

SIGNAL

DF Welcome to ‘Serving Today’, the programme for pastors and church leaders. I’m Derek French and it’s good to be with you.

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DF God’s ways are truly remarkable – Paul speaks to a king, just as God promised.

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DF Roman governors and royal families are confronted with the good news about Jesus.

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DF In the Bible there are a number of powerful men who shared the name Herod, and we’ll learn about them in this programme. Sadly, although powerful, they were not good men but corrupt in their morals and conduct. Their open, sinful behaviour showed they desperately needed a saviour, and although they learned about him, there is no record of any of them trusting in Jesus.

Today we’re in Acts chapter 25 verse 13 to chapter 26 verse 3. Phillippa Chrispin will read these verses for us and then Gerard Chrispin will take us through them.

PC *‘And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus. When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul’s case before the king, saying: “There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix, about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him. To them I answered, ‘It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.’*

‘Therefore when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in. When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed, but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters. But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar.’

‘Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I also would like to hear the man myself.”

“Tomorrow,” he said, “you shall hear him.”

‘So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus’ command Paul was brought in. And Festus said: “King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him. I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him.”

‘Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You are permitted to speak for yourself.”

‘So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: “I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently.”’

GC King Agrippa, known as Herod Agrippa the second, and Bernice come to Caesarea to greet the new Roman governor, Festus. He fully shares the details of Paul’s case with his guests. In explaining to them what has happened, it is encouraging that he recalls well that Paul spoke with him about a certain Jesus who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

Paul never misses the opportunity to speak of the cross and resurrection of Christ, nor should those who have come to forgiveness and cleansing by what Jesus did on the cross for them, fail to make him known. Jesus can save and change anyone, including Saul of Tarsus and even including you and me.

King Agrippa has a high profile because of his notorious relatives in the Herodian dynasty before him, and because of his own gross immorality. Herod is not the name of a king, such as Saul or David, but a title. The title 'Herod' was used by several rulers of Judea during the period when it was part of the Roman Empire.

At the time when Paul meets Agrippa and Bernice, the name Herod is still being used. Herod Agrippa the second was born in AD 27 and will die in AD100. Although he never rules in Judea, he knows a lot about Jews and Judaism because of his family's on-going close connections with them over many years.

His father, Herod Agrippa the first, about 10BC to AD44, is King of Judea and called King Herod, or Herod, in Acts chapter 12. He killed James and imprisoned Peter.

The eldest daughter of King Herod Agrippa the first is none other than his son's lover, Bernice. Although she is presented as a queen on royal occasions, she is a sister of King Herod Agrippa the second and is therefore guilty of incest with him. She had affairs with Emperor Vespasian and then with his son Titus, but always went back to her brother to continue their incestuous relationship.

The sister of Agrippa and Bernice is Drusilla, the woman whom ex-governor Felix stole to be his third wife. We already met her.

Another notorious Herod connected with Agrippa was his grandfather, Herod the Great. He was the king of Judea who rebuilt Jerusalem's second temple into Herod's temple. He cruelly killed the babies and children under two years old after the birth of Jesus, following a visit from the wise men from the east.

Herod Antipas, Agrippa's great uncle, lived from 20BC to approximately AD40, and was Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. Known as Herod the Tetrarch, or simply as Herod, he ordered the beheading of John the Baptist after John had rebuked him about living with his brother's wife. This Herod also met and mocked Jesus.

God's grace can reach, forgive, save and change anyone, however bad, who will turn from sin and trust the Lord Jesus as Lord and Saviour. But it is also tragically true that if a person or a family settles for sin rather than repenting and forsaking it, this affects and spoils generations to come, unless God breaks in through the gospel.

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GC Festus tells Agrippa and Bernice that he has decided to hold Paul in Caesarea until he can process his appeal by sending him to Caesar. The king immediately responds, "I also would like to hear the man myself." Festus obliges Agrippa immediately and agrees that they will hear Paul tomorrow.

Festus commands all the commanders and prominent men of the city to attend the next day. He wants to make a good impression on the king and his sister, who parades as his wife and queen.

As expected, the flattered couple enter the auditorium with great pomp. Paul is brought in. Festus very accurately relays to them all how the Jews at Caesarea and Jerusalem approached him to tell him that Paul was not fit to live any longer. The commander stresses that he evaluated the situation objectively and found that Paul had done nothing that should lead to his execution. Because Paul appealed to Caesar, here called Augustus by Festus, he decided to send him. He had no choice. Then he tells them why he has called them together that day. He must explain to Augustus Caesar how a case like Paul's, where clearly he is innocent and should not have been charged, is coming before the emperor as an appeal.

There are three other aspects which are unstated, but which are important. First, this very high profile hearing enables Festus to bond with King Agrippa and build on his personal relationship with him. Second, he shows the influential men and Roman military commanders, gathered at his command, that he is in control. Third, in God's over ruling wisdom, here is a wonderful opportunity for Paul to testify to many very influential people about his crucified and risen saviour, and how he has come to know him personally.

Jesus told his followers that some would witness to kings, and while awaiting restoration of his sight after his Damascus road experience, Paul was specifically told by God through Ananais, that he would witness to royalty in this way.

But now we return to hear Paul's simple and brief introduction, as he speaks before King Agrippa, before Festus and before his high powered audience in the auditorium. Here is a man who is willing to openly stand and speak to the Lord Jesus Christ before a crooked religious body, before a howling mob and before a king. What boldness! What compassion for spiritually lost men and women! And what faithfulness to his saviour!

The pompous king now relishes the opportunity to show he is in charge. Not only does he meet Paul, about whom all are talking, but he now directs the hearing from which he will advise the Roman governor on what to put before Caesar. He tells Paul that he is allowed now to speak for himself.

Paul responds again with respect, style, composure, professionalism and sincere clarity. He declares himself to be happy that he can answer all the Jews' accusations before Agrippa. He shows he has nothing to fear from the searchlight of truth, just the reverse. He relishes the opportunity. He knows that it will lead to proclaiming Christ. That is his passion! He shows that he knows that Herod Agrippa the second is eminently well-qualified to judge a dispute involving Jewish people and matters. King Agrippa is immoral personally, but Paul applauds his professional suitability to perform the task before him. Such an opening from Paul will also please Festus who has chosen to ask Agrippa to preside.

Paul is not politically motivated but he is politically aware. That is wise. But as he goes into his Jewish background, his anti-Christian persecutions, his personal conversion to Christ and its current implications for him, note his courteous humility. He begs Agrippa to hear him patiently. How could King Herod Agrippa the second refuse such a humble request?

DF Gerard has helpfully indicated that all who love and serve Christ should be ready and willing to speak about our Saviour to anybody. May the Lord give us the courage and faithfulness that Paul demonstrated, and also the opportunities to speak of Christ to others.

And there we must bring this edition of Serving Today to a close. Thank you for being with us, and until next time, this is Derek French saying goodbye, and may God bless you.