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**Day 346 – December 12**

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## **Christ's Church and the Apostles (30-100 CE)**

### ***Paul before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa***

**Readings: Acts 24:1-26:32**

#### ***Reflections:***

- Indictment against Paul: Paul begins what will be a two year imprisonment and the first of three court appearances to defend his innocence against the charges of the religious leaders. Again the detailed record Luke provides aligns perfectly with secular sources regarding who was in political power at this time. In this first passage we see the basic charges that are being laid against Paul: a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world, ringleader for the Nazarene sect, and desecrating the temple. The religious leaders are blaming their own violent religious outbursts against Paul and not taking ownership for their own behaviors and anger. The charge against the temple is something that can't be proven as it would have occurred within the privacy of the temple grounds.
- Statement of defense: We see hear a summary of Paul's beliefs regarding the Law. Paul does not see the Law as wrong but rather as something that was useful for a time but now has been superseded by something far better. Paul denies the riots but admits that he did make a clear statement about the resurrection from the dead. Paul wisely points to his statement about the resurrection from the dead and clearly implies that the outburst was actually the result of a religious squabble between the Sadducees and Pharisees and not because he is a follower of the Way (the name given to the first Christ-followers because of the "way" they lived life).
- Felix postpones decision: Felix postpones his decision as it would appear that he at some level is sympathetic towards the Way. Luke notes that Felix had a pretty good knowledge about the Jesus movement. He allows the Christ-followers to visit and take care of Paul. We see the real support and unity of the movement as Paul is supported even while in prison.
- In prison two years: Felix returns with his wife Drusilla, a Jewess. They both listen to Paul but his teaching on righteousness, self-control and judgment started to scare them. Obviously they had some issues in their lives that when they heard about God's approach to life and relationships they started to get afraid that they might need to repent and get a number of things straight in their lives. We see Felix's character that he was also looking for a bribe from Paul and is disappointed the Christians are not taking up an offering to bail him out. Felix leaves Paul in prison for two years until Porcius Festus takes over office. From secular

history we know that the Jews began to riot against Felix and he was recalled to Rome. We see here in the story of Felix and his wife an example that when some people come under conviction for sin they just want to play the denial game and avoid facing the truth. They plug their ears and just hope the truth goes away.

- Jews ask for Paul: The religious leaders ask Festus to send Paul to them so that they can ambush him and kill him. These religious leaders obviously are not giving up their commitment to kill Paul. Festus apparently can sense something is up and so he asks them to come to Caesarea rather than to allow Paul to be taken to Jerusalem to receive another trial.
- Festus hears Paul's case: Now two years later the religious leaders still have no hard evidence against Paul and Paul remains firm that he has done nothing wrong.
- Paul appeals to Caesar: Festus is open to sending Paul to be tried by the Jews as a favor to them but Paul uses the privilege of his Roman citizenship and appeals to Caesar.
- Festus and Agrippa: This is an interesting passage in that it recounts a conversation that the reader must wonder, how did Luke learn of this conversation and its content. It is possible that someone in the palace reported this to Paul who in turn explained this to Luke. Without doubt the Way had many sympathizers and Paul was a notable figure. Similar to the trial of Jesus as well as other notable political events, the discussions of rulers find their way onto the streets.
- Paul presented to audience: Rulers can be full of themselves and Agrippa and Bernice apparently like the pomp and grandeur. Festus makes it clear that his intention is to actually get King Agrippa to come up with the basic reason why Paul is being charged and sent to Rome. Is Festus looking for support or passing the buck?
- Paul tells of mission: Paul demonstrates humility and respect as he opens his speech before King Agrippa. Paul describes himself as living according to the strictest sect of Judaism, a Pharisee. Paul quickly zeros in on the resurrection as the key truth that he wants them to consider. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection and so the fact that Paul was a Pharisee and believes in the resurrection, particularly the resurrection of Jesus should not be a crime. Paul now tells his story again in Acts of his conversion and his experience of meeting the resurrected Jesus. This is the most detailed passage where Paul explains how he persecuted Christ-followers. We see the systematic nature of his hatred and oppression. It is interesting how God took someone who was deeply passionate about the Torah and very organized and disciplined to transform into his religion-wrecking leader. Paul was using his innate leadership qualities for destructive purposes but God wanted to change him so that he could use these same qualities to advance the mission of Jesus. We see Paul show the same organization, approach and determination as a Christ-follower. Paul outlines again in detail his encounter with Jesus, the time of day, what happened and what Jesus said. Similar to the arrest, trial, death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul's conversion story was one of those often repeated events. Luke ensures it is retold throughout the story of Acts so that people

hearing this story will be confronted over and over again with the facts around Paul's conversion. It is one of the most compelling pieces of evidence for the historicity and truth of Jesus' resurrection. We also see in this passage a very clear outlining of Paul's mission. The exact wording changes in the different accounts but that is a normal part of retelling stories. Here we see Paul state his mission with these words: "I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from you own people and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified (transformed) by faith in me." Again we see the power of having a crystal clear personal mission and mandate. Every key leader within the revolution Jesus initiated would do well to seek Christ until they have such a clear self-understanding of God's calling on their lives. We also see that Paul is very clear that there is a rescue mission and an obvious spiritual battle that must be addressed in this mission (See Ephesians 6:10-18). Paul tells Agrippa about the expansion of the message, "Jerusalem (city), and Judea (country) and to the Gentiles (world)..." Here was Paul's basic discipleship strategy: "I proclaimed that they should repent (turn away from false beliefs, unhealthy actions, religion, self-centeredness) and turn to God (embrace true relationship through the Spirit) and prove their repentance by their deeds (transformed in their thinking, emotional habits and relationships so that their lifestyles are completely transformed)." Paul's desire was to share this message of the new kingdom with people small and great. Paul as called to the poorest and most powerful. He realized that Jesus isn't exclusive on either extreme but inclusive of all. Paul's final declaration is the story and message of Jesus is simply what the Jewish prophets and Moses said would happen. The early Christ-followers were convinced that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus was prophetically announced and confirmed by the prophecies in the Jewish Scriptures. Jesus and his people were to fulfill the calling of bringing God's light to the Jews and the Gentiles.

- Agrippa's response: Festus interrupts Paul to tell him that he thinks he is crazy. Sometimes that is the response people have to the story of Jesus and his message. Not everyone thinks it makes sense. Paul rather than becoming defensive appeals to Agrippa as he knows that Agrippa had a pretty good handle on the teachings of the Jewish Scriptures. It is fascinating that Agrippa is actually wondering if Paul is trying to convert him, not just defend himself. Obviously Agrippa is very engaged in what Paul is saying and at some level may be feeling an increasing curiosity about the potential truth of what Paul is saying. Paul again shows his heart as he wisely responds, "Short time or long – I pray that not only will you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains." Paul uses his words so well and we see again why he was an excellent choice to be a communicator of the message.
- Innocence acknowledged: Agrippa confirms to Festus that Paul is innocent but because of Paul's appeal to Caesar he would need to go to Rome to stand trial. This is an important fact for Luke to capture to validate the credibility of the message within the larger Roman context. Christianity although religiously subversive is not a faith that breaks the law. Rather

it simply proclaims a message that makes the religious upset. One last thought. Sometimes completing God's will requires going the hard road. Paul had to stay in custody longer to complete God's purposes in taking the message of Jesus to Caesar. The hard road is sometimes not the result of doing anything wrong, but simply the only path to accomplishing his will. In this we learn that his power is shown to be sufficient in all of our weaknesses.