

## **Trials Confirm Your Faith Is Genuine**

Acts 25:1-12; 1 Peter 4:13

March 11, 2018

Greg L. Price

God sends trials into your life that your faith in Jesus Christ might be shown to be genuine (the real thing and not some counterfeit).

Jesus gave a parable about different responses people have to God's Word. **The first kind of person** is hardened and there is no faith in God's Word at all. **The second kind of person** has a temporary faith in God's Word, but when trials and persecution arise in standing for the truth, he/she is not willing to endure hardship for the doctrine of Jesus Christ. **The third kind of person** also has a temporary faith and even shows some evidence of life, but his/her love of the world, the cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, and the approval of men chokes out the love for Jesus Christ and His truth. **The fourth kind of person** has saving faith and brings forth lasting fruit in sanctification (some 30, 60, or 100 fold).

Which of these persons are you today? Only the last person is the one that truly evidences a faith in Jesus Christ, that continues in the face of trials and afflictions in life, that endures the temptations brought against it by the world, the flesh, and the devil, and that perseveres against all opposition to bear fruit out of love for Christ and to the glory of God.

The Apostle Paul's life was one of great adversity, and even when there was a time of rest, the enemy only rested it seemed in order to wage a stronger battle next time. Let us consider this conflict that Paul faced once again from the Jews for his comfort in Christ. The main points from our text are these: (1) The Vicious Jews Forget Not Their Hatred for Paul (Acts 25:1-5); (2) Paul Appeals for Justice to the Romans (Acts 25:6-12).

### **I. The Vicious Jews Forget Not Their Hatred for Paul (Acts 25:1-5).**

A. This is now the fourth public defense (with a fifth one yet to come in Acts 26) that Paul has unjustly endured since he arrived in Jerusalem in order to bring a love gift for needy Jewish believers: (1) His defense before the Jewish multitude at the Temple after he was viciously attacked by Jews and rescued by Roman soldiers (Acts 22:1-23); (2) Before the Jewish Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (Acts 23:1-10); (3) Before Felix, the Roman governor, in Caesarea (Acts 24:1-22); (4) Before Festus, the Roman Governor, in Caesarea (Acts 25:6-12); (5) Before King Agrippa in Caesarea (Acts 25:23-26:32).

B. Let's consider this fourth defense given by Paul before Festus, the new Roman governor, who replaced Felix.

1. As we learned in the previous sermon, Felix was recalled by the Roman emperor (Acts 24:27). No doubt this was due to his corruption, cruelty, and abysmal management of the Jews in Judea. His replacement was Porcius Festus. Josephus, the Jewish historian, notes that during his short governorship (due to his death untimely death in 62 a.d.), Festus was a law and order governor that suppressed public revolts and disturbances. Josephus contrasts the wicked successor of Festus, Albinus, in such a way that Festus would appear to have been more just than either Felix or Albinus.

2. When Festus arrives in the province of Judea, he wastes no time in traveling from Caesarea to Jerusalem for a goodwill tour among the Jews so as to bring some order after the disastrous rule of Felix (Acts 25:1). His governorship depended upon peace in Judea.

3. As Festus makes his rounds in meeting with the leaders of the Jews, the high priest and the chief elders of the Sanhedrin take the opportunity to bring up the person of Paul with Festus and to speak against him. They presume to ask a favor of Festus (whom they knew was trying to make a good impression

upon the Jews and would be more vulnerable now rather than later) that he would send for Paul to be removed from safety in Caesarea and brought to be tried before the Sanhedrin in order to murder him along the way (Acts 25:2-3). Their plot to murder Paul two years earlier had failed (Acts 23:12), and Paul was quickly moved out of danger to Caesarea and tried before Felix (who found nothing criminal about Paul's behavior, but left him in Roman custody to appease the Jews).

4. Festus reveals his wise caution at this point in not simply caving in to the request by the Jews, and rather states that Paul will remain in Caesarea and that all those who accuse him of some crime should travel to Caesarea and make their case there. Whether he had heard of the previous plot to murder Paul or was simply a prudent man, he at this point is firm in his resolve to keep Paul where he is.

C. What is seen here (although all wrapped up in outward respect for the new governor) is unabashed hatred that has not abated toward Paul for the past two years.

1. Hatred (or resentment or bitterness) has a very good memory and recollection of every detail toward those who are hated. Every offense is regularly relived in the hearts of those who live in hatred. Every past wrong is suffered again and again as if it happened just yesterday in dreams of the night and in thoughts of the day. Hatred consumes a person's time, energy, joy, peace, and love for God and one's neighbor. Hatred will destroy you before it destroys others.

2. Here we see the hatred of the Sanhedrin for Paul, but really it was hatred for Jesus Christ and His gospel. Jesus warned His disciples that they would be hated (Matthew 10:22). Therefore, be not shocked and surprised at the way you are treated by the world. Rather be shocked if you are a Christian when all men speak well of you (Luke 6:26).

3. Dear ones, has hatred consumed your life? This is a grievous sin against God and against your neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40). Are you content to live in that hatred, or do you hate that hatred? You cannot live in hatred over how someone has treated you and yet live in the love of God at the same time. You are called to love even those who make themselves your enemies (Matthew 5:44-48).

4. When hatred fills your heart over how you have been treated (even wrongfully and sinfully mistreated or abused), you have not yet come to understand the love of God. For when you understand God's holiness and your corruption before God and how before your conversion you hated Him and despised His truth and righteousness, and yet He set His love upon you from all eternity and sacrificed His only Begotten Son to redeem you in love from the curse of the law, and adopted you as His dear child through faith in Jesus Christ, how can the love of God abide and live within you if you abide and live in hatred of those who spitefully use you? A Christian may struggle with hatred, but a Christian cannot abide in hatred, for the Christian hates his hatred—a Christian believes that his hatred was nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ—a Christian fervently prays that the love of God in Christ Jesus would wash and sanctify him/her of all hatred and all its destructive power.

5. But what about the "perfect hatred" of which David speaks in Psalm 139:21-22? This is not a hatred that comes from how David has been treated by others, but is a holy hatred for those who hate the Lord God. It is not a vindictive hatred on our parts that seeks to get even with others, but a righteous hatred that prays for the conversion of the enemies of God, and shows to them the love of Christ. They are David's enemies because they have made themselves God's enemies. Dear ones, you cannot be neutral about sin, nor can you be neutral toward those who hate your God, His gospel, and His commandments. Our corrupt heart looks for any reason to justify hatred or any other sin in our life. David was so careful about not justifying hatred in his life that he immediately calls out to God to search his heart (Psalm 139:23-24).

## **II. Paul Appeals for Justice to the Romans (Acts 25:6-12).**

A. Festus, the Roman governor, continued his goodwill tour in Jerusalem for almost two weeks,

and when he returned to Caesarea, he called forth Paul and the representatives of the Jewish Sanhedrin to step forward once again in almost a repeat of the trial before Felix (Acts 25:6).

B. If I were in that situation and facing another trial, I cannot help but think I would be tempted to say, “Here we go again—another trial. Why is this happening to me?” Is that not a response that has been found on your lips and in your heart when facing another trial of your faith (perhaps the same trial of faith)? Why was Paul going through this again?

1. **As a constant reminder that even the godliest (and usually the godliest) suffer great trials for their faith in Christ and for His truth, so that you do not despair under your trials** (Acts 14:22). Suffering the attacks of others (even from Christians) for standing for Christ and refusing move the biblical and confessional landmarks of faithful forefathers of the past can feel at times like a very lonely place to be. It is often at such a time that the enemy whispers in your ear, “Is this really worth all the trouble and heartache from family and friends?” Dear ones, you and I need to be reminded that we are not alone (Acts 18:9-10). Dear ones, you walk in the footsteps of the faithful who have preceded you (this is the cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 12:1). You are never alone when you stand for the truth of Jesus Christ, for Jesus is never separated from a faithful testimony for Him. When you suffer for Christ and His faithful testimony, you are partakers of Christ’s sufferings (1 Peter 4:13).

2. **As an inspired memorial that when you suffer let it not be for having openly violated God’s commandments without repentance in your life, but rather for your faith in Christ and for His truth** (1 Peter 4:15-16). Paul was not going through another trial because he had sinned or had violated God’s commandments, but rather because he could not be threatened and scared into quietly casting away his testimony for Christ. Jesus blesses those who suffer for His truth and righteousness, not for being an offensive jerk.

3. **As a written monument that your perseverance in faith in the face of adversity evidences that your faith is genuine and not fake** (1 Peter 1:6-7). Dear ones, if you feel like your faith is taking a beating from all sides, do not give up or surrender, for the Lord is giving you comfort that you have (by God’s grace) the real thing and not a counterfeit. Those trials and hardships are not for God’s benefit, but are for your benefit, for the strengthening of your faith and your comfort to the glory of God. Even when you fall into sin and arise by faith in Jesus Christ to repent and eye the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, you evidence that Jesus is your only hope and that your faith is the real thing—this is what the justified man/ woman does (Proverbs 24:16).

4. **As a constant testimonial that God’s good providence is not so much concerned with your earthly comfort as much as it is with revealing your faithfulness to the testimony of Jesus Christ** (Genesis 50:20). Paul’s testimony in each of these public defenses remained faithful and true, not to curry favor with men so as to have a more favorable outcome (simply because he was sick and tired of waiting in jail month after month), but rather to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. You may not be called in God’s providence to give a faithful testimony before a king, a president, or a prime minister, but you are testifying before your wife, husband, children, and parents (and before friends and co-workers) in all the trials that God’s brings into your life in His good providence. What is the testimony that they hear and see? Is it a faithful testimony out of love for Jesus Christ, or one filled with contradictions in profession as opposed to conduct, or one of anger and frustration because you don’t like the way people have treated you or because of the trail you are facing? You are daily on the witness stand before God and others as you are tried, let not your familiarity with others lead you to compromise, forget, or cast away a faithful testimony for Jesus Christ.

C. The Jewish Sanhedrin brings the same charges against Paul before Festus which they could not prove before Felix (thinking Festus may be more gullible, Acts 25:7). After two years they still had no witnesses to accuse Paul. If they have no witnesses, there is no case against Paul; therefore this case ought justly to be

dismissed. Paul clears himself before Festus by saying the false charges brought against him before Felix have not now become true—they are still false (Acts 25:8).

D. Festus now tries to play games with Paul and to put himself in good standing with the Jews by asking Paul if he would agree to return to Jerusalem to be judged there (Acts 25:9). Paul will not consent to return to Jerusalem (and suffer the murderous plots of the Jews again) because as a Roman citizen he should be judged before the representative of Caesar—namely, Festus (Acts 25:10). Paul reminds Festus that Festus himself knows that he is innocent of all charges brought against him (Acts 25:10). Paul then boldly makes clear to Festus that he has committed no crimes (especially none worthy of death) and that if he had done so, he would not be unwilling to be executed (Acts 25:11). But since he hasn't committed any crimes, no one (not even Festus) can lawfully deliver him to the Jews to be tried in Jerusalem (Acts 25:11).

E. Paul is done playing these games (justice must be done), and he appeals to Caesar to be tried in Rome as a Roman citizen (Acts 25:11). After consultation with his council, Festus says, "Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go" (Acts 25:12). What were Paul's motives in appealing to Rome?

1. First, Paul appealed to Caesar as a lawful means of self-preservation in upholding the Sixth Commandment.

a. Paul used his natural-born Roman citizenship on at least three different occasions (in **Philippi**, Acts 16:37; in **Jerusalem**, Acts 22:25; in **Caesarea**, Acts 25:10-11). The emperor of Rome at this time was Nero, a vile tyrant. He claimed to be divine. He murdered family members (his mother, his wife and the child she bore, his adopted sister who would not marry him) and anyone who stood in his way (his lover's husband and leading citizens and statesmen of Rome). He persecuted and executed Christians in Rome (Peter and Paul died at his hand). He set fire to Rome and blamed it on the Christians. Here was clearly a maniacal, vicious, corrupt, and unjust ruler.

b. So why would Paul appeal to him? Not because Paul recognized such a man to be a fit or lawful ruler in regard to even the moral principles found in the light of nature. This was not a ruler who was the minister of God to the people (especially God's people) for good (Romans 13). This decision of Paul shows just how corrupt and evil was the Jewish Sanhedrin, for Paul believed he would more likely receive a fair hearing before Nero (or one of Nero's representatives in Rome) than he would from the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. Paul's first motive in appealing to Caesar was to lawfully preserve his own life from the plots and attacks of the murderous Jews.

2. Paul's second motive in appealing to Caesar was as a lawful means to minister the gospel to those in Rome and to build up the saints in Rome in fulfillment of the command of Jesus Christ (Romans 15:24; Acts 23:11).

Dear ones, God's providence does not always lead us down the most tasteful and pleasant paths to glorify Him. There are many times in which those paths are uncomfortable, hard, painful, and heartbreaking.

a. Abraham gave up his home.  
b. The parents of Moses gave up their child.  
c. Naaman, the Syrian captain, gave up his pride.  
d. Paul gave up his freedom and faced the trials again.  
e. The Lord Jesus Christ gave up His life. The Lord Jesus says that if you would follow Him, you must be willing to cut off that which you value most here on earth (whether a right hand, or right foot, or right eye). The way of the cross is the way to reign with Him (Luke 9:23). The Lord Jesus promises you will never be alone (Hebrew 13:5-6).

Copyright 2018 Greg L. Price.