

December 12  
Acts 24-26

Hello everyone and welcome back to Project 4:4 daily accelerators. My name is Lisa Ashton and I am bringing you December 12's reading covering Acts 24-26.

Today our reading covered over a 2 year span! Paul makes his defense before Governor Felix and instead of making a decision as to release Paul or convict him, he keeps him under guard for 2 years! During which we read that he was hoping Paul would offer him a bribe! Felix apparently cared so much about money and appeasing the Jews that he chose to stall as his decision.

Felix was followed by Governor Festus who upon taking office made a visit to Jerusalem. Remember now that the Roman Governor headquarters was Caesarea so this was about a 60 miles trip. When Festus got to Jerusalem the Jewish leaders and chief priests pleaded their case for Paul's conviction AND we read they still wanted to kill him. So even after 2 years of Paul being under guard in Caesarea and Jerusalem is still angry and conspiring to have him done away with! I wonder if these are the same dudes who said they wouldn't eat until they had Paul killed. After two years they must be pretty thin!

Well after Festus spent his time in Jerusalem he returned to Caesarea (with a slew of Jews who had come back with him) and proposed Paul to stand trial before him back in Jerusalem. Talk about peer pressure - he wanted to make a concession to please the Jews. However, since Paul understood that only Roman justice could be relied upon to free him, he exercised the right of a Roman citizen - he appealed to Caesar. What did this mean? It meant he was on his way to Rome! Can you hear Governor Festus singing, "To Caesar you will go, to Caesar you will go, hi ho the dairy yo, to Caesar you will go!" I wonder if this is where Mother Goose got her inspiration for her nursery rhyme.

Festus, knowing that he was out of his league in attempting to judge this case, was in all probability greatly relieved by Paul's request because it removed him from any responsibility in the matter. The only problem he now had was what to write on the bill of charges that would be sent with the prisoner to Rome. He hadn't a clue as to what he should say.

That is where the younger Agrippa and his sister Bernice come in. The son of Herod Agrippa I was king in mainly Gentile areas north and east of the Sea of Galilee, and in territories and cities on the west of the lake as well. He had no rule over Judea or Samaria but Festus still needed his advice. King Agrippa knew the Jews and he was very interested in hearing about Paul's case....although we learn later, Agrippa found no guilt in him.

So Festus brings Agrippa in and presents the problem: "There's this guy, Paul, who has been in prison under Felix, the Jews want him condemned, apparently it is over some dead man name Jesus who Paul claims is alive...I don't how to investigate

this...and he now appealed to Caesar...but I don't even know what he is guilty of! I don't think it's right to send a prisoner to the Emperor without clarifying the charges against him...can you help me!"

Agrippa agrees and Paul has a chance to speak his case in front of him. Paul proceeds to give his story of conversion – life before his encounter with Jesus, what made him turn to God and then his mission to take the light of Christ to the Gentiles.

Paul's defense of himself before Agrippa is interesting, because it shows us once again a bit of his heart. On trial for his life, Paul is not at all content to simply present the facts and leave them there as a matter of information. He is concerned about the heart of his listeners. He aims to help Agrippa personally respond to the Good News of The Way. *"Agrippa," he says, "do you believe the prophets? I know you do."* In that environment, I believe that I would very likely have been much more hesitant - more passive; but not Paul. Agrippa's response of "Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian?" may have been in fear or may have been in jest - we do not know. Paul at least was in deadly earnest: *"Short time or long, I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me may become what I am - except for these chains."*

This scene with Festus, Agrippa and Paul is one of my favorite evangelistic exchanges in all of scripture. Why? Paul is kind and respectful to authority, but yet firm and confident. He asks a question that calls for a response and when given push back, he places the outcome in the hands of God. These are good principles to follow when we engage the lost in Gospel conversation.

- 1 – We can be calm, confident and respectful in discussing our faith, without getting defensive.
- 2 – Questions that provoke a response are important.
- 3 – God is the one who does the persuading in drawing people to himself. Our job is to pray for them and be patient with his timing.

So who do you need to pray for today? Who do you need to trust God's timing to in responding to the Gospel?

Well that's a wrap to our study on Paul today. And that is also a wrap on my time with you through the Project 4:4 adventure. We got to study King David together! We got to study Famous Amos together! We got to see a dead man raised to life together! And now, we got to see brother Paul raising some holy havoc everywhere he went...all in the name of Jesus of Nazareth who rose again, for you and for me, so we could experience life, true life.

Tomorrow you will pick up in Acts 27 as he heads off to Rome.

"To Caesar he will go, to Caesar he will go, hi ho the dairy yo, to Caesar he will gooooo!"

So long everybody.