death sentence, it would have to come from a Roman court, not a frenzied Sanhedrin in their holy city. Apparently in Paul's view all other appeals had been exhausted, so he declared the Roman fifth amendment (see "Deeper Discoveries") and appealed to the emperor, an appeal reflected several more times before Acts ends (25:11-12, 21, 25-26; 26:32; 28:19).

25:12 All indications at this point suggested that Nero could have been a model emperor. Besides, Paul wasn't going to Nero as much as he was going to Caesar—the law, not the emperor, was the major focus here. Let's not credit Festus with any great wisdom. Once Paul had delivered his caesaren appello (appeal to Caesar), a provincial governor had no choice. Paul had effectively designed an end-run around Festus' authority, whether in Jerusalem or Caesarea, and whatever further delays might come in his path, he was underway for Rome.

25:13-15 Herod Agrippa II (a.d. 27-100) was still a young man the day he visited Festus. Approximately thirty-three years of age, he had become king of Chalcis in a.d. 48 and had advanced to control over Abilene, Trachonitis, Acra, Tarichea, and Tiberias. His sister Bernice was one year younger and had come to live with her brother after the death of her husband, who was also her uncle. Throughout the Roman Empire people assumed an incestuous relationship, probably an accurate analysis of the strange situation. Herod did not rule over Judea but had been appointed by Claudius as "Curator of the Temple." He could insert or depose a high priest and also held responsibility for the temple's treasure and priestly vestments.

25:16-22 The former procurator had every opportunity to acquit the prisoner in the absence of valid charges but chose not to do so. Festus had barely begun to look into the case when Paul cut him off with his appeal to Caesar. From that point on Festus had no chance to consider what he would or would not do with Paul; the matter was out of his hands. In this casual conversation with Agrippa which existed only for informational purposes, Jesus became the center of the dispute, something lacking in earlier trial summaries.

Like the word Christian, we would expect the word emperor to appear frequently in the pages of the New Testament. After all, the entire account took place against the backdrop of Roman authority and Rome appears from the soldiers of the gospel to references to the city itself in the Book of Revelation. But the word emperor (sebastos) appears twice in this chapter, its only use in the entire New Testament. At this time Romans did not yet equate the emperor with Deity, but certainly acknowledged a high level of majesty. Festus, in his ignorance, had stumbled over the philosophy of the resurrection which argues, "There is more to life than life." Perhaps this message never affected him, but it was precisely the testimony Paul would take to Caesar's court.

25:23 We can hardly miss the parallel between Paul standing before Herod Agrippa II and Jesus before Herod Antipas, a scene which Luke alone records (Luke 23:6-12). In each case the prisoner was first arraigned before a Roman governor and then brought before the Jewish king. This is the longest of five defenses Luke records in Acts. Luke may have been a firsthand observer. A bona fide historian, he had already chronicled the life of Christ and may have used a first-century equivalent of a "press pass" to attend public festivities. The Romans knew all about pomp, and Agrippa had picked up a thing or two himself; so we see this high drama building though there is nothing legal at stake. These two could decide absolutely nothing about the fate of the prisoner; the whole council convened just for show and the convenience of

Agrippa to hear Paul's side of the story. An interesting word for "pomp" is *fantasia*. Luke attempts here to paint a picture displaying the mood of the event. Finally, when all the robes were unfurled and the trumpets had sounded their last note, Paul was brought in.

25:24-25 In a fine piece of rhetorical exaggeration which could have been appreciated by both Romans and Greeks, Festus announced the whole Jewish community in Jerusalem and Caesarea wanted Paul dead. He had hardly been in office long enough to get many variant opinions on this subject, but as a Roman, he assumed that the leaders of any people (in this case the Sanhedrin) spoke for that people. Here Festus set himself up as Paul's deliverer, even though it had been necessary to stand against all the Jews in Judea. Politicians must always make an impression, always give the message that they have achieved something, preferably defending the constitution and national legal system. Again Festus declared Paul's innocence but didn't quite tell the truth in saying, I decided to send him to Rome; that decision did not belong to him.

25:26-27 Since Paul had broken no Roman law, what could this governor write when he sent the prisoner to Rome? We find no hint early in the chapter that he has looked to Agrippa for help on this matter, but here it comes in verse 26. To be sure, it would be unreasonable to send a prisoner to the emperor without specifying charges. It would also be dereliction of duty, incompetence, and probably cause for removal from office. Festus' conundrum had lessened, since he no longer had to deal with the Jews; but he still had to figure out what papers Roman soldiers would take to the imperial city along with this nuisance of a prisoner.

## | Acts 26:1-12

26:1 This is Paul's third apologetic or defensive speech in Acts.

26:2-3 Paul began his *captatio benevolentiae* by flattering Agrippa about how fortunate he was to be making his defense before an expert in Jewish customs and laws.

26:4-5 My youth indicates that Paul had lived in Jerusalem since his teens. All this time his way of life had been known and seen by others, and he lived by the strictest party of Jewish religion, the Pharisees. In this way Paul painted a portrait of his character for Agrippa.

26:6-8 Paul distilled the entire controversy down to his hope of the promise made by God to raise the dead. More than a mere tactic to pit Pharisees and Sadducees against one another, this was an accurate assessment of the Jewish complaint against Christianity: that Jesus was raised from the dead and that faith in Him as risen Lord gives eternal life.