



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Yet Another Tale of Two Politicians (Acts 26)

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In our last study, we considered two politicians we read about in the book of Acts. Both had governmental responsibilities and both came under the teaching of Paul. We saw that one (Sergius Paulus) responded to Paul's teaching by accepting it while the other (Felix) was scared of the message of decision and judgment. He responded with unbelief. This reminded me of Charles Dickens' words:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity...

As God's Word is shared, we can expect many different responses. We pray for leaders to have the heart of Sergius, who was amazed at the teaching of the Lord and believed. We are commanded to pray for that result.

1 Timothy 2:1-4 - First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions. . . it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Let's continue our survey through the end of Acts to consider two more accounts of reactions by political leaders to the teaching of the gospel.

I. THE RESPONSE MAY BE ACCUSATION

Acts 26:24, 25 - And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind." But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words."

At the end of our last study, Paul was in prison in Caesarea with many charges by the Jewish leaders against him. The governor, Felix, heard his appeal and testimony of the gospel, choosing to leave him in jail. Felix was frightened as he heard Paul's message of truth, which included warnings about coming judgment. After a couple of more years, Felix was replaced by Festus.

Festus, as the new governor, heard the complaint of the leaders in Jerusalem and heard Paul himself. Again, Paul had the chance to stand before a governmental leader and proclaim the message of life

and forgiveness through Jesus. Festus didn't see a reason for Paul to be executed as the Jewish leaders wanted, but he also did not believe in the Christ Paul taught about.

There are times when the gospel is proclaimed, that the rejection will be accompanied with an accusation of craziness. This might be a true conviction or a convenient deflection, but the world has often thought followers of Christ were out of their minds.

When someone makes the accusation of craziness, what are they really saying? It's actually the easiest and laziest accusation to make. The accuser is really saying, "You don't think like I do. I'm sane, so you must be crazy." We speak of a living Creator God who communicates through His creation and a book He inspired to be written over centuries by dozens of authors. We believe He also revealed Himself by sending His Son to live on earth, die to redeem those who believe, and be raised to life, conquering death forever. We believe He will come again to judge all mankind, then reign forever in a new heaven and earth. That's too much for some people. We don't think like them, so we must be crazy.

Paul wrote about such people. The problem isn't with the message of the gospel, but that their minds are affected by sin.

1 Corinthians 2:14 - The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Pray for those who can't see the light of the gospel. It may seem crazy to them, but we never know how the Spirit of God will work in their heart to lead them to belief at some point.

II. THE RESPONSE MAY BE AVOIDANCE

Acts 26:26-28 For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?"

Agrippa was the son of Herod Agrippa, who had had James, one of Jesus' disciples, executed and died a horrific death himself, eventually being eaten by worms. We're also told that Agrippa was with Bernice, his sister, with whom he had an incestuous relationship. He

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had come to visit Festus in Caesarea when the topic of Paul's imprisonment came up. Agrippa agreed to hear the case and give his advice to Festus, so Paul was brought before them again.

Paul again makes his appeal, with a detailed account of his conversion and plea for his hearers to exercise faith in Christ. This was when Festus called him crazy followed by Paul's denial. Then Paul appeals to the religious background of Agrippa, who was not Jewish by birth but did hold to Jewish teaching. That is why Paul could be so bold in his presence.

Paul's words here are striking, stating that he knows the king believes the teaching in the Old Testament. He said he knew Agrippa could see Christ foretold in the writings of the prophets.

At that point Paul calls for a public decision and asks Agrippa point blank if he believes. Unfortunately, Agrippa's response is one of avoidance: "In a short time, will you persuade me to be a Christian?" The passage then says Agrippa, Bernice and Festus arose and withdrew, walking away from the life-giving message they had just heard.

Sometimes people walk away. Jesus even experienced this after speaking truth to his hearers. He actually had more than twelve disciples, but many of them walked away when his teaching became too hard for them to follow.

John 6:66 – After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

A rich young ruler once walked away from him when he was told he had to value Christ more than the world.

Matthew 19:21, 22 - Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Avoidance will sometimes result when the Good News of Christ is shared. All we can do is stay faithful to God's Word, praying that hearts will be softened to Christ and eventually, with other positive touches along the way, acceptance will occur.

IMPLICATIONS FOR US

Depending on where you are spiritually, the implications vary. If you do not believe in Christ, then the implication is the same as it has always been. Jesus loves you, which means wanting the best for you. For that to happen, you must turn to him in repentance, trusting in his death and resurrection for your salvation. No amount of good deeds will be sufficient. Only belief in him resulting in a changed life of obedience to his Word will suffice and lead to eternity with him. Please make that choice. It is God's best and you will never regret it.

For those who believe and follow already, I encourage you to be bold in sharing your story with others. Point them to Christ, as Paul did, and trust the Lord for the results. Since we love people we want to see them accept the message, but that will not always happen. In fact, there will be more rejection than acceptance. The reaction may be alarm, accusation, avoidance or a variation of each. We must still love, pray for and minister to the needs of a desperate world. If we abide in the vine, Jesus, he will bear fruit as he chooses.