SMITH FOR CHRIST PUBLISHING · BEREAN DASHBOARD STUDY

Acts 25

I Appeal to Caesar — O·I·A, integrated with the Deep Dive

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION · 2026-11-10 · NASB 1995

"Seeking God diligently — examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." — Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

Paul's enemies have not given up, a new governor wants to keep the peace, and an innocent man is about to be traded as a favor — so Paul uses the law God gave him and appeals to Caesar. Under all the politics God is keeping His promise to bring Paul to Rome, and the whole case turns out to be about one thing: Jesus died, and He is alive.

00 The Text

ACTS 25 (NASB95), MARKED

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED — God — His character & actions · Command / instruction · Key repeated word · Sin / warning · Promise / blessing · Time / place / contrast

1 Festus then, having arrived in the province, three days later went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea.

2 And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul, and they were urging him,

3 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).

4 Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly.

5 "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."

6 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.

7 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,

8 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."

9 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?"

10 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.

11 "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."

12 Then when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, "You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go."

13 Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and paid their respects to Festus.

14 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;

15 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.

16 "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.

17 "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.

18 "When the accusers stood up, they began bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting,

19 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.

20 "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.

21 "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."

22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him."

23 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.

24 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.

25 "But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him.

26 "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.

27 "For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him."

Marked in the text

- **v1** "three days later went up to Jerusalem" — Time / place / contrast
- **v3** "setting an ambush to kill him on the way" — Sin / warning
- **v7** "which they could not prove" — Sin / warning
- **v8** "I have committed no offense" — Time / place / contrast
- **v9** "wishing to do the Jews a favor" — Sin / warning
- **v10** "I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know" — Time / place / contrast
- **v11** "I do not refuse to die" — Command / instruction
- **v12** "to Caesar you shall go" — God — His character & actions
- **v16** "it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man" — Time / place / contrast
- **v16** "meets his accusers face to face" — Time / place / contrast
- **v19** "their own religion" — Time / place / contrast
- **v19** "a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive" — God — His character & actions
- **v20** "Being at a loss how to investigate such matters" — Sin / warning
- **v22** "I also would like to hear the man myself" — Command / instruction
- **v23** "amid great pomp" — Time / place / contrast
- **v24** "he ought not to live any longer" — Sin / warning
- **v25** "he had committed nothing worthy of death" — Promise / blessing
- **v26** "I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord" — Time / place / contrast
- **v27** "it seems absurd to me" — Sin / warning
- **v8** "Caesar" — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v11** "appeal" — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v12** "appealed" — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v6** "tribunal" — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v2** "charges" — Key repeated word (every occurrence)

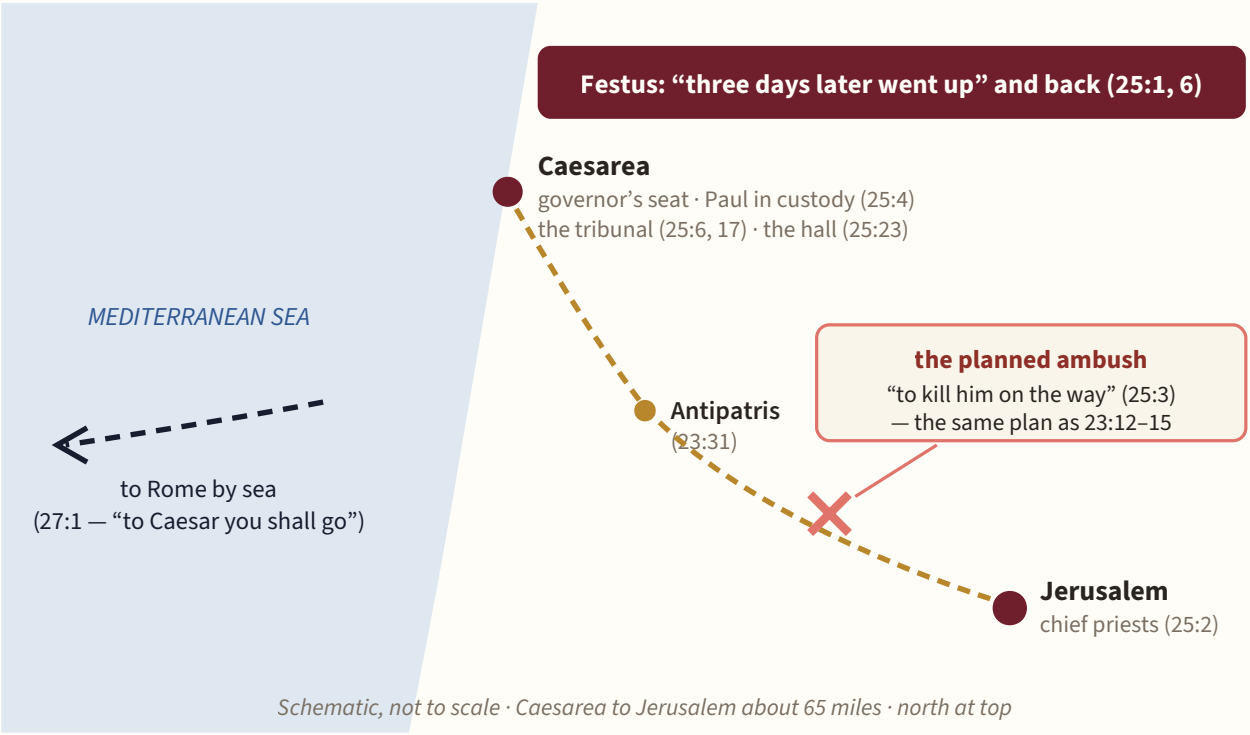
01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · ACTS 25:7

"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,"

FIGURE · CAESAREA AND JERUSALEM



Festus goes up to Jerusalem and back; the priests want Paul on that same road so they can kill him, and Paul's appeal sends him west across the sea instead.

Setting. Caesarea, the Roman capital on the coast, and Jerusalem, two days up in the hills, about AD 59–60. Paul has been in custody two years (24:27). Porcius Festus replaces Felix; three days after arriving he goes up to Jerusalem (v1), stays eight or ten days (v6), and hears Paul at Caesarea. Several days later King Agrippa II and his sister Bernice arrive (v13), and Paul is brought before them in the auditorium (v23).

Structure:

- vv1–5 — **the plot revived:** Festus goes up to Jerusalem; the chief priests ask that Paul be brought there, "setting an ambush to kill him on the way" (v3); Festus says Paul stays at Caesarea — "let the influential men among you go there with me" (vv4–5).

- vv6–12 — **the appeal:** Festus takes his seat on the tribunal; many serious charges "which they could not prove" (v7); "I have committed no offense" (v8); Festus, "wishing to do the Jews a favor," proposes Jerusalem (v9); "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal … I appeal to Caesar" (vv10–11); "to Caesar you shall go" (v12).
- vv13–22 — **the question of Jesus:** Agrippa and Bernice pay their respects (v13); Festus lays out the case — the Roman custom of meeting accusers face to face (v16), charges not such as he expected (v18), "a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive" (v19), "at a loss" (v20), the appeal to the Emperor (v21); "I also would like to hear the man myself" (v22).
- vv23–27 — **the great hall:** Agrippa and Bernice "amid great pomp," with commanders and prominent men (v23); Festus presents the prisoner — the Jews cry he ought not to live (v24), he found nothing worthy of death (v25), nothing definite to write to "my lord" (v26), absurd to send a prisoner without charges (v27).

Repeated words, with counts:

- "Festus" ×9 — vv1, 4, 9, 12, 13, 14, 22, 23, 24.
- "Caesar" ×6 — vv8, 10, 11, 12 (×2), 21; "Emperor" ×2 — vv21, 25.
- "charge / charges" ×7 — vv2, 7, 9, 15, 16, 18, 27; "accuse / accused / accusers" ×4 — vv11, 16 (×2), 18.
- "Jerusalem" ×7 — vv1, 3, 7, 9, 15, 20, 24; "Caesarea" ×4 — vv1, 4, 6, 13.
- "Jews" ×7 — vv2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 24.
- "appeal / appealed" ×5 — vv11, 12, 21, 24, 25 (four times Paul's appeal; once the Jews' appeal to Festus, v24).
- "Agrippa" ×5 — vv13, 22, 23, 24, 26; "king" ×4 — vv13, 14, 24, 26.
- "tribunal" ×3 — vv6, 10, 17; "custody" ×3 — vv4, 21 (×2).
- "wrong / wrongdoer" ×3 — vv5, 10, 11; "worthy of death" ×2 — vv11, 25.
- "next day / tomorrow" ×4 — vv6, 17, 22, 23.

Contrasts: Jerusalem, where the ambush waits ⟷ Caesarea, where the law sits (vv3–6). Many serious charges ⟷ nothing proved (v7). A favor to the Jews ⟷ what is right (vv9–10). "I do not refuse to die" ⟷ "no one can hand me over to them" (v11). What Festus expected ⟷ a question about religion and a dead man (vv18–19). A dead man ⟷ asserted to be alive (v19). Great pomp ⟷ a prisoner (v23). "He ought not to live" ⟷ "nothing worthy of death" (vv24–25).

Shape of the chapter: two scenes and a speech. Scene one is a trial that goes nowhere (vv1–12); scene two is a conversation that repeats it for a king (vv13–22); and Festus's speech in the great hall sets the stage for Paul's defense in chapter 26 (vv23–27). The governor tells the story twice — and both times the only thing he cannot explain is Jesus.

Chapter theme (my words): Men keep handling Paul's case for their own advantage — the priests for revenge, Festus for goodwill, Agrippa for curiosity — and God keeps using all of it to get His witness to Rome. And when the case is stripped down, it is about one Man who died and is alive.

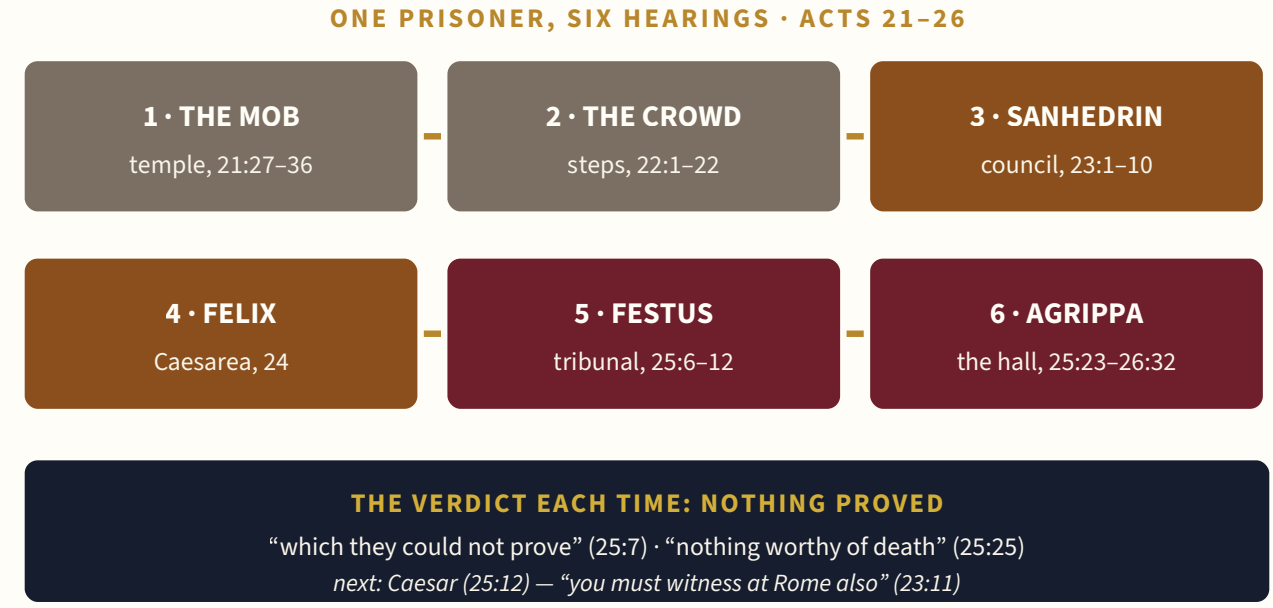
02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · ACTS 25:11

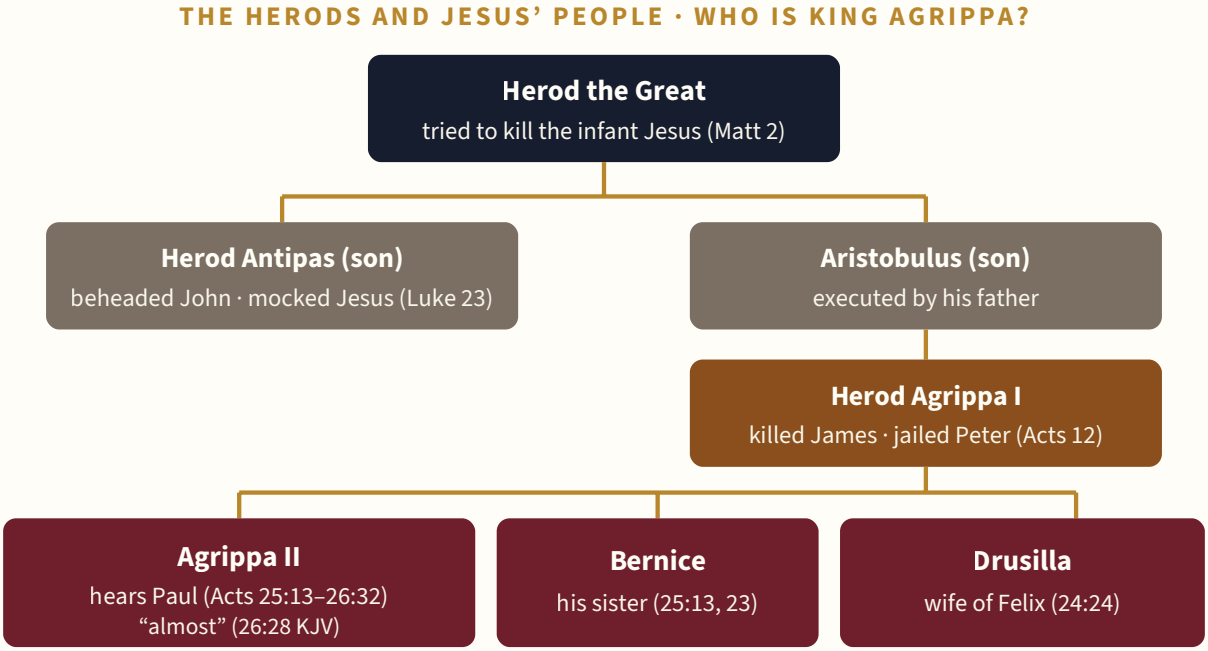
"If, then, I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar."

FIGURE · ONE PRISONER, SIX HEARINGS



Read the boxes in order: every court Paul faced from the temple riot to King Agrippa found nothing it could prove, and the last step is Caesar.

FIGURE · THE HERODS AND JESUS' PEOPLE



Simplified — only the members named in the Gospels and Acts are shown.

King Agrippa came from a family that had opposed Jesus and His followers for three generations — and Paul offered him the same Christ.

Who was Festus? Porcius Festus took office about AD 59–60 and died in office a couple of years later. Guzik: "Felix was undoubtedly a bad man, but history tells us Festus was a basically good man." Henry is cooler: quick, fair in procedure, but "not so just to him as he should have been, for he does not release him." Both are true. Festus kept Roman procedure (vv16–17) and still wanted to do the Jews a favor (v9) — the same words Luke used of Felix (24:27).

Why did Paul appeal to Caesar? Because a trial in Jerusalem meant the road, and the road meant the ambush (v3). Guzik: "Paul saw through the plot against his life," and "Rightly and wisely, Paul wanted to avoid martyrdom if he could." He cites Calvin: "God, who has appointed courts of law, also gives his people liberty to use them lawfully." Paul was not afraid to die ("I do not refuse to die," v11); he refused to be handed over as a favor. And the appeal lined up with what the Lord had already told him: "you must witness at Rome also" (23:11).

Was it a mistake? Agrippa will say Paul "might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar" (26:32). But Luke gives no hint of regret. Guzik: the appeal served God's plan and got Paul to Rome. Paul had purposed in the Spirit, "I must also see Rome" (19:21).

Who were Agrippa and Bernice? Agrippa II, son of the Herod who killed James (12:1–2), great-grandson of the Herod who tried to kill the infant Jesus. Rome gave him territories in the north and the right to oversee the temple and appoint high priests (Guzik). Bernice was his sister; their closeness was the talk of the ancient world (Guzik: rumors; Henry: "Such lewd people were the great people generally in those times!"). Agrippa knew Jewish customs well (26:3), which is why Festus wanted his help.

"A dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive" (v19). Festus thinks it is a side issue in a religious squabble (*deisidaimonia*). It is the center of everything. Spurgeon: "Jesus is evidently nothing to Festus." Henry: "See how

slightly this Roman speaks of Christ." But Festus has stated the gospel exactly — He died, and He lives (*zēn*, "to be alive"). The question for every man is not whether Christianity is a respectable religion but whether Jesus is alive.

Great pomp. *Phantasia*, a show. Guzik: "All the pomp and pageantry was meant to communicate who was important, and who wasn't important." Henry: "Great pomp is but great fancy." Two thousand years later the only person in the room we remember for anything good is the prisoner.

Word study (Greek):

- **ambush — *enedra* (G1747):** a "sitting in wait"; the plot of 23:12–15 revived.
- **concession / favor — *charis* (G5485):** grace sunk to a political favor (25:3, 9; 24:27).
- **tribunal — *bēma* (G968):** the judge's seat (25:6, 10, 17); compare "the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor 5:10).
- **appeal — *epikaleomai* (G1941):** to call upon; also "calls on the name of the Lord" (Acts 2:21; Rom 10:13).
- **Emperor — *Sebastos* (G4575):** "Augustus," the Revered One (25:21, 25).
- **religion — *deisidaimonia* (G1175):** fear of the gods; only here (compare 17:22).
- **alive — *zaō* (G2198):** "to be living" — not just raised once, but alive now.
- **pomp — *phantasia* (G5325):** a show; only here.
- **definite — *asphalēs* (G804) / lord — *kyrios* (G2962):** nothing certain to write to "my lord," the emperor.

Key insights to carry (from the Deep Dive):

1. **Malice waits two years** (Henry).
2. **Grace sunk to a favor** — *charis* in vv3, 9.
3. **Innocent, and still in chains** — nothing proved, and sent on anyway.
4. **Use the law; don't court the lion** (Guzik, Calvin).
5. **He called on Caesar because he had called on the Lord** — *epikaleomai*.
6. **A higher tribunal** — the *bēma* of Christ.
7. **The gospel in a pagan's mouth** — a dead man, alive (v19).
8. **Jesus is still little known** (Spurgeon).
9. **Great pomp is but great fancy** (Henry).
10. **God's word runs under man's injustice** (23:11; 25:12).

Cross-references: Matt 2:16; Luke 21:12–13; 23:8–11; Acts 9:15; 12:1–2; 17:22; 19:21; 23:11–35; 24:24–27; 26:32; 28:30–31; Rom 10:13; 13:1–4; 1 Cor 15:20; 2 Cor 5:10; 2 Tim 4:16–17; 1 Pet 3:15.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · ACTS 25:19

"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."

Sin to confess — keeping a grudge warm. The chief priests waited two years and brought up Paul the first day they could. I know what it is to keep a grudge alive, to rehearse it, to wait for my chance. Henry is right: "See how restless a thing malice is." I name the man I have not forgiven, and I give that grudge to God before it turns me into the kind of religious man who would set an ambush.

Sin to confess — trading people for approval. Festus wanted to do the Jews a favor, and Felix had done the same. I have done it too — kept quiet, gone along, let someone else pay so the people who mattered would like me. Grace is not a favor I trade; it is what God gave me for nothing.

Example to follow — Paul's courage and wisdom. "I do not refuse to die" — and "I appeal to Caesar." Paul was not reckless and he was not afraid. Many of the men I serve have been through courts and know how unfair they can be. Paul shows us we can use every lawful protection, tell the truth, and leave the outcome with God, who had already said, "you must witness at Rome also."

Truth to face — Jesus is alive. Festus called Him "a dead man." For a long time I lived like Jesus was a dead man in a story — respected, maybe, but not present. Paul kept asserting He is alive. If He is alive, I can speak to Him today, and He hears, and He will be there tomorrow in whatever hall I am brought into.

Promise to trust — God gets His man where He wants him. Priests, governors and kings all thought they were handling Paul. God was. When my life feels like it is in other people's hands — a judge, a parole board, a boss, a doctor — the same Lord who stood by Paul at night stands by me.

Questions for the table (from the Deep Dive):

1. Two years passed and the chief priests' hatred had not cooled. Is there a grudge I have kept warm for years — and what would it look like to lay it down? (25:1–3; Eph 4:31–32) *See how restless a thing malice is (Henry).*
2. Festus wanted to "do the Jews a favor" at Paul's expense. Where am I tempted to trade what is right for someone's approval? (25:9; 24:27) *The word for grace sunk to a political favor.*
3. Paul said, "I do not refuse to die" — and in the same breath appealed to Caesar. How do I hold together courage and wisdom when I am treated unjustly? (25:10–11; Rom 13:1–4) *Not afraid of the lions, but no head in the lion's mouth (Guzik).*
4. To Festus, Jesus was "a dead man" and a matter of "their own religion." How would the people around me describe Jesus from watching my life? (25:19) *Jesus is still so little known (Spurgeon via Guzik).*
5. Is Jesus to me a dead man in a story, or a living Lord I speak to? What changes on an ordinary day if He is alive? (25:19; 1 Cor 15:20) *Believe Paul's affirmation and speak to the living Jesus (Spurgeon).*
6. The hall was full of pomp, and the man in chains carried the only lasting word. Where do I measure my worth by rank, and where does God measure it? (25:23; 1 Pet 3:15) *Great pomp is but great fancy (Henry).*

Worship. The Lord who stood by Paul in the barracks rules over governors and kings. He turned an ambush into an appeal and a political favor into a voyage to Rome. And He is not a dead man: Jesus, who died, is alive — the first fruits of those who sleep, and the Judge before whose seat every tribunal on earth will one day stand.

Prayer. Lord Jesus, You are alive. Forgive me for the grudges I have kept warm and for the times I have traded what is right for someone's approval. Give me Paul's courage — not to refuse to die, if that is Your will — and his wisdom to use the means You have given. When my life seems to be in other people's hands, remind me that it is in Yours. And make me a man who keeps asserting, in every hall I am brought into, that You are alive. Amen.

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