



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 25: 1-27

Acts

"Justice Denied"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our study in the Book of Acts continues with Acts 25 and we're going to look at all 27 verses. I'll read them, but I'm going to begin with verse 27 of chapter 24. It gives us the background for what occurs. Paul is in the town of Caesarea on the Mediterranean Coast. He has stood trial before the governor Felix, had an interesting interview with Felix and his wife Drusilla in which Felix was convicted of his sin and made to tremble. We read though in verse 27:

But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned.

Festus then, having arrived in the province, three days later went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul, and they were urging him, requesting a concession against Paul, that he might have him brought to Jerusalem (at the same time, setting an ambush to kill him on the way). Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly. "Therefore," he said, "let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him."

After he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them, he went down to Caesarea, and on the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. After Paul arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove, while Paul said in his own defense, "I have committed no offense either against

the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar." But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?" But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know. If, then, I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar." Then when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, "You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go."

Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and paid their respects to Festus. While they were spending many days there, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a man who was left as a prisoner by Felix; and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges. So after they had assembled here, I did not delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought before me. When the accusers stood up, they began bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting, but they simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive. Being at a loss how to investigate such matters, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there stand trial on these matters. But when Paul appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar." Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him."

So, on the next day when Agrippa came together with Bernice amid great pomp, and entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. Festus said, "King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you see this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer. But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I

decided to send him. Yet I have nothing definite about him to write to my Lord. Therefore I have brought him before you all and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the investigation has taken place, I may have something to write. For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let's bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for this opportunity that we have to be gathered together as men and women who profess faith in Jesus Christ. We thank You that we have possession of Your inerrant word and we have the privilege of reading it together and the added privilege of spending time considering the meaning of this text and its application to us. That is a great privilege, but it might come to nothing, Father, apart from the fact that You have blessed us with a teacher who lives within the hearts of every believer in Jesus Christ, and that is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity who guides us in our thinking, who opens our hearts to receive Your truth. And we know that that is the case in regeneration and faith. When the gospel is presented, it is the Spirit of God that enables us to respond and believe. Father, that fact continues on into our Christian life and on till the day we are present with You. We are constantly being nourished, taught by the Holy Spirit. He opens our hearts at every moment. We cannot understand anything apart from that ministry within us. And so we thank You for it, and we pray this morning, Father, that it would go unhindered, that the Spirit of God would minister to each and every one of us. We have a lesson to be heard, and the lesson seeks to address the issues of life that all of us experience. But everyone's life is unique, and their experience is unique. May the Spirit of God apply these in the unique way to each and every individual who hears. And may each one of us be built up in the faith as we spend time in Your word. It is our meat. It is our source of nourishment, spiritually. And so Lord, we look to You to make it effective within our hearts. Build us up, strengthen us, and may we go out from this place with the desire to be witnesses for Jesus Christ, and with the wisdom to know how to do that. Equip us to minister and serve faithfully this week.

We pray Lord not only for our spiritual needs, but also for the material concerns that we have. They are great. We thank You for Your bountiful provision.

You have blessed us abundantly. Every day, You bless us with another day of life, and You meet our needs. It is so consistent, Father, that we tend to take it all for granted. And yet, the reality is: every good thing that we have comes down from above. It is a gift from You. So we thank You for that, Father. We pray for those who are in need, those who are sick. We have a long list of names and we pray for them. We pray that You'd bless them. We pray that You'd give healing if that be Your will. Yet, we know that's not always Your will. And very often, Lord, it is Your will, that difficulty happen, and that difficulties continue for some length of time. Give strength and encouragement in the midst of that. Build people up through the afflictions that they experience. It is sometimes Your work that You do in our lives. You use affliction to mature us and to build us up in the faith. So, may those who are afflicted draw close to the throne of grace. May they find comfort in Your word, and may they find help through their prayers.

We pray for our nation at this time, this very difficult hour. We pray that You would bless it. We pray for wisdom. We pray for a good outcome to the issues that are facing this land. You have blessed this country abundantly. We pray for further blessing. We pray for blessing for this land mainly though in terms of its spiritual need. We are a needy people. This land is spiritually dark. Bring revival, Father. Use us to do that.

Bless our meeting this evening. May it be honoring to You. Prepare our hearts for that. May those who minister tonight minister well. Bless us now. Bless us through the singing of our final hymn. May it prepare our hearts for our time of study and worship. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] I don't think that William Gladstone had the apostle Paul in mind when he said that "justice delayed is justice denied." But his words certainly applied to the apostle. When we come to Acts 25, Paul has endured one delay after another. He has come before the course of law an innocent man, and yet his case has been tied up in the courts, and decisions have been put off. Consider all that Paul has been through in our study since chapter 21. He went up to the temple of Jerusalem lawfully, and he was beaten and almost murdered by a mob. He was narrowly rescued by the Romans, allowed to give a defense of himself before the crowd, but was shouted down when he spoke of his association with the Gentiles. So, he wasn't

released. In fact, he almost suffered a scourging by the Romans and only escaped that when he informed them that he was a citizen of the empire. He was given a trial in Jerusalem before the Sanhedrin, which was the supreme court of the Jews. But it became divided and dissolved into chaos before a decision was reached. When a plot on Paul's life was discovered, he was taken down to Caesarea, the seat of the Roman government in Judea, and was granted a hearing before the governor Felix. Paul defended himself against false charges that were made without witnesses, without evidence. Felix also had a letter from the Roman commander, Lysias, which exonerated Paul.

But again, rather than acquit the apostle, the judge delayed his decision, even though Felix had, we're told, a good knowledge of Christianity, and he knew that Paul was innocent. This was justice delayed, and so it was justice denied. And at the end of chapter 24, we read that Paul remained in jail there in Caesarea for two years.

Now, we might tend to skip over that without much thought as we read on to chapter 25, but that's a significant detail in the trials of Paul. Between Paul's dramatic interview with Felix and Drusilla, and the arrival of a new governor, Porcius Festus. In between these two chapters, two full years disappear from Paul's life.

Now, for some, that might mean very little, because the years tend to slip by for many people and they think very little of it. They take life rather lightly and don't think of the importance of time. But Paul was very much different from that. He was very conscience of the importance of time. He knew that when you lose a minute, you can never get it back. And so, as he comes to the end of his life, some of the good counsel that he gave to Timothy was: "Redeem the time." We don't have much of it, and it's slipping by all the time, so we are to redeem it. And Paul was a man very much interested, very concerned about the time that he had. And here he is, made to sit idly in a jail.

Paul didn't have Gladstone's quote at hand, but he did have one of Solomon's: "Hope deferred makes the soul sick." And he may have pondered on that. It's hard to imagine that Paul was not sick at heart by what he suffered because it just dragged on and on. And I don't doubt that Paul was discouraged, and Paul was perplexed by the events of his life, but I don't think he ever despaired because he knew that God was sovereign and that God is faithful.

But his experience does give us an example of the way things often times are. And what I mean by that is: Christians are not promised an easy life, and you might think, well, that's obvious. If you read the Word of God, that's very clear from beginning to end. We see godly men suffering and suffering for a period of time, a long period of time. And yet, I guess it does bear some mentioning because it seems to me that we live in a day of soft Christianity. We're not used to difficult times and difficult experiences, and so it does bear some repeating that we are not promised an easy life. And also, we're not promised answers to all of the questions that we have, and we're not very patient about that either. We tend to want to know why things occur the way they do. We want answers quickly.

Well, in this life, we're not guaranteed either one of those things. We will have hardships. We will not always be treated fairly. We will have trials and difficulties that may drag on and on, and we may not understand why that is. We could probably devote a whole sermon to that blank space in between the end of chapter 24 and the beginning of chapter 25, those two missing years in Paul's life. What purpose did they serve? Why didn't God give Paul swift justice? He was innocent. Why wasn't he acquitted? Why wasn't he released and allowed to get on with the business of spreading the gospel throughout the world, which Paul was so devoted to, so good at?

But for two years, he sits in a jail in Caesarea. Well, I don't know why that is, and Luke doesn't tell us. We can speculate. Maybe Paul, who had worked very diligently, worked very hard for so many years, was in need of rest, and God gave him something of a forced rest there in Caesarea. That may be, although a cold, damp jail doesn't seem to be to be the ideal place for a vacation. Well, maybe just the opposite. Maybe his time in chains was preparation for the hardships that were to come, because hardships would come.

We can guess at different reasons. The fact is: God doesn't reveal the reason why this happened to Paul, and that is often the way He works. He doesn't always tell us why things happen. What He does tell us is that He is sovereign, and He is faithful, and we are to trust Him. Paul did that. He didn't despair. He knew that the reins of the universe hadn't slipped from God's hands. He still controlled and guided world affairs. He still guided and controlled the events of Paul's life.

But still, after two years of trusting the Lord, after two years of justice delayed and denied, there was more of the same. Felix was recalled to Rome. Felix was a bad governor, and a new governor arrived, Festus. He was a better man than Felix. He was very diligent about his duties. Three days after arriving in Caesarea, he went to Jerusalem. He must've been tired after arriving in Caesarea by ship. But instead of resting, he went up to Jerusalem to meet the leaders there. That was good politics. He wanted to know what kind of men he would be dealing with, and he wanted those men to know that his rule would be different from that of Felix, which had been tyrannical. He was going to assure them that he would govern well.

While he was conferring with the leaders, the Jewish leaders, they brought the matter of Paul before him. They made their accusations against him and asked that he be brought up to Jerusalem to stand trial. But it wasn't a trial that they wanted. That was all a ruse. Luke explains in verse 3 that they were planning to set an ambush for him along the way. These men hadn't forgotten Paul. For two years, he'd been down in Caesarea. He had been out of their sight. But all that time, they had been brooding, they had been scheming. You remember those 40 plus conspirators who had plotted to ambush and kill Paul in Jerusalem back in chapter 23. They had taken a vow not to eat or drink anything until they had killed him. Well, two years have gone by and they're getting hungry. They were still dedicated to murder. But now, in addition to that, the rulers are very involved in this. They knew that the terrain around Jerusalem in those hills, which Paul would have to pass through, were ideal for setting a trap. That's what they planned to do if Festus agreed to bring Paul to them.

But he didn't. He refused. Luke doesn't say why. Maybe, as some have thought, it was because he knew about the plot previously. I doubt that that's the case. I don't think that Festus at this point had much knowledge of what had happened. He didn't have time for that. I think the reason he did not acquiesce and agree to their terms is found in Proverbs 21 verse 1. "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord." He turns it wherever He wishes. God's sovereign over all of the affairs of life. He's sovereign over the hearts of the rulers of the nations. And here, He turned this ruler's heart to Paul's advantage.

God works that way, which is very interesting, very encouraging, very comforting because while Paul was sitting in jail, unable to do anything in his own defense, God was defending him by causing a pagan judge to do the right thing.

Don't ever think that you are alone in your struggles. They may be very hard and they may be unrelenting. But God is acutely aware of your situation and completely involved in it. You don't need to know why things are happening the way they are happening. It is enough to know that God is at work to accomplish His will for your life, and that is an assurance that we have. Paul had that assurance because God, the Lord Jesus Christ, had appeared to him, had promised to send Paul to Rome, and His will could not be thwarted. God's will cannot be thwarted. Nothing can overrule God's plan.

So Paul would be kept in Caesarea. But Festus did invite those who wanted to return with him to come down and they could prosecute Paul there. And so, about ten days later, a group of men returned with him and another trial was held. Festus took his seat on the tribunal. Paul was brought in and his accusers stood around him and brought many and serious charges against him. The accusations were both religious and political. One that was very serious was that Paul was an enemy of Caesar. That was a charge, you'll remember, that was used against the Lord and caused Pilate to be afraid to release Him. It was the charge that forced Pilate's hand and led to Christ's death. It was a charge, it was an accusation that was intended to intimidate Festus just as it had Pilate and given in a procedure that would seem to have been very intimidating to Paul. These men stood around him. An image you get, the picture you get is these men like wolves, standing there, hostile to him, making scurrilous charges but without evidence.

Luke writes, "They could not prove any of their charges." I say it would seem to be intimidating, but Paul evidently was not intimidated. He seems quite calm. He answers all of their accusations. He said, "I have committed no offense either against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar." That's been his defense; that's his defense again. The burden of proof rested with these accusers since they could not prove their charges. Then, the trial should've gone in Paul's favor. The trial should've ended with Paul's acquittal.

But again, it didn't. Festus was a better governor than Felix had been, but he had the same weakness that Felix had, the same weakness that Pilate had. The weakness that men have. And in verse 9, Luke writes, "But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, 'Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?'" Well, Paul was no fool. If Festus was

ignorant of the atmosphere in Jerusalem, Paul certainly wasn't. He knew very well the prejudice of the court there. He knew there were assassins in the city and he knew that if he even made it to the court, that he wouldn't receive a fair trial there.

And so, with the wisdom that God had given him, Paul saw that he had only one option, and that was to find a different venue and a different judge. Paul was very direct. Paul was quite bold. He said to Festus: "I have done no wrong to the Jews as you also very well know." In other words, this trial should be over, Festus. You know that I am innocent. You have not done your job of justice.

He goes on to point out that he was not trying to avoid justice at all. He says if he was worthy of death that he would not refuse to die. But nothing of which he had been accused was true. And since he had no other option, he said I appeal to Caesar. That was his right as a Roman citizen. And once he made that appeal, Festus could not hand him over to the Jews. So after conferring with his counselors, Festus said in verse 12, "You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go."

It was the right decision. It was not a failure of faith by Paul as though he was not waiting on the Lord, as though he was not trusting in God to providentially work out matters in Jerusalem. It was a wise decision. Even though Paul would stand before the emperor Nero, because Paul was using the institutions that God had provided. It was just a few months before this that Paul had written the Book of Romans, that he had written Romans chapter 13 in which he describes government as an institution established by God, and described it as a ministry of God. He's talking about governments. That includes the government of Rome. It's a minister of God. And so he was not wrong in seeking to use that institution that God had established.

John Calvin wrote, "God, who has appointed courts of law, also gives His people liberty to use them lawfully." And so Paul was simply doing that. Paul was being consistent with his own teaching. He was not a passive person. When it came to making decisions, Paul was very active, and I think we learn something about decision-making from the apostle Paul. The decisions we face are not always clear. They're not always black and white. And so, we should make those decisions very much the way Paul made his decisions, the way he made this particular decision. He knew God's word. He made plans and he made those plans according to the principles of God's word. He analyzed his situation, he knew what he faced in Jerusalem, he knew what his options were, he knew that really, he had only one

option unless he wanted to go up to a city that was hostile to him, that was predisposed against him where he might be assassinated. And so, understanding all of that, understanding God's word, he used his wisdom and he trusted God to work through the legal system in Rome.

That's how we make our decisions, very often. We use our wisdom and we seek that wisdom from God. James tells us in James 1:5 that if we lack it, we're to ask God for it. If He will give it to us, He will not withhold it. We use our wisdom and then we trust the Lord. That's what Paul did, and I am sure that Festus was quite relieved by Paul's appeal because it took a difficult case out of his hands, one that he did not know how to resolve. He was out of his element when it came to religious matters, and he makes that clear from what follows.

The rest of the chapter, and all of chapter 26 deals with the visit of King Agrippa. Luke gives a lot of attention to it. He was Agrippa II, the son of the king Agrippa who killed the apostle James in chapter 12. He was probably a better king, this Agrippa, than the Herods that preceded him. But still, he was not free of scandal. His queen was Bernice. She was his sister. And the rumor around Rome was that they were living together as man and wife. After his father's death, Agrippa was made king of a small area in Northeastern Lebanon. Over the years, his dominion was enlarged to include much of Galilee. But at this time, he had a rather small domain, and he was under the authority of the Roman governor.

And so, not long after Paul's trial, Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus as the new governor. In the course of their visit, the conversation came around to Paul and to his case. Festus called him a man left a prisoner by Felix. He was one of Felix's leftovers, as one writer puts it, like some junk that had been left behind for Festus to deal with and clean up. I'm sure that that is just about how Festus looked on Paul: as nothing important, and as a real bother to this governor. First Corinthians 4 and verse 13, Paul described himself and the apostles as "scum in the eyes of the world." The dregs of all things, the off scouring of the world. Festus must've looked upon Paul in much that way. He was not interested in Paul. He was not interested in his case. He didn't really know how to deal with his case. He had to explain to Caesar the reason he had sent him for trial. As he says in verse 19, it was all over a disagreement about religion, about a dead man, Jesus, he said, whom Paul asserted to be alive.

You can tell it was all so foreign to Festus and completely unimportant. Jesus, a dead man, and Paul, a leftover. That's how Festus looked at it all. It was a case that really shouldn't have been sent to a Roman court. It was a theological dispute, not something that the emperor would want to deal with. So, Festus had to justify sending Paul and his case to Rome. He didn't quite know how to do that. He didn't understand these matters. He didn't want to upset Nero by sending a case that had nothing to do with Roman law. And so he's very much at a loss. And not only was he not sure of how to deal with this; he was completely uninterested in this, didn't want to be bothered with it. He wanted to get down to the important issues of life, which are politics, which are matters of state, not realizing that he was dealing with the most important issue of all: Jesus Christ, once dead, now alive.

Well, Festus was uninterested in any of these issues, but Agrippa was very much interested. He said in verse 20, I would like to hear this man myself. And Festus said, tomorrow you shall hear the man. So once again, Paul must stand trial and defend his innocence before an unjust judge. And now, before a decadent king. It was a discouraging, wearisome process. And yet, Paul was not discouraged, and Paul was not weary because he faced it all well-grounded in his theology. He knew that he was innocent. His conscience was blameless, as he has said. And though he was in an uncomfortable place, he knew that God was over it. God was sovereign and working out His plan. Paul had Scripture to draw on and he had a number of examples to recall for encouragement. I don't know what Scriptures he was thinking about, and I don't know what examples he had in his mind that would have encouraged him, but I can imagine very well that he thought of Joseph, because Joseph was a man very much like Paul. He was innocent, and he was godly. He was a prophet. He was the deliverer of his family, but he was treated unjustly by his brothers, and he was sold into slavery. He was imprisoned in Egypt and suffered much for a long period of time. We know the story from the Book of Genesis, but the psalmist also picks it up in Psalm 105 and he wrote of Joseph, and he stated that "God sent him into Egypt when he was sold as a slave."

So, the psalmist recognized that Joseph's experience in Egypt was all part of God's plan. He was sovereign in it from the beginning to the end. He sent him down there and sent him by means of slavery. He writes, "They afflicted his feet with fetters." He himself was laid in irons until the time that his word came to pass, the

word of the Lord tested him. And when that test was finished, when Joseph had been tried and had been refined, as with fire and had been made fit for that future work that he would have, then the king, Pharaoh, exalted him over Egypt.

Nothing happened by chance. The psalmist knew that. Joseph knew that. You know the story. At the end of Genesis in chapter 50 and verse 20, he told his brothers, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." In other words, all that you did, your planning, your scheming, your evil action against me, God ordained all of that to bring about this very result, which was good, which was the deliverance of the family.

Well, Paul saw himself in the same situation. He was an innocent man who had been imprisoned. He'd been laid in irons, but he was confident that he was where he was supposed to be, and he knew that God meant it for good.

With that understanding, with that conviction, he could go to trial with confidence and take the opportunity to be a witness. Whether or not we know the reason for our circumstances, we can always know that whether they be circumstances of victory or circumstances of defeat, they are always opportunities to be a witness by our words or by our response to the circumstances of life. And Paul entered the court to be just that, to be a witness.

It was not a formal trial. Festus calls it an investigation, verse 26. But still, formal or informal, it was a court of law that he entered, and he was called there to give an account of himself, and called to do that without much notice. The next day, the court convenes, and so Paul had just a few hours to put his case together and formulate what he would say. It was a spectacular event. Luke describes it in verse 23. Agrippa and Bernice entered the auditorium together. Luke writes that they entered amid great pomp. I can imagine there were trumpets that sounded to announce their arrival. They were probably dressed in their regal robes and finery, and then they were followed by the great and the powerful Festus the governor, the military commanders, the leading men of the city, the politicians, the wealthy merchants. All the men of influence attended this hearing, this investigation, this trial.

Then, into the midst of this great pageantry, Paul was led. What a contrast he was. Against all of the purple and gold, he entered wearing a prisoner's tunic and chains. But it was Paul, this little Jew from Tarsus, as someone put it, that commanded the attention. John Stott writes, "He dominated the court with his quiet,

Christ-like dignity and confidence." It was Paul against the pomp. In the eyes of those who were there, Paul was among the great. He was privileged to be in the company of the king and the queen, the governor and his officials, the rich and the powerful. Privileged to be there, they thought, but the reality was, the fact was it was they who were privileged to be in the company of the apostle. F.F. Bruce wrote, "Luke had a true sense of values and knew that in Paul, there was a native greatness which had no need to be decked with the trappings of grandeur."

Luke understood that the grandeur surrounding Paul was really nothing of lasting value. In fact, Bruce goes onto suggest that there is quiet humor in Luke's account. That may be, because the word "pomp" that Luke uses is literally "*fantasia*." It's the word from which we get "fantasy." And while the Greek word does mean "pomp" or "show," it was really a fantasy. In fact, Plato and Aristotle used this word in their philosophies with the meaning of imagination. And maybe, Luke intended that as a lesson and used this word for that reason, because while all this pomp had the appearance of the permanent and the important, it was not. It was all transient. It was all a fantasy. It would all soon end.

Throughout the Bible, we are warned against such things. We are warned against looking at the outward. We are to value the inward. We are to value the invisible. We are to value the spiritual, the biblically spiritual. The Bible tells us that the world is passing away, and also its lusts. Everything we see will be crushed, ultimately, by the weight of God's glory when Christ returns.

Daniel explained that when he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream of that great image in Daniel chapter 2. It was an image that was colossal in its appearance, glorious in its appearance. It had a head of gold, arms and chest of silver, thighs of bronze, and feet of iron, picturing how history will unfold with the kingdoms of this world. It stood majestically until a stone from heaven struck its feet, crushed it to powder that was blown away without a trace to be found. And then the earth was filled with that stone which is the kingdom of Christ. It fills the earth.

That is the future of this present world. It is doomed to destruction. It won't last. Even now, John tells us, it is passing away. The court of Caesarea is just an example of that. With all of its pomp, all of its pageantry, it was all transient. It didn't last. At the end of the day, it came to an end. The auditorium emptied of those glamorous people and it was all gone. There was greatness at that court, but it was

not in the dignitaries. It was in the apostle Paul who remembers Agrippa and Bernice today.

Who gives any thought to Festus? Who even remembers his name? Maybe a few historians do, and those of you who read your Bibles regularly and diligently remember names like this. But who remembers the names of these people who were the celebrities of their day? But Paul is known throughout the world. Not because Paul was great in and of himself, but because of what he was by the grace of God, because of what he stood for, because of who he represented, who is eternal Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So whenever we are impressed by the world and its glory, and whenever we are attracted to it, which is probably just about every day of the week, we should remember that all of that is just passing away. It will not last. It is not permanent, and understanding that should give us perspective on life. That fact should also encourage us and help us deal with the trials of life. They will not last. They seem to go on and on. We face injustices. We face hardships, but we suffer only for a time. The difficulties of life, the injustices of life will soon be replaced by eternal glory.

Paul knew that. Paul wrote of that in Romans chapter 8. In the middle of that chapter, he writes about the creation. He writes about it being subjected to futility. It groans, he says, and we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. That day will come. That is our hope, and I don't doubt that Paul had that in mind, or something like that in mind. He knew that that day is coming, whatever he suffers is but temporary. The day of eternal glory is soon approaching, and that hope, no doubt gave Paul the strength to stand in the midst of that court of dignitaries, glamorous people that they were, powerful people that they were, stand there with courage and confidence, and be a witness for Christ. All of the pomp, all of the glory he saw in that auditorium was just a show. The importance of it was in the imagination. He knew that. He stood for the truth, which is eternal. He stood for the gospel. He stood with the hope of the glory to come.

To that princely crowd, that proud group, Paul may have been nothing but scum and dregs and privileged to be there. The reality was: they were the ones who were privileged. They had the opportunity to hear the truth. They had the opportunity to hear the gospel. They had the opportunity to respond and be saved. That is the opportunity that everyone who hears the gospel has. It is the greatest of all

opportunities. It is the greatest of all privileges. It is the privilege that God has made possible by His grace.

We began our study this morning with that quote attributed to Gladstone. Justice delayed is justice denied. And that was true of Paul. A man's justice was denied by delays and by selfish motives, but there is another sense in which justice delayed is not justice denied. It is grace. God has, as it were, delayed His justice for the world. He has given sinners an opportunity to consider their condition and consider the solution to that condition in Jesus Christ, to believe in Him and be saved. If God acted according to strict justice, which He has a full right to do. But if He had acted according to strict justice, He would not delay. There would be no opportunity for salvation. The guilty would have been swept away in a moment long ago.

But we live in an age of grace. The day of judgment has been set. Make no mistake about it. Christ will return to judge the living and the dead. That day has been set. But mercifully, God has also made a day of salvation. That day is today. Today is the day of salvation. So if you're here today without Christ; if you know yourself to be a sinner, then believe in Him. He was, as Festus said, a dead man, but a dead man made alive. That is the good news. That's the gospel. That's what Paul preached. That's what Paul will preach before this august company of men and women in Caesarea. Jesus Christ is God's son who became a man in order to die for sinners, to suffer the penalty of their sins in their place. He did not come to be merely an example. He did not come to die, in order to influence us in some way to repent and believe, and by that faith be saved. Our salvation is not based on our faith; it's based on the work of Christ. And because it is based on the work of Christ, because that was a judicial death, it was a death that satisfied the wrath of God, the justice of God. It turned the wrath of God away so that now, everyone who believes in Him is saved. Justice has been satisfied with a just God. And because of the death of Christ, He is free to pour out His love, and He does that. He does that on believers.

So if you're here without Him, realize your peril, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. All who believe are saved. Don't trust in the world. Don't look around at the glory of it all, which seems so permanent. Don't put your hopes in the pomp of this age. It is a fantasy. It is passing away. It's those who do the will of God who live forever, those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who are saved. It's not our works that save us. We're saved through faith and faith alone. It's the work of Christ that

redeems His people from their sins. May God help you to know that, and to believe that, and help all of us to rest in that, and to rejoice in the fact that God is in complete control of our circumstances, and will bring them to a good end at the right time.

Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for that. We do thank You for the example we have of the apostle Paul, which is one of many examples that we have down through the Scriptures of men and women who suffered for long periods of time, men and women of whom the world was not worthy, who lived without the comforts of this world, who lived, as the author of Hebrews tells us, in holes in the ground, without any of the comforts that we have. And yet, they persevered, and You blessed. And through all of that, You carried out Your will for their lives. Encourage us with that fact as we go through difficulties, that You're in control, and You are working things out for Your good, and to our good. Help us to see –