

## God and Caesar

Acts 25:1-12

### Slide 1

A Father was trying to teach his fifth-grade son the value of tithing. Listening attentively, the boy said, *“I still don’t understand why you have to pay taxes.”*

To this the Father replied, *“Because the Bible says we must give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar and unto God what belongs to God.”*

His son looked at his father and exclaimed, *“That’s what I’m trying to tell you, Dad. Caesar died a long time ago.”*

Which brings up questions like: *“As Christians what is our duty to our government? How do we treat our leaders, especially if we don’t like them?” “Do we owe a duty to our nation or is that secondary?”*

Today, on this 4<sup>th</sup> of July, we come to a passage that speaks to all these questions.

Yet, to understand what it says we must know who the people are that are mentioned. When you do that and then look at the words and actions of Paul, I think you’ll get a clearer picture.

Not just a clearer picture of how we are to act as citizens of our nation now, but a clearer picture of why Paul acted the way he did towards people who didn’t warrant respect.

So, as we begin to look at these people and this passage, we should keep these words of Paul in in mind.

Romans 13:1, *“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”*

In Acts 25:1-12, the words of Paul speak to a respect for the authorities in our life both on a personal and on a national level because God is the one Who put them there.

So, let's look at the people that are involved in our passage today.

## **Slide 2**

Acts 25:1 introduces us to Festus, *“Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem.”*

Festus was the new governor of the province. Historians tell us that he was a just and efficient governor.

We know Festus was efficient because of the amount of time that passes between the various tasks he had to do.

Verse 1, *“Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, where the chief priests and the Jewish leaders appeared before him...”*

Festus had only been in office for three days and already he's visiting Jerusalem. He didn't sit in his office and ask for a written report about events, he was a hands-on man who wanted to see things for himself.

The Jewish leaders recognized this and as soon as he got to Jerusalem they took no time in getting to him to ask a favor.

Acts 25:3, *“They 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.”*

I don't know if this is the same group from Acts 24 or not because, if it was, they had to be really thirsty by now, since they'd taken an oath not to eat or drink until Paul was dead.

But notice, he didn't brush them off or tell them to come back later with their petty problems.

He knew what was important, so he took time with these religious leaders in order to get a clearer picture of one of the more emotional issues with which he had to deal, the trial of Paul.

*Verse 6, "After 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."*

After finishing what needed to be accomplished in Jerusalem, he goes back to Caesarea and orders Paul to be brought before him. Another example of his efficiency.

Festus was also known for being just. Which was nicer than what those same historians had to say about his predecessor, Felix. But remember, Festus is still a politician.

*Look at verse 9, "Festus, 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?"*

Remember there was a group of men who vowed to kill Paul and the previous governor had kept Paul under arrest for two years. So, on the surface, this might seem like a nice offer.

But also remember, Festus spent 8 to 10 days in Jerusalem, so I'm sure he knew how much the religious leaders disliked Paul.

Regardless, if Festus had talked to the religious leaders or Felix or not, there was probably a note or someone around to clue him into the details, as Romans kept detailed legal records and notes.

Yet, Festus is still a politician, and politicians haven't change, that's why he wanted to do a favor for the Jews.

### **Slide 3**

So, here's the situation.

When Festus arrived as the new governor, he went to Jerusalem and met with the religious and political leaders, but he didn't allow them to pressure him into a rushed decision.

Verse 3 says, *"They urgently requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem..."*

Why the urgency? Paul had been imprisoned for two years, so what's the hurry?

Simple, it wasn't that they were concerned with what Paul had done but who Paul was. They were afraid of what he would do. They wanted Paul dead and that was it.

When the religious leaders learned they had a new governor, they saw this as an opportunity to get rid of Paul. Therefore, they tried to take advantage of Festus before he got settled in.

They thought, *"If we can get to Festus before Paul has a chance to speak with him, then we can kill him."*

So, they asked Festus for a favor. It's just a small thing, right? *"Paul's in prison already, just move him to a prison here. He's supposed to get a trial, just have the trial here."*

Such a small request. Some people might have fallen for it. Some might have been willing to compromise, to curry favor with these "important" people to get what they wanted.

This was a temptation for Festus, that's why he floats the idea to Paul later. There's justice to this man. There's a desire to be a wise leader and to do things correctly.

So, even though they tried to rush Festus into making a mistake, he didn't do it. He waits until he has a chance to meet Paul and talk with him.

With all this concern over a simple prisoner, Festus has Paul brought before him the next day and asks Paul to tell him about the charges that had landed him in jail.

Paul's response was short and to the point. He simply said, *"I haven't done anything wrong."*

*Acts 25:8, "Then Paul made his defense: 'I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar.'"*

That's why the religious leaders wanted to have him ambushed and murdered. They had no case.

But Paul knew he had a bigger problem, he was dealing with a politician. No matter how just he was, Festus had been offered something important to him, the opportunity to do a favor.

If he could just talk Paul into accepting a change of venue, the Jewish leaders would owe him a favor that he could collect later. He wanted that.

*Acts 25:9, "Festus, 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?'"*

Look at how Festus framed this, emphasizing that Paul would stand trial before him, not the Sanhedrin.

In so many words, Festus was telling Paul that *“I’m not going to allow you to be railroaded. If you’re truly innocent, go up and give a defense, here or there what’s the difference?”*

Of course, we know what the difference would’ve been and so did Paul. He wasn’t going to survive a trip to Jerusalem.

So, here’s Paul, unjustly accused, wrongfully incarcerated for two years, and now this politician, the representative of the government was offering to help, by putting him in a situation that would probably end his life.

I think at this point Paul might have echoed the words of President Reagan when he said, *“The nine most terrifying words in the English language are, ‘I’m from the government and I’m here to help.’”*

Sometimes we should rant and rave about our government and our systems, and sometimes we should use it.

This is exactly what Paul did. When Paul realized the dire straight that he was in, he used the system not only for his advantage but also to follow God.

#### **Slide 4**

Paul could’ve ranted and raved. He could’ve bemoaned his fate. He could’ve done a lot of unproductive things but look at what he did instead.

Verses 10-11, *“Paul answered: ‘I am not 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. If, 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!’”*

I believe this was a calculated move. Where most of us might've been tempted to feel sorry for ourselves, Paul sees the hand of God at work and allows himself to be given over to that hand.

Why? Remember when all this started, when Paul was first put into prison, God came and told him what he needed to do.

*Acts 23:11, "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.'"*

I think Paul understood that his next destination was Rome, that the door for ministry in Israel was closed.

You must understand that to appeal to Caesar meant Caesar's court, not necessarily Caesar himself, but the trial had to be in the city of Rome itself not one of the Roman provinces.

This practice was implemented to protect Roman citizens from incompetent governors. So, when Paul ups the ante and makes his request, as a Roman citizen, Festus had no choice but to comply.

Paul could've raged against the system and against the unfairness of it all but instead he accepted it, learned from it, and then used it to his advantage.

Of course, this caused a problem for Festus. Why? Because, if you referred someone to Rome for trial, you had to charge them with something, and Festus didn't have any real charges.

So, he asked for help, not from just another leader, but from one who was part Jewish and familiar with their religious practices, King Agrippa, who had come to pay his respects to the new governor.

So that's the background. Paul has had formal hearings, informal hearings, no one can say what's he's done wrong, but they won't let him go and the religious leaders wanted him.

If anyone had a reason to be frustrated with his government, it was Paul.

But what we see from Paul in this story is an outline of how we should behave as citizens of Heaven living temporarily as citizens of an earthly country.

## **Slide 5**

So, let's look at how he acted and use it as a guideline of how we should act. First, I want to say that we owe respect to our government. It doesn't matter what we feel, nor does it matter if they deserve it.

Remember Romans 13:1? *“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.”*

It's not that he wrote it, he lived it. Paul had been put in a position where he's going to stay under arrest until he's taken to Rome. It's going to work out for him in a sense, but we'd still be frustrated.

Yet, before he goes, he had to have one more trial. This time it was before King Agrippa and his sister, Bernice, who don't exactly have a great reputation.

Remember King Agrippa, who was descended from the infamous line of Herod the Great, and Bernice, his sister, had come to Caesarea to pay their respects to the new governor.

Now, we can't be held accountable for the actions of our ancestors. But people do tend to be a reflection of their parents.

Remember Herod the Great built a lot of nice things, but he also ordered the death of all the young boys in Bethlehem.

Regardless of King Agrippa's genealogy, it's his current situation that's a mess.

It's alleged in history, and basically accepted as a fact, that the reason he was traveling with his sister was because they were more intimate than a brother and sister should ever be.

By the way, Bernice's first husband was also her uncle. These two are not exactly pillars of moral righteousness.

But these were the people, the government representatives, with whom Paul had to work, and he did.

Even though these individuals didn't have a great reputation, the important part was how Paul addressed them.

As righteous as Paul is, he doesn't treat them with disdain. He greets them with respect and professes his righteousness.

*Acts 26:2, "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently."*

This is an example we must take to heart. We must treat our government and our leaders with respect.

We may not always agree with them, in fact the price of leadership is that people won't always agree with you, but we should always respect them. That's not just what Paul said, it's what he did.

Next, we need to tell them about Jesus. By respecting them we get the right to be heard and when they're listening, our message needs to be Jesus.

That's our mission as a church and as the people of God. We need to tell people about Jesus.

Paul did this so well and so often that even the religious leaders communicated the point for him.

Look at verse 19, *"They had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive."*

Festus, King Agrippa, and Bernice have heard the center of the message. They don't know what to do with it, but they've heard it. Paul will tell them what to do with it in the next chapter.

## **Slide 6**

### Conclusion

So, here's the point for us today. Too many times in the recent past, when it came to politics, our message has been about everything else except Jesus.

I'm not saying those things aren't important, but the central message of the church needs to be Jesus Christ, the one Whose name we bear.

We need to introduce people to Him and when we do that, He'll change their hearts, then other things will come into line.

Some of those other things are vitally important but until people accept Christ into their lives, they won't accept His authority.

The central message of the church, the central message of our lives must be Jesus, first and always.

See, when we tell people about Jesus, when they know Him, then we can move to the next step. That's why we need to call people to righteousness and do our best to live a righteous life ourselves.

Sometimes, when I see the way that we live as a nation, when I see the way people, who call themselves Christians live, I want to ask the question, "*What ever happened to sin?*"

It's not that it's gone away, it's just that we don't talk about it anymore. There are things that we're not supposed to do.

Yes, we serve a God of grace. Yes, He died on a cross so that our sins could be forgiven, but that doesn't mean that we're supposed to indulge in them.

We get into relationships that we know we shouldn't. We take money that we know God has told us to give to Him and we spend it on ourselves.

We're mean and judgmental when we've been commanded to love. We greet one person at church and ignore others. We need to call our nation to righteousness and then live that way ourselves.

Paul didn't just preach Jesus, he lived it! The cornerstone of his defense is that he could say that he had done nothing wrong, that he had lived a righteous life.

If we want to see America be great again, we, the people of God who gather in the church of God, must follow in Paul's footsteps and live and preach lives that reflect the righteousness of God.

That's why we need to pray for our nation and our leaders. Paul was praying for these people with whom he had to deal.

*Acts 26:29, "Short time or long-I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."*

His prayer was for the salvation of all people, even his nation. That's what our prayer should be today.

2 Chronicles 7:14 is a famous passage it reads, *"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."*

People often say that the answer for America is in prayer. But look at who God's calling to prayer. It's not the people of this nation, it's His people within this nation.

He's saying, *'When My people pray, when My people humble themselves, then I will hear from Heaven and Heal their land.'*

We need to be in prayer for our country. It doesn't matter who the President is, or if we like him or not. It doesn't matter if we like the party that controls one or both houses of congress.

As Christians, as the people called by God's name, our duty is not just to respect our leaders and our country, but our duty is to pray for our nation and our leaders.

God help our nation on this, its 245th birthday. God help us to do all that we can do to see morality and righteousness once again rule and reign in our lives and in the heart of our country.

God will bless America.