

CHAPTER 25

Some think that Felix was turned out, and Festus succeeded him, quickly after Paul's imprisonment, and that the two years mentioned in the close of the foregoing chapter are to be reckoned from the beginning of Nero's reign; but it seems more natural to compute them from Paul's being delivered into the hands of Felix. However, we have here much the same management of Paul's case as we had in the foregoing chapter; cognizance is here taken of it,

I. By Festus the governor; it is brought before him by the Jews (v. 1-3). The hearing of it is appointed to be, not at Jerusalem, as the Jews desired, out at Caesarea (v. 4-6). The Jews appear against Paul and accuse him (v. 7), but he stands upon his own innocency (v. 8); and to avoid the removing of the cause to Jerusalem, to which he was pressed to consent, he at length appeals to Caesar (v. 9-12).

II. By king Agrippa, to whom Festus relates his case (v. 13-21), and Agrippa desires he might have the hearing of it himself (v. 22). The court is accordingly set, and Paul brought to the bar (v. 23), and Festus opens the cause (v. 24-27), to introduce Paul's defence in the next chapter.

ACTS 25:1-12

PAUL'S FOURTH DEFENCE

We commonly say, "New lords, new laws, new customs;" but here was a new governor, and yet Paul had the same treatment from him that he had from the former, and no better. Festus, like Felix, is not so just to him as he should have been, for he does not release him; and yet not so unjust to him as the Jews would have had him to be, for he will not condemn him to die, nor expose him to their rage. Here is,

I. The pressing application which the high priest and other Jews used with the governor to persuade him to abandon Paul; for to send him to Jerusalem was in effect to abandon him.

1. See how speedy they were in their applications to Festus concerning Paul. As soon as ever he *had come into the province*, and had taken possession of the government, into which, probably, he was installed at Caesarea, within *three days he went up to Jerusalem*, to show himself there, and presently the priests were upon him to proceed against Paul. He staid *three days at Caesarea*, where Paul was a prisoner, and we do not find that in that time Paul made any application to him to release him, though, no doubt, he could have made good friends, that he might hope to have prevailed by; but as soon as ever he comes up to Jerusalem the priests are in all haste to make an interest with him against Paul. See how restless a thing malice is. Paul more patiently bears the lengthening out of his imprisonment than his enemies do the delay of his prosecution even to the death.

2. See how spiteful they were in their application. They *informed the governor against Paul* (v. 2) before he was brought upon a fair trial, that so they might, if possible, prejudice the cause with the governor, and make him a party who was to be the judge. But this artifice, though base enough, they could not confide in; for the governor would be sure to hear him himself, and then all their informations against him would fall to the ground; and therefore they form another project much more base, and that is to assassinate Paul before he came upon his trial. These inhuman hellish methods, which all the world profess at least to abhor, have these persecutors recourse to, to gratify their malice against the gospel of Christ, and this too under colour of zeal for Moses. *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum* — *Such was their dire religious zeal*.

3. See how specious the pretence was. Now that *the governor was himself at Jerusalem they desired he would send for Paul thither*, and try him there, which would save the prosecutors a great deal of labour, and looked most reasonable, because he was charged with having profaned the temple at Jerusalem, and it is usual for criminals to be tried in the court where the fact was committed; but that which they designed was to way-lay him as he was brought up, and to murder him upon the road, supposing that he would not be brought up under so strong a guard as he was sent down with, or that the officers that were to bring him up might be bribed to give them an opportunity for their wickedness. It is said, *They desired favour against Paul*. The business of prosecutors is to demand justice against one that they suppose to be a criminal, and, if he be not proved so, it is as much justice to acquit him as it is to condemn him if he be. But to desire

favour against a prisoner, and from the judge too, who ought to be of counsel for him, is a very impudent thing. The favour ought to be for the prisoner, *in favorem vitae* — *to favour his life*, but here they desire it against him. They will take it as a favour if the governor will but condemn Paul, though they can prove no crime upon him.

II. The governor's resolution that Paul shall take his trial at Caesarea, where he now is, v. 4, 5. See how he manages the prosecutors.

1. He will not do them the kindness to send for him to Jerusalem; no, he gave orders *that Paul should be kept at Caesarea*. It does not appear that he had any suspicion, much less any certain information, of their bloody design to murder him by the way, as the chief priests had when he sent him to Caesarea (~~423~~ Acts 23:30); but perhaps he was not willing so far to oblige the high priest and his party, or he would maintain the honour of his court at Caesarea and require their attendance there, or he was not willing to be at the trouble or charge of bringing Paul up; whatever was his reason for refusing it, God made use of it as a means of preserving Paul out of the hands of his enemies. Perhaps now they were more careful to keep their conspiracy secret than they had been before, that the discovery of it might not be now, as it was then, the defeat of it. But though God does not, as then, bring it to light, yet he finds another way, as effectual, to bring it to nought, by inclining the heart of the governor, for some other reasons, not to remove Paul to Jerusalem. God is not tied to one method, in working out salvation for his people. He can suffer the designs against them to be concealed, and yet not suffer them to be accomplished; and can make even the carnal policies of great men to serve his gracious purposes.

2. Yet he will do them the justice to hear what they have to say against Paul, if they will go down to Caesarea, and appear against him there: “*Let those among you who are able, able in body and purse for such a journey, or able in mind and tongue to manage the prosecution — let those among you who are fit to be managers, go down with me, and accuse this man; or, those who are competent witnesses, who are able to prove any thing criminal upon him, let them go and give in their evidence, if there be any such wickedness in him as you charge upon him.*” Festus will not take it for granted, as they desire he should, that there is wickedness in him, till it is proved upon him, and he has been heard in his own defence; but, if he be guilty, it lies upon them to prove him so.

III. Paul's trial before Festus. Festus staid *at Jerusalem about ten days*, and then *went down to Caesarea*, and the prosecutors, it is likely, in his retinue; for he said they should *go down with him*; and, since they are so eager in the prosecution, he is willing this cause should be first called; and, that they may hasten home, he will despatch it *the next day*. Expedition in administering justice is very commendable, provided more haste be not made than good speed. Now here we have,

1. The court set, and the prisoner called to the bar. Festus *sat in the judgment-seat*, as he used to do when any cause was brought before him that was of consequence, and he *commanded Paul to be brought*, and to make his appearance, v. 6. Christ, to encourage his disciples and keep up their spirits under such awful trials of their courage as this was to Paul, promised them that the day should come when they *should sit on thrones, judging the tribes of Israel*.

2. The prosecutors exhibiting their charges against the prisoner (v. 7): *The Jews stood round about*, which intimates that they were many. *Lord, how are they increased that trouble me!* It intimates also that they were unanimous, they stood by one another, and resolved to hold together; and that they were intent upon the prosecution, and eager in clamouring against Paul. They *stood round about*, if possible, to frighten the judge into a compliance with their malicious design, or, at least, to frighten the prisoner, and to put him out of countenance; but in vain: he had too just and strong an assurance to be frightened by them. *They compassed me about like bees, but they are quenched as the fire of thorns*, ~~HBSP~~ Psalm 118:12. *When they stood round about him, they brought many and grievous accusations against Paul*, so it should be read. They charged him with high crimes and misdemeanors. The articles of impeachment were many, and contained things of a very heinous nature. They represented him to the court as black and odious as their wit and malice could contrive; but when they had opened the cause as they thought fit, and came to the evidence, there they failed: *they could not prove* what they alleged against him, for it was all false, and the complaints were groundless and unjust. Either the fact was not as they opened it, or there was no fault in it; *they laid to his charge things that he knew not*, nor they neither. It is no new thing for the most excellent ones of the earth to have all manner of evil said against them falsely, not only *in the song of the drunkards*, and upon *the seat of the scornful*, but even *before the judgment-seat*.

3. The prisoner's insisting upon his own vindication, v. 8. Whoever reproaches him, his own heart does not, and therefore his own tongue shall not; *though he die, he will not remove his integrity from him*. When it came to his turn to speak *for himself*, he insisted upon his general plea, Not guilty: *Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all*.

(1.) He had not violated the law of the Jews, nor taught any doctrine destructive of it. *Did he make void the law by faith? No, he established the law*. Preaching Christ, *the end of the law*, was no offence against the law.

(2.) He had not profaned the temple, nor put any contempt at all upon the temple-service; his helping to set up the gospel temple did not at all offend against that temple which was a type of it.

(3.) He had not offended against Caesar, nor his government. By this it appears that now his cause being brought before the government, to curry favour with the governor and that they might seem friends to Caesar, they had charged him with some instances of disaffection to the present higher powers, which obliged him to purge himself as to that matter, and to protest that he was no enemy to Caesar, not so much as those were who charged him with being so.

IV. Paul's appeal to the emperor, and the occasion of it. This gave the cause a new turn. Whether he had before designed it, or whether it was a sudden resolve upon the present provocation, does not appear; but God puts it into his heart to do it, for the bringing about of that which he had said to him, *that he must bear witness to Christ at Rome*, for there the emperor's court was, ~~Acts~~ Acts 23:11. We have here,

1. The proposal which Festus made to Paul to go and take his trial at Jerusalem, v. 9. *Festus was willing to do the Jews a pleasure*, inclined to gratify the prosecutors rather than the prisoner, as far as he could go with safety against one that was a citizen of Rome, and therefore asked him whether he would be willing to go up to Jerusalem, and clear himself there, where he had been accused, and where he might have his witnesses ready to vouch for him and confirm what he said. He would not offer to turn him over to the high priest and the sanhedrim, as the Jews would have had him; but, *Wilt thou go thither, and be judged of these things before me?* The president, if he had pleased, might have ordered him thither, but he would not do it without his own consent, which, if he could have

wheedled him to give it, would have taken off the odium of it. In suffering times, the prudence of the Lord's people is tried as well as their patience; being sent forth therefore as sheep in the midst of wolves, they have need to be wise as serpents.

2. Paul's refusal to consent to it, and his reasons for it. He knew, if he were removed to Jerusalem, notwithstanding the utmost vigilance of the president, the Jews would find some means or other to be the death of him; and therefore desires to be excused, and pleads,

(1.) That, as a citizen of Rome, it was most proper for him to be tried, not only by the president, but in that which was properly his court, which sat at Caesarea: *I stand at Caesar's judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged*, in the city which is the metropolis of the province. The court being held in Caesar's name, and by his authority and commission, before one that was delegated by him, it might well be said to be his judgment seat, as, with us, all writs run in the name of the sovereign, in whose name all courts are held. Paul's owning that he ought to be judged at Caesar's judgment-seat plainly proves that Christ's ministers are not exempted from the jurisdiction of the civil powers, but ought to be subject to them, as far as they can with a good conscience; and, if they be guilty of a real crime, to submit to their censure; if innocent, yet to submit to their enquiry, and to clear themselves before them.

(2.) That, as a member of the Jewish nation, he had done nothing to make himself obnoxious to them: *To the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest*. It very well becomes those that are innocent to plead their innocency, and to insist upon it; it is a debt we owe to our own good name, not only not to bear false witness against ourselves, but to maintain our own integrity against those who bear false witness against us.

(3.) That he was willing to abide by the rules of the law, and to let that take its course, v. 11. If he be guilty of any capital crime that deserves death, he will not offer either to make resistance or to make his escape, will neither flee from justice nor fight with it: "I refuse not to die, but will accept of the punishment of my iniquity." Not that all who have committed any thing worthy of death are obliged to accuse themselves, and offer themselves to justice; but, when they are accused and brought to justice, they ought to submit, and to say both God and the government are righteous; as it is necessary that some should be made examples. But, if he be innocent, as he protests he is, "*If there be none of these things whereof*

these accuse me, — if the prosecution be malicious and they are resolved to have my blood right or wrong, — *no man may deliver me unto them*, no, not the governor himself, without palpable injustice; for it is his business as much to protect the innocent as to punish the guilty;” and he claims his protection.

3. His appealing to court. Since he is continually in danger of the Jews, and one attempt made after another to get him into their hands, *whose tender mercies were cruel*, he flies to the *dernier resort* — *the last refuge* of oppressed innocency, and takes sanctuary there, since he cannot have justice done him in any other way: “*I appeal unto Caesar*. Rather than be delivered to the Jews” (which Festus seems inclined to consent to) “let me be delivered to Nero.” When David had divers times narrowly escaped the rage of Saul, and concluded he was such a restless enemy that he should *one day perish by his hands*, he came to this resolution, being in a manner compelled to it, *There is nothing better for me than to take shelter in the land of the Philistines*, ~~1~~ Samuel 27:1. So Paul here. But it is a hard case that a son of Abraham must be forced to appeal to a Philistine, to a Nero, from those who call themselves the seed of Abraham, and shall be safer in Gath or Rome than in Jerusalem. *How is the faithful city become a harlot!*

V. The judgment given upon the whole matter. Paul is neither released nor condemned. His enemies hoped the cause would be ended in his death; his friends hoped it would be ended in his deliverance; but it proved neither so nor so, they are both disappointed, the thing is left as it was. It is an instance of the slow steps which Providence sometimes takes, not bringing things to an issue so soon as we expect, by which we are often made ashamed both of our hopes and of our fears, and are kept still waiting on God. The cause had before been adjourned to another time, now to another place, to another court, that Paul's *tribulation might work patience*.

1. The president takes advice upon the matter: *He conferred with the council* — *meta tou symbouliou*, not with the council of the Jews (that is called *synedrion*), but with his own counsellors, who were always ready to assist the governor with their advice. *In multitude of counsellors there is safety*; and judges should consult both with themselves and others before they pass sentence.

2. He determines to send him to Rome. Some think Paul meant not an appeal to Caesar's person, but only to his court, the sentence of which he would abide by, rather than be remitted to the Jew's council, and that Festus might have chosen whether he would have sent him to Rome, or, at least, whether he would have joined issue with him upon the appeal. But it should seem, by what Agrippa said (~~487~~ Acts 26:32), that *he might have been set at liberty if he had not appealed to Caesar* — that, by the course of the Roman law, a Roman citizen might appeal at any time to a superior court, even to the supreme, as causes with us are removed by *certiorari*, and criminals by *habeas corpus*, and as appeals are often made to the house of peers. Festus, therefore, either of choice or of course, comes to this resolution: *Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar thou shalt go*. He found there was something very extraordinary in the case, which he was therefore afraid of giving judgment upon, either one way or other, and the knowledge of which he thought would be an entertainment to the emperor, and therefore he transmitted it to his cognizance. In our judgment before God those that by justifying themselves appeal to the law, to the law they shall go, and it will condemn them; but those that by repentance and faith appeal to the gospel, to the gospel they shall go, and it will save them.

~~483~~ ACTS 25:13-27

THE SPEECH OF FESTUS

We have here the preparation that was made for another hearing of Paul before King Agrippa, not in order to his giving judgment upon him, but in order to his giving advice concerning him, or rather only to gratify his curiosity. Christ had said, concerning his followers, *that they should be brought before governors and kings*. In the former part of this chapter Paul was brought before Festus the governor, here before Agrippa the king, for a testimony to both. Here is,

I. The kind and friendly visit which king Agrippa made to Festus, now upon his coming into the government in that province (v. 13): *After certain days, king Agrippa came to Caesarea*. Here is royal visit. Kings usually think it enough to send their ambassadors to congratulate their friends, but here was a king that came himself, that made the majesty of a

prince yield to the satisfaction of a friend; for personal converse is the most pleasant among friends. Observe,

1. Who the visitants were.

(1.) King Agrippa, the son of that Herod (surnamed *Agrippa*) who killed James the apostle, and was himself eaten of worms, and great grandson of Herod the Great, under whom Christ was born. Josephus calls this *Agrippa the younger*; Claudius the emperor made him king of Chalcis, and *tetrarch of Trachonitis and Abylene*, mentioned ~~xxx~~ Luke 3:1. The Jewish writers speak of him, and (as Dr. Lightfoot tells us) among other things relate this story of him, “That reading the law publicly, in the latter end of the year of release, as was enjoined, the king, when he came to those words (~~xxxvii~~ Deuteronomy 17:15), *Thou shalt not set a stranger king over thee, who is not of thy brethren*, the tears ran down his cheeks, for he was not of the seed of Israel, which the congregation observing, cried out, Be of good comfort, king Agrippa, thou art our brother; for he was of their religion, though not of their blood.”

(2.) Bernice came with him. She was his own sister, now a widow, the widow of his uncle Herod, king of Chalcis, after whose death she lived with this brother of hers, who was suspected to be too familiar with her, and, after she was a second time married to Polemon king of Cilicia, she got to be divorced from him, and returned to her brother king Agrippa. Juvenal (*Sat.* 6) speaks of a diamond ring which Agrippa gave to Bernice, his incestuous sister: —

— *Berenices*

*In digito factus pretiosior; hunc dedit olim
Barbarus incestae, dedit hunc Agrippa sorori.*

*That far-famed gem which on the finger glow'd
Of Bernice (dearer thence), bestowed
By an incestuous brother. — Gifford*

And both Tacitus and Suetonius speak of a criminal intimacy afterwards between her and Titus Vespasian. Drusilla, the wife of Felix, was another sister. Such lewd people were the great people generally in those times! *Say not that the former days were better.*

2. What the design of this visit was: they *came to salute Festus*, to give him joy of his new promotion, and to wish him joy in it; they came to

compliment him upon his accession to the government, and to keep up a good correspondence with him, that Agrippa, who had the government of Galilee, might act in concert with Festus, who had the government of Judea; but it is probable they came as much to divert themselves as to show respect to him, and to share in the entertainments of his court, and to show their fine clothes, which would do vain people no good if they did not go abroad.

II. The account which Festus gave to king Agrippa of Paul and his case, which he gave.

1. To entertain him, and give him some diversion. It was a very remarkable story, and worth any man's hearing, not only as it was surprising and entertaining, but, if it were truly and fully told, very instructive and edifying; and it would be particularly acceptable to Agrippa, not only because he was a judge, and there were some points of law and practice in it well worth his notice, but much more as he was a Jew, and there were some points of religion in it much more deserving his cognizance.

2. To have his advice. *Festus* was but newly come to be a judge, at least to be a judge in these parts, and therefore was diffident of himself and of his own ability, and willing to have the counsel of those that were older and more experienced, especially in a matter that had so much difficulty in it as Paul's case seemed to have, and therefore he declared it to the king. Let us now see the particular account he gives to king Agrippa concerning Paul, v. 14-21.

(1.) He found him a prisoner when he came into the government of this province; and therefore could not of his own knowledge give an account of his cause from the beginning: *There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix*; and therefore, if there were any thing amiss in the first taking of him into custody, Festus is not to answer for that, for he found him in bonds. When *Felix, to do the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound*, though he knew him to be innocent, he knew not what he did, knew not but he might fall into worse hands than he did fall into, though they were none of the best.

(2.) That the Jewish sanhedrim were extremely set against him: “The *chief priests and the elders informed me* against him as a dangerous man, and not fit to live, and desired he might therefore be condemned to die.” These being great pretenders to religion, and therefore to be supposed men of

honour and honesty, Festus thinks he ought to give credit to them; but Agrippa knows them better than he does, and therefore Festus desires his advice in this matter.

(3.) That he had insisted upon the Roman law in favour of the prisoner, and would not condemn him unheard (v. 16): *“It is not the manner of the Romans, who herein govern themselves by the law of nature and the fundamental rules of justice, to deliver any man to die, to grant him to destruction”* (so the word is), *“to gratify his enemies with his destruction, before the accused has the accusers face to face, to confront their testimony, and have both licence and time given him to answer for himself.”* He seems to upbraid them as if they reflected upon the Romans and their government in asking such a thing, or expecting that they would condemn a man without trying him: *“No,”* says he, *“I would have you to know, whatever you may allow of among yourselves, the Romans allow not of such a piece of injustice among them.”* *Audi et alteram partem* — *Hear the other side*, had become a proverb among them. This rule we ought to be governed by in our private censures in common conversation; we must not give men bad characters, nor condemn their words and actions, till we have heard what is to be said in their vindication. See ~~John~~ John 7:51.

(4.) That he had brought him upon his trial, according to the duty of his place, v. 17. That he had been expeditious in it, and the prosecutors had not reason to complain of his being dilatory, for *as soon as ever they had come* (and we are sure they lost no time) *without any delay, on the morrow*, he had brought on the cause. He had likewise tried him in the most solemn manner: He *sat on the judgment-seat*, as they used to do in weightier causes, while those that were of small moment they judged *de plano* — *upon even ground*. He called a great court on purpose for the trial of Paul, that the sentence might be definitive, and the cause ended.

(5.) That he was extremely *disappointed* in the charge they brought against him (v. 18, 19): *When the accusers stood up against him*, and opened their indictment, *they brought no accusations of such things as I supposed.*

[1.] He supposed by the eagerness of their prosecution, and their urging it thus upon the Roman governors one after another, *First*, That they had something to accuse him of that was dangerous either to private property or the public peace, — that they would undertake to prove him a robber, or a murderer, or a rebel against the Roman power, — that he had been in

arms to head a sedition, — that if he were not that Egyptian who lately made an uproar, and commanded a party of cut-throats, as the chief captain supposed him to be, yet he was one of the same kidney. Such were the outcries against the primitive Christians, so loud, so fierce, that the standers-by, who judged of them by those outcries, could not but conclude them the worst of men; and to represent them so was the design of that clamour, as it was against our Saviour. *Secondly*, That they had something to accuse him of that was cognizable in the Roman courts, and which the governor was properly the judge of, as Gallio expected (~~4184~~ Acts 18:14); otherwise it was absurd and ridiculous to trouble him with it, and really an affront to him.

[2.] But to his great surprise he finds the matter is neither so nor so; they had *certain questions against him*, instead of proofs and evidences against him. The worst they had to say against him was disputable whether it was a crime or no — moot-points, that would bear an endless debate, but had no tendency to fasten any guilt upon him, questions fitter for the schools than for the judgment-seat. And they were questions of *their own superstition*, so he calls their religion; or, rather, so he calls that part of their religion which Paul was charged with doing damage to. The Romans protected their religion according to their law, but not their superstition, nor the tradition of their elders. But the great question, it seems, was *concerning one Jesus that was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive*. Some think the superstition he speaks of was the Christian religion, which Paul preached, and that he had the same notion of it that the Athenians had, that it was the introducing of a new demon, even Jesus. See how slightly this Roman speaks of Christ, and of his death and resurrection, and of the great controversy between the Jews and the Christians whether he were the Messiah promised or no, and the great proof of his being the Messiah, his resurrection from the dead, as if it were no more than this, There was one Jesus that was dead, and Paul affirmed he was alive. In many causes issue is joined upon this question, whether such a person that has been long absent be living or dead, and proofs are brought on both sides; and Festus will have it thought that this is a matter of no more moment. Whereas this Jesus, whom he prides himself in being thus ignorant of, as if he were below his notice, is he that *was dead, and is alive, and lives for evermore, and has the keys of hell and of death*, ~~4185~~ Revelation 1:18. What Paul affirmed concerning Jesus, that he is alive, is a matter of such vast importance that if it be not true we are all undone.

(6.) That therefore he had proposed to Paul that the cause might be adjourned to the Jewish courts, as best able to take cognizance of an affair of this nature (v. 20): “*Because I doubted of such manner of questions, and thought myself unfit to judge of things I did not understand, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, appear before the great sanhedrim, and there be judged of these matters.*” He would not force him to it, but would be glad if Paul would consent to it, that he might not have his conscience burdened with a cause of this nature.

(7.) That Paul had chosen rather to remove his cause to Rome than to Jerusalem, as expecting fairer play from the emperor than from the priests: “*He appealed to be reserved to the hearing of Augustus* (v. 21), having no other way to stop proceedings here in this inferior court; and therefore I *commanded him to be kept a close prisoner till I might send him to Caesar,* for I did not see cause to refuse his appeal, but rather was pleased with it.”

III. The bringing of him before Agrippa, that he might have the hearing of his cause.

1. The king desired it (v. 22): “*I thank you for your account of him, but I would also hear the man myself.*” Agrippa knows more of this matter, of the cause and of the person, than Festus does; he has heard of Paul, and knows of what vast concern this question is, which Festus makes such a jest of, whether Jesus be alive or no. And nothing would oblige him more than to hear Paul. Many great men think it below them to take cognizance of the matters of religion, except they can hear them like themselves in the judgment-seat. Agrippa would not for all the world have gone to a meeting to hear Paul preach, any more than Herod to hear Jesus; and yet they are both glad to have them brought before them, only to satisfy their curiosity. Perhaps Agrippa desired to hear him himself, that he might be in a capacity to do him a kindness, and yet did him none, only put some credit upon him.

2. Festus granted it: *To-morrow thou shalt hear him.* There was a good providence in this, for the encouragement of Paul, who seemed buried alive in his imprisonment, and deprived of all opportunities of doing good. We know not of any of his epistles that bore date from his prison at Caesarea. What opportunity he had of doing good to his friends that visited him, and perhaps to a little congregation of them that visited him every Lord's-day, was but a low and narrow sphere of usefulness, so that

he seemed to be thrown by as a *despised broken vessel, in which there was no pleasure*; but this gives him an opportunity of preaching Christ to a great congregation, and (which is more) to a congregation of great ones. Felix heard him in private concerning the faith of Christ. But Agrippa and Festus agree he shall be heard in public. And we have reason to think that his sermon in the next chapter, though it might not be so instrumental as some other of his sermons for the conversion of souls, redounded as much to the honour of Christ and Christianity as any sermon he ever preached in his life.

3. Great preparation was made for it (v. 23): *The next day* there was a great appearance *in the place of hearing*, Paul and his cause being much talked of, and the more for their being much talked against.

(1.) Agrippa and Bernice took this opportunity to show themselves in state, and to make a figure, and perhaps for that end desired the occasion, that they might see and be seen; for *they came with great pomp*, richly dressed, with gold and pearls, and costly array; with a great retinue of footmen in rich liveries, which made a splendid show, and dazzled the eyes of the gazing crowd. They came *meta polles phantasias* — *with great fancy*, so the word is. Note, Great pomp is but great fancy. It neither adds any real excellency, nor gains any real respect, but feeds a vain humour, which wise men would rather mortify than gratify. It is but a show, a dream, a fantastical thing (so the word signifies), superficial, and *it passeth away*. And the pomp of this appearance would put one for ever out of conceit with pomp, when the pomp which Agrippa and Bernice appeared in was,

[1.] Stained by their lewd characters, and all the beauty of it sullied, and all virtuous people that knew them could not but condemn them in the midst of all this pomp as vile persons, ~~1504~~ Psalm 15:4.

[2.] Outshone by the real glory of the poor prisoner at the bar. What was the honour of their fine clothes, compared with that of his wisdom, and grace, and holiness, his courage and constancy in suffering for Christ! His bonds in so good a cause were more glorious than their chains of gold, and his guards than their equipage. Who would be fond of worldly pomp that here sees so bad a woman loaded with it and so good a man loaded with the reverse of it?

(2.) The chief captains and principal men of the city took this opportunity to pay their respects to Festus and to his guests. It answered the end of a ball at court, it brought the fine folks together in their fine clothes, and served for an entertainment. It is probable that Festus sent Paul notice of it overnight, to be ready for a hearing the next morning before Agrippa. And such confidence had Paul in the promise of Christ, that it should be *given him in that same hour what he should speak*, that he complained not of the short warning, nor was put into confusion by it. I am apt to think that those who were to appear in pomp perplexed themselves more with care about their clothes than Paul, who was to appear as a prisoner, did with care about his cause; for he knew whom he had believed, and who stood by him.

IV. The speech with which Festus introduced the cause, when the court, or rather the audience, was set, which is much to the same purport with the account he had just now given to Agrippa.

1. He addressed himself respectfully to the company: "*King Agrippa, and all men who are here present with us.*" He speaks *to all the men* — *pantes andres*, as if he intended a tacit reflection upon Bernice, a woman, for appearing in a meeting of this nature; he does not refer any thing to her judgment nor desire her counsel; but, "*All you that are present that are men* (so the words are placed), I desire you to take cognizance of this matter." The word used is that which signifies men in distinction from women; what had Bernice to do here?

2. he represents the prisoner as one that the Jews had a very great spite against; not only the rulers, but *the multitude of them, both at Jerusalem and here at Caesarea*, cry out *that he ought not to live any longer*, for they think he has lived too long already, and if he live any longer it will be to do more mischief. They could not charge him with any capital crime, but they wanted to have him out of the way.

3. He confesses the prisoner's innocency; and it was much for the honour of Paul and his bonds that he had such a public acknowledgement as this from the mouth of his judge (v. 25): *I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death*. Upon a full hearing of the case, it appeared there was no evidence at all to support the indictment: and therefore, though he was inclinable enough to favour the prosecutors, yet his own conscience brought in Paul *not guilty*. And why did he not discharge him then, for he

stood upon his deliverance? Why, truly, because he was so much clamoured against, and he feared the clamour would turn upon himself if he should release him. It is a pity but every man that has a conscience should have courage to act according to it. Or perhaps because there was so much smoke that he concluded there could not but be some fire, which would appear at last, and he would detain him a prisoner in expectation of it.

4. He acquaints them with the present state of the case, that the prisoner had appealed to the emperor himself (whereby he put an honour upon his own cause, as knowing it not unworthy the cognizance of the greatest of men), and that he had admitted his appeal: *I have determined to send him.* And thus the cause now stood.

5. He desires their assistance in examining the matter calmly and impartially, now that there was no danger of their being interrupted, as he had been with the noisiness and outrage of the prosecutors — that he might have at least such an insight into the cause as was necessary to his stating it to the emperor, v. 26, 27.

(1.) He thought it *unreasonable to send a prisoner*, especially so far as Rome, *and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him*, that the matter might be prepared as much as possible, and put in a readiness for the emperor's determination; for he is supposed to be a man of great business, and therefore every affair must be laid before him in as little compass as possible.

(2.) He could not as yet write *any thing certain* concerning Paul; so confused were the informations that were given in against him, and so inconsistent, that Festus could make nothing at all of them. He therefore desired Paul might thus be publicly examined, that he might be advised by them what to write. See what a great deal of trouble and vexation those were put to, and to what delay, nay, and to what hazard, in the administration of public justice, who live at such a distance from Rome, and yet were subject to the emperor of Rome. The same was this nation of ours put to (which is about as far distant from Rome the other way) when it was in ecclesiastical affairs subject to the pope of Rome, and appeals were upon all occasions made to his court; and the same mischiefs, and a thousand worse, would those bring upon us who would again entangle us in that yoke of bondage.