

Main Idea: By examining Paul’s experience with Governor Festus in Acts 25, we learn how to respond when we are at the mercy of powerful people. There are three scenes in the story.

- I. Governor Festus meets the prisoner (1-12).
 - A. The Jews wanted to kill Paul (1-5).
 - B. Festus wanted to appease the Jews (6-9).
 - C. Paul appealed to a higher authority (10-12).
 1. Unless you’re ready to die, you’re not ready to live.
 2. If you’re ready to die, you can live with confidence.
- II. Governor Festus talks to King Agrippa about the prisoner (13-22).
 - A. To Festus, Paul was an inherited problem (13-15).
 - B. To Festus, Paul was an inexplicable puzzle (16-21).
 - C. To Agrippa, Paul was intriguing person (22).
- III. Governor Festus introduces King Agrippa to the prisoner (23-27).
 - A. We don’t control what people do to us.
 - B. We don’t control what people say about us.
 - C. We don’t control what people tell us to do.
 - D. We do control how we respond.
 1. Paul’s goal wasn’t to protect himself.
 2. Paul’s goal was to present Christ.

Make It Personal: When powerful people make life difficult for us...

1. Remember who is really in control.
2. Look for ways to exalt Christ in the difficulty.
3. Depend on His sufficiency.

I thought about several titles for today’s message, including: “God and the Government,” “When We Are a Victim of an Oppressive Government,” “When It’s Time to Appeal to Caesar,” and then, “When God Doesn’t Seem to Be Doing Anything.”

That sort of sums up what’s going on as we open our Bibles to today’s text, Acts 25. Paul has been in prison for two years. He’s a victim of a wicked government system that’s wronged him, no doubt about it. But he doesn’t see himself as a victim, but as an ambassador of the Sovereign Lord Himself. And because he’s faithful, and willing to suffer, and willing to wait patiently, some pretty amazing things happen. Through him, a lowly prisoner, the gospel reaches a governor, then a king, and eventually Caesar himself.

There are times in life when we are at the mercy of powerful people. Let’s begin by listening to David as he describes such a time in Psalm 9.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 9

As the story goes, when Christian Herter was governor of Massachusetts, he was running hard for a second term in office. One day, after a busy morning chasing votes (and no lunch) he arrived at a church barbecue. It was late afternoon and Herter was famished. As Herter moved down the serving line, he held out his plate to the woman serving chicken. She put a piece on his plate and turned to the next person in line.

"Excuse me," Governor Herter said, "do you mind if I have another piece of chicken?"

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Acts series preached at WBC in 2003.

"Sorry," the woman told him. "I'm supposed to give one piece of chicken to each person."

"But I'm starved," the governor said.

"Sorry," the woman said again. "Only one to a customer."

Governor Herter was a modest and unassuming man, but he decided that this time he would throw a little weight around.

"Do you know who I am?" he said. "I am the governor of this state."

"Do you know who I am?" the woman said. "I'm the lady in charge of the chicken. Move along, mister."²

Some of us tend to be control freaks. We like to be in control, and we like to think we're in control. We don't like it when other people are in control, especially when those other people do things that affect our lives in adverse ways.

There's an important truth revealed in Proverbs 21:1, "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases." That means that no matter how great a ruler is, God is the ultimate ruler. God is in control.

But it may not always seem like it, not from our limited vantage point. Sometimes powerful people use their power in very ungodly ways, for very self-seeking ends. Some of them rule countries that way. Some rule classrooms that way. Some coach teams that way. Some run companies that way.

The question is, how should we respond to these powerful people? The late Jack Benny once remarked, when receiving an award, "I really don't deserve this. But I have arthritis, and I don't deserve that either."³

People never treat us as well as we're prone to think we deserve. That's a fact, given our depravity. Yet having said that, there are times when people in power use their authority in ways that displease God, and we suffer for it.

How should we respond? We *see* the answer (literally, in living color) in Acts 25. The year AD 57 was a tough year for the apostle Paul. He was about 50 years old at the time (born around AD 6) when he was arrested (see Acts 21) and put in prison for no good reason. He will remain an incarcerated man to the end of the book in Acts 28.

From a human perspective, he is a victim. He's been wrongfully framed for a crime he didn't commit, and then denied justice in the legal system.

He's denied justice in Acts 23 when he goes on trial before the Jewish authorities. Then in Acts 24 he goes to trial before a Roman governor, Felix, but Felix punted the ball and left Paul in prison for two years.

Then came another before Felix's replacement, Governor Festus, in Acts 25, the text we'll consider shortly. Then in Acts 26, Paul appeared before King Agrippa. Finally, in Acts 28, Paul arrives in Rome where he eventually gave a defense before the Roman emperor himself.

Thus, the book of Acts records at least four cases in which Paul had to defend himself in a court setting before rulers who controlled his destiny. And not one of these rulers was a godly man. Time and time again, instead of doing the just thing and setting Paul free, they did the convenient thing and left Paul in custody.

Is that bad? Yes, it's bad. It resulted in Paul losing more than four years of freedom from his life. But on the other hand, all this injustice ends up being the means by which

² *Bits & Pieces*, May 28, 1992, pp. 5-6.

³ Haddon Robinson, *Leadership*, IV, 3, p. 94.

Paul makes Christ known to the movers and shakers of the Roman government, all the way to the top.

Friends, we may never spend jail time due to injustice, but we may miss a job promotion, or spend time on the bench, or lose money. And if so, then what? How should we respond?

Acts 25 shows us how to respond when we are at the mercy of powerful people. There are three scenes in this chapter.

I. Governor Festus meets the prisoner (1-12).

The story begins, “Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea.”

We need some background. I mentioned last time that the previous governor, Felix, was a pretty shady character. In Acts 24:27 Luke merely states that Felix was “succeeded by Porcius Festus.” Extra-biblical literature tells us why. Felix showed his incompetence once too many times for his Roman superiors’ tastes. In AD 59 he reacted to a conflict between Jews and Gentiles in Caesarea by sending soldiers and brutally killing the Jewish leaders. Rome found out about it and removed him from office.

This means that when Festus took over for Felix, he had a huge constituency problem on his hands. Due to his predecessor’s blunder, there was serious tension in the air between the Jews and the ruling Romans, and it certainly affected what he did next.

In scene one, Luke puts the spotlight on three parties, first of all, the Jews.

A. The Jews wanted to kill Paul (1-5). In the NIV, “Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea [where his headquarters were] to Jerusalem [where the Jewish leaders lived].”

Festus is a go-getter. He doesn’t wait around for the problem to get worse, so instead of unpacking all his boxes he heads sixty miles to Jerusalem after only three days to do some hand-shaking with his Jewish constituents.

There was a new high priest in Jerusalem named Ishmael, who had replaced Jonathan whom Felix had killed.⁴ Again, after what Felix had done, the situation with the Jews was volatile. And the Jews tried to use that knowledge as leverage with Festus to get something they wanted very badly. The death of Paul of Tarsus.

Luke explains what happened upon Festus’s arrival in Jerusalem in verses 2-3: “And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him,³ asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem—because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way.”

Remember the forty men back in chapter 23 who took an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul? It’s been two years. I’m not sure what much weight they’ve lost, but they haven’t lost one ounce of hatred for Paul.

There is one change. In Acts 23 the Jewish zealots came up with the idea to kill Paul and then persuaded the leaders to support the cause. In Acts 25, it’s the religious leaders themselves instigating the deed.

Verses 4-5, “Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly.⁵ ‘So,’ said he, ‘let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him.’”

⁴ Wiersbe, p. 503.

Festus is new, but he's not naïve. Historical records show him to be a pretty decent leader, especially when compared with his forerunner. He can sense the Jews are up to something, so he does a bit of political maneuvering.

"No, why don't you boys just come to my place?" he says. "Paul's already there anyway. I'll host the meeting."

B. Festus wanted to appease the Jews (6-9). Verses 6-7, "After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought.⁷ When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove."

Luke doesn't mention the charges here, but by Paul's response we can surmise what they were. Verse 8 says, "Paul argued in his defense, 'Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense.'"

So Paul indicates there were three basic charges against him. They accused him of the violation of Jewish law, the violation of divine law ("against the temple"), and violation of Roman law ("against Caesar"). Obviously, as he now stands before a Roman judge, the third matter is the most serious.

Paul's response was a categorical denial. In the words of the KJV, "Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended in anything at all." In other words, short and sweet, *I am not guilty!*

Spurgeon said, "Often the less we say to our foes, and the more we say to our best Friend, the better it will fare with us."

So what happened? According to verse 9, "But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, 'Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?'"

Festus knew he was sitting on a powder keg in Judea. Yes, he knew Paul was innocent, as he later admitted (verse 25). But he also knew that if he set Paul free, he'd have thousands of irate Jewish constituents, and he had to live with these people.

So, he essentially did what Pilate had done with Jesus. Rather than antagonize the Jews, he sort of bent Roman justice. Instead of doing what was *right*, he did what was *expedient*. Luke says he "wanted to do the Jews a favor" (NIV).

Put yourself in Paul's shoes. He is a victim of a corrupt system. He's been neglected in prison for two years, and now he's staring in the face of yet another injustice. On the one hand, he's under the gaze of a self-protecting politician. On the other hand, he's in the cross-hairs of a spiteful group of hypocritical religious leaders who want him dead.

Again, I says, he's a victim. He's at the mercy of powerful, ungodly people.

Or is he? Actually, no. The truth is, he is right where he has always been, in the hands of a wise, sovereign, and good God.

So are we, brothers and sisters. Oh, it may not seem like it, but no matter how bleak the circumstances, God is on the throne, and Romans 8:28 is still true. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Notice what happened next...

C. Paul appealed to a higher authority (10-12). Listen to verses 10-11, "But Paul said, 'I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I

have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. ¹¹ If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.”

I love Paul’s response. He shows incredible boldness and courage, affirming “I haven’t done anything wrong, *as you yourself know*.” But he also takes full responsibility for his actions, acknowledging, “If I am guilty, I do not refuse to die.”

Every Roman citizen had the right to be heard by Caesar. Here, Paul makes use of this right. Why didn’t he sooner? We don’t know. Maybe he thought the local magistrates could clear up the matter. I think it’s more than that though. I don’t think Paul’s motivation was himself, for he’s already shown repeatedly he doesn’t care what people do to him. I think he’s concerned about the effect all this will have on the gospel. If Festus lets the Jews twist justice against him, in time it will happen towards other followers of Jesus.

John Calvin observed, “God, who has appointed courts of law, also gives his people liberty to use them lawfully.”⁵

Listen to Kent Hughes, “Just think of what God has done through his servants who used that which God made available to them. For example, William Wilberforce, a strong Christian and a member of the British Parliament in the last eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, championed the abolition of slavery. Exercising spiritual determination, using all the legitimate political resources at his disposal, he persevered in his calling for more than twenty years and was used by God to bring an end to slavery in the British Empire.”⁶

And so Paul said, “I appeal to Caesar!”

The result? According to verse 12, “Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, ‘To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.’”

With that declaration Festus set in motion the slow-moving machinery of the Roman legal system. In the end, this appeals process would cost Paul at least two more years of his freedom.

There are a couple of critical lessons we can learn from Paul’s example.

1. *Unless you’re ready to die, you’re not ready to live.* Listen again to Paul, “I do not refuse to die.” There’s something worse than death, my friend. It’s failing to live the kind of life for which we were created.

God gave us life. Our purpose is to live for Him, whether that means 80 years or 18. He determines the amount of life. We determine the focus of it. Are we going to live for His purposes or our own?

Have you surrendered your life to your Creator? Have you said, “I am not my own. I am yours. Have your way with me.”?

My friend, unless we are ready to die, we’re not ready to live. And there’s only one way to be ready to die. That’s to know Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

God sent His only Son into the world to rescue sinners. Christ died on the cross, not only to save us from our sins, but to save us from *ourselves*. And the One who conquered death three days later doesn’t enter our lives to play second fiddle. He enters as *Lord*. If

⁵ Calvin, *Acts*, p. 384.

⁶ K. Hughes, p. 323.

we want to be ready to die, we must repent—in other words, we must turn the controls of our life over to Him—and we must receive Him as our Savior and Lord.

Perhaps this has yet to happen in your life. Why not today, my friend?

The first lesson leads to a second lesson.

2. *If you're ready to die, you can live with confidence.* The person who knows Christ is the person who is ready to die, and the person who is ready to die is the person who is ready to live the kind of life God intends.

In the *Gulag Archipelago* the famous Russian author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn reflects on why in the notorious prison system of the U.S.S.R. some prisoners were able to survive the interrogations while others collapsed under it. Listen to his conclusion:

“At the very threshold, you must say to yourself: ‘My life is over, a little early to be sure, but there’s nothing to be done about it. I shall never return to freedom. I am condemned to die—now or a little later. But later on, in truth, it will be even harder, and so the sooner the better. I no longer have any property whatsoever. For me those I love have died, and for them I have died. From today on, my body is useless and alien to me. Only my spirit and my conscience remain precious to me.’

“Confronted by such a prisoner, the interrogation will tremble.”

“Only the man who has renounced everything can gain that victory.”⁷

I’m convicted by that, aren’t you? Have we done that, have we *renounced everything*? Can we say, as Paul did (and indeed, these words explain why he could be so confident before Festus): “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me (Gal 2:20). For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain (Phil 1:21).”

This is the key to confident living, to value nothing more than Christ. In truth, we can lose everything else, but we can’t lose *Him*.

So ends scene #1. Governor Festus meets the prisoner.

II. Governor Festus talks to King Agrippa about the prisoner (13-22).

In the following narrative, we learn that Festus viewed Paul in two ways.

A. To Festus, Paul was an inherited problem (13-15). “Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus.¹⁴ And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul’s case before the king, saying, ‘There is a man left prisoner by Felix,¹⁵ and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him.’”

Agrippa had a reputation for being an authority on Jewish religion. In fact, Rome had given him legal jurisdiction over the temple in Jerusalem. That’s why Festus decided he was the ideal person to help him draft a letter to send to Rome with Paul.

We’ll have plenty to say about Agrippa and Bernice in a few moments, but for now I want you to see Festus’s perspective of Paul. Simply put, Festus refers to him as “a man left prisoner by Felix.” That’s a loaded statement. The unspoken sentiment is that if Felix had done his job, I wouldn’t be doing it for him.

Have you ever experienced that frustration on the job scene? It’s one thing to do your own job. It’s another to have to clean up somebody else’s mess. To Festus, Paul was simply an inherited problem.

⁷ Taken from James Boice, pp. 309-400.

B. To Festus, Paul was an inexplicable puzzle (16-21). That's the sense I get in what Festus says next, in verses 16-21, "I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him.¹⁷ So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought.¹⁸ When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed.¹⁹ Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive.²⁰ Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them.²¹ But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar."

Here Festus makes it sound like he really wants to do the right thing with Paul, but just doesn't understand Jewish religion enough to make sense of the controversy. Back in verse 9, however, we saw a different motive, that he wanted to do the Jews a favor. All this indicates that to Festus, Paul is an enigma.

This is Paul's predicament. He's in the hands of a somewhat fickle, unpredictable powerful person who will decide his future?

Do God's people today ever find themselves in situations like this? Indeed. A man works faithfully for his company 25 years, hears his boss promise him time and time again, "The downsizing won't affect you. You're important to us." And then comes the pink slip.

A woman is assured of her rights as the trial begins, only to find herself taken to the cleaners by a spiteful ex-spouse and some clever legal maneuvering.

Yes, it happens today. Perhaps to you. But there's another complicating layer.

C. To Agrippa, Paul was intriguing person (22). "Then Agrippa said to Festus, 'I would like to hear the man myself.' 'Tomorrow,' said he, 'you will hear him.'"

Agrippa is yet another of the Herods in the New Testament, **Herod Agrippa II**. We're all too familiar with this family. His great-grandfather was **Herod the Great**, the wicked king who tried to kill baby Jesus and massacred the infant boys in Bethlehem. His great-uncle, **Herod Antipas**, killed John the Baptist and later tried Jesus. His dad, **Agrippa I**, is the one who killed the apostle James in Acts 12 and who later was struck down by the Lord and eaten by worms.

Agrippa II was born in AD 27 and was only 17 when his dad died. Four years later, in AD 48, he began to rule as king. In AD 56 Emperor Nero added more land to his kingdom, and Agrippa showed his gratitude to Nero by renaming one of the cities, Caesarea Philippi, to Neronias. Agrippa ruled as king until AD 100 when he died, childless.

Bernice was actually his sister, the eldest daughter of Herod Agrippa I. She married at the age of 13, but later moved in with her brother, Agrippa II. Their incestuous relationship was the subject of gossip in Rome. Bernice would at times leave Agrippa for another man, but she always returned to him. She became the mistress of Emperor Titus, but her conduct was so notorious that he sent her away because of the moral outcry of pagan Rome. In the words of Kent Hughes, "Agrippa and Bernice were a sick, sin-infested couple."⁸

⁸ K. Hughes, p. 326.

And throw this piece of information in the hopper. Agrippa and Bernice had another sibling, a sister ten years younger than Bernice. Her name? Drusilla. Remember her? We met her last time in Acts 24:24. She's the woman who divorced her husband so she could marry Governor Felix, who along with her husband, listened to Paul "as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment (25)."

Let this sink in. Paul is going to appear before the brother and sister of the woman he confronted for adultery, a brother and sister who themselves were living in open sin. No wonder Agrippa said, "I'd like to hear this man myself!"

Indeed, to Agrippa, Paul was intriguing. On the one hand, he was sort of an odd ball, someone who broke the curve and spoiled the party. But on the other hand, he was a curious fellow, a Jew who didn't talk the party line, but kept insisting that a dead man named Jesus was now alive. Yes, Agrippa just had to hear more.

Scene one, Governor Festus meets the prisoner. Scene two, Governor Festus talks to King Agrippa about the prisoner. Now scene three.

III. Governor Festus introduces King Agrippa to the prisoner (23-27).

Verses 23-27 "So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. ²⁴ And Festus said, 'King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. ²⁵ But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. ²⁶ But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. ²⁷ For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him.'"

What a scene! Luke specifically says the king and his consort entered with great "pomp." The Greek word *phantasia* appears only here in the Bible and denotes a grand, showy pageant. I can just imagine the king and his sister entering in their crimson robes with regal music playing. Festus walks slowly to his seat, adorned in his royal, Roman purple. The room is filled with high-ranking dignitaries, each dressed to make an impression.

And then Paul is brought into the room, a short, balding, near-sighted man (as history has described him), wearing plain, unassuming attire. What a contrast! The impressive versus the unimpressive. The language of the text portrays an atmosphere that might intimidate most of us. But not Paul.

Friends, Paul saw what everyone else in the room failed to see, what we must see. It looks like he's at the whim of a pagan ruler's command, a ruler who retried him, reviewed his case, and even now is making a show out of him. Most of us would be quaking in our boots by now.

But Paul looks past the façade. He looks beyond what the human eye can see and fixes his gaze upon something else, a promise the Lord had given to him twenty-four years earlier at his conversion.

Do you remember that promise? Paul never forgot it. It's recorded in Acts 9:15 (NIV), "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel."

This is what Paul sees. Not powerful people, but the powerful God Himself, keeping His Word, fulfilling His promise.

Let's make it personal. This story illustrates four important truths for us.

A. We don't control what people do to us. Paul's arrest, his trials by Felix and Festus and Agrippa, his prison time. Paul had no control over that. Nor do we over the painful things people often do to us. What's more...

B. We don't control what people say about us. Why does the media portray Christians as bigoted and dangerous, but God-denying radicals as heroes? It's senseless and untrue. But it happens and we have no control over it.

C. We don't control what people tell us to do. So on this day the soldier told Paul, "Get up! The governor's waiting to see you." And Paul couldn't say, "I don't want to go." He had very little choice in the matter.

Nor do we often, not when powerful, ungodly people tell us what to do. We're at their mercy. We can't control what they do to us, say about us, or tell us to do.

However, there is something that by God's grace we do control.

D. We do control how we respond. And we must.

Adrian Rogers tells the story about a man who bragged that he had cut off the tail of a man-eating lion with his pocket knife. Asked why he hadn't cut off the lion's head, the man replied: "Someone had already done that."

There are a lot of people like Festus and Agrippa that affect our lives, proud people with power who are in positions of authority over us, people who don't always use their power wisely. In most cases, we have little or no control over what they do to us. But we do have control over something that, in the hands of a sovereign God, can make a difference for eternity. *How we respond to them.*

How did Paul respond? As he looked around the room, he saw an audience like he had probably never seen before and may never see again. He saw a room filled with powerful people who needed to know the truth about Someone with real power, Someone who conquered death itself, and won! That's what he saw. He saw an opportunity.

You see...

1. *Paul's goal wasn't to protect himself.* He'd already died, on that road to Damascus when the Son of God brought him to his knees, and then by His mercy and grace, forgave him and brought him into the family of God. And from that day forward...

2. *Paul's goal was to present Christ.* "Warning every man and teaching every man, with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ," Paul confessed in Colossians 1:28. That's precisely what Paul sees, and what he plans on doing now that he has the opportunity to stand before this royal crowd, as we'll see next time in Acts 26.

Years ago, the communist government in China commissioned an author to write a biography of Hudson Taylor with the purpose of distorting the facts and presenting him in a bad light. They wanted to discredit the name of this consecrated missionary of the gospel. As the author was doing his research, he was increasingly impressed by Taylor's saintly character and godly life, and he found it extremely difficult to carry out his

assigned task with a clear conscience. Eventually, at the risk of losing his life, he laid aside his pen, renounced his atheism, and received Jesus as his personal Savior.

Fellow ambassadors for Christ, we don't always know how the Lord is using our example to influence those around us.⁹ But He is using it. And sometimes He allows their hostility, and our subsequent suffering, to increase. Why would He do that? That others might see even more clearly just how worthy He is, worthy of our love, our lives, and even our death. Indeed, He who gave His life for us is worthy of our all.

Make It Personal: When powerful people make life difficult for us...

1. *Remember who is really in control.* Yes, you know it, but *remind* yourself. The Lord *is* in control, whether I feel it or not, whether it seems like it or not. He is.

My friend, who does the world remember today, Agrippa, Festus, or Paul? Those first two powerful men had their day of "pomp," and they squandered it. But we're still talking about their prisoner all these centuries later.

2. *Look for ways to exalt Christ in the difficulty.* If He allowed it to enter our lives, whatever "it" is, then He intends to make Himself known to us and through us...through *it*.

You say, "But I'm so weak. How can I do it?" Here's how.

3. *Depend on His sufficiency.* Paul himself said in 2 Corinthians 2:16, "Who is sufficient for these things?" And then he answered his own question in 2 Corinthians 3:5-6, "Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God,⁶ who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant."

*What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!*

Closing Song: #435 "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" (all three verses)

Community Group Discussion:

1. This morning we looked at Acts 25 in a message entitled, "When We Are at the Mercy of Powerful People." As you read the account together, pay particular attention to how Luke describes the powerful people that made life difficult for Paul.

2. Based on what we're told by Luke in this chapter, what kind of ruler was Governor Festus? What about King Agrippa? What did these powerful government officials think about the apostle Paul, and how would you assess their treatment of him?

3. Paul experienced a series of injustices in this chapter. What were some of them? How did he respond?

4. In verse 11, Paul told Governor Festus, "I appeal to Caesar." What does that mean, and why did Paul choose to do that? What does his example teach us about how a Christian should relate to government?

5. Do you have any powerful people in your life that are making life difficult for you? What lessons do we learn from Acts 25 that can help us respond in a God-pleasing way? After sharing, spend time praying for one another for the needed grace to appropriate these lessons.

⁹ Jack Williams, *Phoenix Gazette*.