



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 25:1-27

“Festus: Or the Lunacy of Expediency”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] I am also told, unofficially, that no high school or college reunion pictures will be accepted. I tried to submit one from nineteen thirty-eight and they refused that. We want to see you as you look now, in spite of what the camera may do to your beautiful countenances. So we do hope that you will make an effort to get your picture. It will help a number of people in a number of ways to be able to put your face with your name, when needed. So we hope you will make every effort to be here on one of those days and have your picture taken. Unfortunately, a week is not sufficient to take off a whole lot of poundage; but you can at least make an appointment with a beauty parlor and do a more of those housekeeping things that some of you might like to do.

Our Scripture reading for today is Acts chapter 25, verse 1 through verse 27. We hope you will turn with me now as I read these verses for our Scripture reading. There are only 27 verses in this chapter, but they are rather lengthy verses, as you can see. And I'm going to read them with just a minimum of comment, to save a bit of time. Perhaps it would be wise, simply, to look at the one verse with which the preceding chapter has ended. “But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix’s room.” Now, that doesn’t mean he entered into the place where he was living, but he took his place as the procurator of Judea. “And Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.”

“Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, and desired favor against him that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him. But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. ‘Let them therefore,’ said he, ‘which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.’ And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, [The original text says “not more than eight or ten days.”] he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought. And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove. While he answered for himself, neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all. But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, ‘Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?’ Then said Paul, ‘I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar.’”

Now, this was a legal term, and when he said *pro voco ad caesarium*, “I make my appeal to Caesar,” he was invoking a privilege that a Roman citizen had in certain cases, to have his case tried in Rome by the authorities there. And that is what is meant by “I appeal unto Caesar.” It was a legal privilege that was available for Roman citizens.

“Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, (that, of course, is not the Jewish council, but his own council) answered, ‘Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar shalt thou go.’ And after certain days King Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus. And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, ‘There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him.’

And, incidentally, I'll just mention this that Agrippa actually while called king and having the right of that title, had authority over a relatively small part of the northeastern part of the land, and actually was under Festus, so far as the authority from Rome was concerned. But he had the right to be called king, but he was subordinate; and, therefore, when we read this section, we should remember that that term “king” has a limited force in this instance. Bernice was his sister, his younger sister, who had been married and then had been living with him, and then had married again and then had come back and was living with him again. It was one of the scandals of the days; and, incidentally, she had been married to her uncle. And, finally, after he had died, she came back and was living with Agrippa. She went off and married someone else, then came back, and so Bernice, the sister of Drusilla, we've already had reference made to her, they had a third sister named Mariamme, and they all were tainted with a great deal of scandal.

So Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus. Naturally, after they had been there for a little while, since Agrippa had one unusual privilege. He had the privilege of appointing high priests in Jerusalem. It was natural that this discussion about Paul should come up. And so verse 16.

“To whom I answered, ‘It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have license to

answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.’ Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed, but had certain questions against him of their own religion, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And because I doubted of such manner of questions, (That Greek verb is a word that means something like perplexed about.) And because I was perplexed about such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar. (Now, at this point, Agrippa as he is listening to this story, he said to Festus). I was wishing (that’s the force of the Greek text.) I was wishing to hear the man myself. ‘Tomorrow,’ said he, (that is, Festus.) ‘Thou shalt hear him.’ And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth. And Festus said, ‘King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord.’”

That’s, what an interesting admission. Here is a Roman official, and incidentally, his reputation was very good. He’s a Roman official. He said, “There is nothing so far as I can tell wrong with this individual. I have found nothing in him worthy of death.” But now, he’s got to send him to Rome and if he sends him to Rome without any comment, the Romans will say, evidently, Festus is incompetent. He should have released this man if there is nothing that can be said against him. Now, Festus was smart enough to know

that that might be the case. So now, he’s fishing around for something that he can say, that will deliver him from the problem that he has created for himself by not freeing Paul. So he’s in effect asking for some help from Agrippa, concerning what he should write to Rome, as he sends Paul there.

“Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and especially before thee, O King Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.”

Most of our problems in life are created by ourselves and Festus illustrates this point very beautifully. May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the word of God and for the insights that it has concerning the human situations, human nature, the human problems that we, ourselves, so often create for ourselves. We thank Thee for the way in which Luke has faithfully recorded the experiences of the apostle and the early church, and the experiences of the Roman officials, who representing the world have had to deal with the claims of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though having been crucified and buried now lives to carry out the divine purpose. We thank Thee and praise Thee for the faithfulness of a man such as Paul and others, who were willing to stand for the truth of the word of God, even though it may have meant, and often did, their lives. May, Lord, the lessons that we learn from these men impress us as well. Give us the same spirit of faithfulness to the truth of God, we pray.

We thank Thee for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we ask, Lord, that as it is preached here today, that the Holy Spirit may take of the things of Christ and bring them home to us. Edify us through Thy word, Lord. And for those who may be here, who do

not have the assurance of the forgiveness of sins, may they leave with that assurance, through trust in the Lord Jesus and his saving work. We pray for this assembly of believers and friends and visitors. We pray for the elders and for the deacons, give them wisdom and guidance as they seek to have the oversight and exercise it over us. Bless the outreach of the Chapel, and especially, Lord, do we pray for those who are troubled and perplexed, and some who are sick and some who are bereaving. We ask, Lord, that through the Holy Spirit, Thou will give comfort and consolation and healing. For those, Lord, who are very critically ill, we especially pray for them. Strengthen them and give healing, if it should please Thee. Bless this meeting and the meeting this evening, as we remember our Lord around the Lord's Table.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject for this morning, in the continuations of the exposition of the Acts is “Festus or the Lunacy of Expediency.” A single statement will sometimes immortalize a man. “Am I my brother's keeper?” Cain said. “I have played the fool,” was Saul's word.

Many years ago, one of the presidents of General Motors uttered a statement that has never been forgotten. Charles Wilson, then the president, made his famous statement, for which he will be remembered. And it was, “What's good for General Motors is good for the country.” I thought it was a rather sensible statement, but everybody else seemed to think it was terrible that what was good for General Motors was not necessarily good for the country. But at any rate, Mr. Wilson will live in history, because of that statement.

When I was growing up, I used to be quite interested in boxing, still am interested in it, purely as an observer, let me assure you. And there was a well-known fight manager by the name of Joe Jacobs. He had a number of fighters of some repute who fought for him, no relation to Mike Jacobs, the famous promoter, so far as I know, but Joe was noted for his handling of past tenses in English. When one of his fighters lost a fight, took a beating, he used to say, “He should have stood in bed.” And I puzzled over that

for a long time, wondering what in the world that meant, until I realized that he didn't know the past tenses of the verb “stay.” And so he intended to say, “He should have staid in bed,” but he used to say, “He should have stood in bed.” Sports writers loved that, and they used to always quote him over that.

Dizzy Dean confounded all the school of teachers in St. Louis, for many years, with his grammar, while he was broadcasting the St. Louis Cardinals baseball games. And one of his well-known expressions was based upon the fact that he didn't understand the principle parts of the verb “slide,” which are slide, slid, and slid; or sliden. And when a man roared into third base, he used to say, “He slud into third.” [Laughter] And so Dizzy was remembered for that famous statement, and he never ceased to say that, too. “He slud into third.”

Well, when you look, we think of other statements, too, in more recent times, those were statements of my childhood, Neil Armstrong and his famous statement will never be forgotten. You will find it in books of quotations now. “That's one small step for a man; one giant leap for mankind.” Words that he uttered when he, the first man, stepped on the moon.

Well, when you turn to the Bible, you find a number of men there who are known for one statement. For example, Felix is the one who has said, “Paul, go your way; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.” And so we remember him by that statement.

Agrippa? Well, we all remember Agrippa, even those who are not Christians have heard this statement, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” Now, we will point out that that's not really precisely what that statement was intended to say. There is probably a mistranslation in this case. But the truth that lies back of it is a biblical truth. Even our Lord spoke to an individual and said, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” But we think of Agrippa, and we think of that statement. “Almost, Paul, thou persuadest me to become a Christian.”

Well, Festus was known for one important statement and, perhaps, this is the way in which he really appears in history. “Paul, you are beside yourself; much learning has made you mad.” Translated sometimes, you’re out of your mind; much learning has made you mad. You are raving; much learning has made you mad. But the Authorized Version statement is, “Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.”

This experience that Festus had, and the comment that was called forth by it, through the preaching of Paul, is the same kind of thought that has often appeared in the minds of men in spiritual things. For example, the Lord Jesus was called mad, beside himself. Even his own family called him mad. The Apostle Paul was called mad; so often, that in his letter to the Corinthians, he referred to the fact and said that he was not mad.

It’s not simply a New Testament thing; it’s an Old Testament thing, as well. And Hosea in the 9th chapter of his book, puts in the mouth of the Prophet, words that have to do with prophets in general when he says, “The prophet is a fool, and the man of the spirit is mad.” That’s the thing that they were saying about individuals who were the preachers of the word of God.

Now, the question about Festus is simply this, was he right? Was Paul really mad? Or should we turn it around and say that Felix and Agrippa and Festus, all of them and all of those others, who think of the men who are truly preaching the word of God as mad, are they the ones who are really spiritually mad?

There are many fascinating, typical men in the Book of Acts. There’s Gallio, the calmly indifferent man; Felix, the procrastinating man; Festus, the politically unprincipled man, well, we could say that about Felix, as well, Festus was a very capable man but nevertheless, an unprincipled man, fundamentally; blind, hardened, and dead in his self-interest. Confessing that Paul had done nothing worthy of death, he would sacrifice him upon the altar of political advantage. And, finally, bereft of his own reason, he calls Paul “a man bereft of reason.” The irony of it is really striking.

Now, remember that Paul was in bonds in Caesarea. He was the innocent football of the priests and the politicians in Jerusalem, and of the politicians in Caesarea, where the procurator resided.

Now, in order to save time, because this is a lengthy chapter, what I would like to do this morning is simply recount the story as set forth here and then conclude with some lessons that we learn from the tragedy of Festus.

Now, you can see, in the first 12 verses of this 25th chapter, that the apostle is going to be brought again before the Roman authorities; this time, before Festus. Festus was more upright than Felix, if we may go by the things that we know about him. He died just a few years after this, untainted by any particular scandal. In fact, Josephus, the Jewish historian, called him a “wise and just” official. Well, that’s quite a recommendation, because the Jews were not happy with almost all of the Romans who were over them. But at least, in Festus’ case, they thought well of him.

You can notice, too, that he was probably a very good administrator. He acted with alacrity. In fact, you can see as you read this account that he was carrying on his business in a very definite and speedy way. In fact, his great comment, which we remember him by, “Paul, thou art beside thyself,” is a comment that he blurted out while the apostle was still giving his message. So he was a man who was quick. He acted speedily. He did the things that he thought were proper and he did them quickly. He was not as quick in dispensing purity in justice, but, nevertheless, he was a good administrator.

When he became the procurator, procurators were staying in Caesarea; he thought it would be of value to go up to Jerusalem because the Jews were a very rebellious kind of people. As a matter of fact, the Jewish people will never be happy under any ruler, except the Messiah. Now, they don’t understand that but, nevertheless, that’s the cause of the fact that the Jews are often a rebellious, recalcitrant kind of people; and no one, up to this point, has been able to really handle them. Because, fundamentally, God has put in

their hearts, and even they don't understand it as a nation today, the fact that they will never be satisfied until the messianic king is their ruler, in the theocracy of God. So it's not surprising then that at the time of Paul, Jerusalem should be in something of a turmoil quite frequently. Festus, thinking that it would be desirable to go up and to get acquainted with the high priests and others there, went up to Jerusalem. Well, when he came, of course, they thought this is a good opportunity to get at that Paul, which they were unable to get at during the time of Felix's procuratorship. So they told Festus, when he came there, about the Apostle Paul. They said they'd like to have him up there, and they'd like to have him appear again before the authorities there. But they really weren't interested in that, they didn't have any charges they could legally lay against Paul that would stand. But they knew that they could lie in wait for him, and put him to death. And so that's what they hoped.

Well, Festus was smart enough to realize that, and he said, “No, we're going to keep Paul in Caesarea. But if you would like to come down with me, and I'm going back in a few days, we'd be glad to have a hearing down there.” And so they came and they had the hearing. And when the apostle was brought out before the Jewish men and before Festus, they laid a number of grievous complaints against Paul, but they couldn't prove any of them so Luke said. And then when Paul's turn came to answer for himself, he spoke out very plainly and said, “I haven't said anything against the law of the Jews, in the true sense of speaking against the law. I have not made any detrimental statements about the temple, nor yet against Caesar. I haven't offended any of these things. So far as the biblical foundation of those comments is concerned.”

So it was a case of charges unfounded, laid against the man of God. But Festus, and this was his mistake, the same mistake Felix had made. In fact, the verbs used to describe it are the same verbs. Over in verse 27 of chapter 24, we read in the Scripture reading, “And Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.”

Now, in verse 9 of chapter 25, we read the same thing. “But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul and said, Paul, would you go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things,” but not before them, “before me?” In other words, will you go up to Jerusalem. That, he thought, would maybe satisfy the Jews. And, at the same time, get him off the hook because he could, when he was up there, pronounce him innocent.

But the apostle was too wise for that. After all, if he couldn't be absolved of any blame in Caesarea, before the Roman official, then how could he expect, going to Jerusalem, and there in the presence of many enemies, seek to gain justice. And so the apostle saw that this was, these were cards stacked against him, and so if he wasn't protected by a Roman man, then he said, perhaps I'll be protected by Roman law. And so he blurted out, *ad caesarium pro voco* “I appeal to Caesar.”

So one might think, well, the apostle was taking the easy way out. But no, this was in accordance with the apostle's philosophy. He said, in Romans chapter 13, that every soul should be subject to the higher powers. If Paul were here, he would tell us that we should obey the laws of the land. Now, he would also tell us if the laws of the land are contrary to God's word, then, of course, our responsibility is to obey the Lord, rather than men. But when there is no basic conflict of scriptural teaching, we are to obey the laws. That's why we pay our income taxes, or most of us do, anyway. We pay our income taxes. We adhere to other forms of law, both local, state, national, as the case may be. The apostle believed in that, he proclaimed that; so did all of the apostles, for that matter. And so for him to appeal to the production of the Roman law, in my opinion, was just simply good sense in a situation in which the cards were stacked against him. So since Festus was unable to send him immediately to Rome, he remained there in Caesarea in bonds.

And not long after that, King Agrippa, from those few little territories up in the north east of the land. He had inherited the kingship of Chalcis. He had also been given

certain other smaller authorities. He was called a king, but he wasn't really a king. Thinking that it would be desirable to go down and meet the new procurator who was over him in government, they, he and his wife went down. Bernice was a well-known beauty of the period of time. I imagine that the stories of Agrippa II, for that was Agrippa's name, he was the son of the one who had put James to death, recorded in chapter 12 of the Book of Acts. His encounters, with his sister Bernice, and their living together, was one of the ancient scandals of the day. I imagine that they appeared in all of the media magazines, like Bergman and Rossellini; or Taylor and Burton. These were the scandals of the day. They came and met Festus, and they were there for some days and Festus entertained them. It was a kind of courteous summit meeting, on the part of these two individuals.

Well, it was inevitable that the talk of Paul should come to the fore, because Agrippa had the right to appoint the high priest in the city of Jerusalem and, in fact, was a Jew and his wife was a Jewess. And so naturally, talk came to Paul. And, Festus reported. In fact, he gave a very fine insight, expressed a very fine insight into the issue, because he says here in his discussion with Agrippa, “Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusations of such things as I supposed:” and in verse 19, and, “had certain questions against him of their own religion, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.” So he had a firm insight into the matter; he saw that the issue was an issue about the Lord Jesus, and it was about an issue of whether he was alive or not. In other words, he centered in on the discussion of the resurrection. Now, he still was at a loss. He didn't understand, but nevertheless, he realized that that was the issue. Here was a man, who has a great deal of light then, but still he doesn't understand. That illustrates the fact that if there is no effectual grace, we will never understand.

Many years ago at theological seminary, where I was teaching, a number of students, with good motives, thought that they might by invention of a particular slogan

arouse the student body to evangelism. And, probably, the student body needed to be aroused to evangelism. And so they came up with this marvelous little slogan, “If love is felt, the message is heard.” And they got together some buttons and other things and required all students to walk around with the button on their coat, “If love is felt, the message will be heard.” Sounded very beautiful and very nice; the only problem with it was it was just unscriptural. Because, a simple reasoning about the matter would indicate its falsity. In the final analysis, whoever loved more than our Lord Jesus Christ? But was his message heard? He was crucified. A few people heard, but they didn’t hear simply because “if love is felt the message is heard.” If that were true, everybody would have responded to our Lord. If that were true, everybody would have responded to Paul or almost everybody: For surely, the apostle is the greatest of the illustrations of a Christian worker, and, most distinguished for his obedience and devotion to the Lord. The facts are if love is felt, the message may or may not be heard. The message is heard when God the Holy Spirit opens a man’s understanding so that he responds to the message of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. What Paul and others referred to as the “Opening of a man’s heart.” Luke spoke of it, when Paul preached to Lydia, when he said, “Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things that were spoken by Paul.” Well, Festus has the heart of the matter, so far as the issue is concerned, but he’s blind and he doesn’t understand.

Some years ago I read a pitiable book by Pat Boone. It was called, “A New Song.” It was crammed with doctrinal boners and one can just read it and after a few pages realize that there is a vast amount of scriptural knowledge missing from that book, and a lot of information that is totally wrong. One of the things that he says on page 10 is, “Every man wants to know God.” Now, that is precisely contrary to the teaching of the word of God. “There is none that seeketh after God. No, not one,” the apostle said. On the one hand, we have Pat Boone, “Everyman wants to know God.” On the other hand, we have the Apostle Paul, “There is none that seeketh after God. No, not one. Whom

shall we believe? One sounds sweet and nice; the other sounds very harsh. But often, the truth is harsh and what we think of as sweet is not sweet at all, but heretical teaching. So he understands; but the thing that is missing is responsiveness. Now, he is responsible; we must never think that he is not responsible. He is responsible. But in the final analysis, salvation is of the Lord.

Well, he tells Agrippa about the things concerning the Apostle Paul, and when he finishes his little account, Agrippa says, “You know, Festus, I was wishing to hear him, too.” He obviously had heard about him. Maybe he hadn’t heard such nice things, but there was something about it that troubled him enough to say, “I was wishing to hear him, too.”

Now, Agrippa was a Jew. His wife was a Jewess. He had a strong acquaintance with the things at Jerusalem and with the priestly authorities there. And, perhaps, as is often the case, thieves and difficult men do not often get along as well with one another as we really think. And so maybe he was hoping that he could find out things about Paul, and through things about Paul about some of those in Jerusalem with whom he had to deal.

So Festus said, “Well, tomorrow you will hear him.” And so on the morrow, they decided to have this meeting. And this meeting was a marvelous meeting because here is great pomp. Luke describes it that way. There was pomp and glitter and glamour and glory and ABC and CBS and NBC and all of the media of that day were no doubt there. And they all gathered around with the pomp and glitter of such a situation. We had the king, he was dressed in his purple, because he had the right to do that. And Bernice, the great beauty, I know that she was decked out, really decked out in the latest of the apparel of that day. And then there was Festus, with his captains and with his legionnaires and with the leading men of the city, the mayors and others. They were all there in this remarkably important and significant meeting. And into it comes this little person, this Jewish man that Voltaire describes as “that ugly little Jew.” And he stands in

the midst of all of this pomp, and one gains the impression immediately that the king is not Agrippa. The man in authority is not Festus. The ultimate person who controls this meeting is the representative of the Lord God.

Now, Festus is in a difficult situation, and so he tells Agrippa, he said, “I didn’t find any thing worthy of death in this man. But he has appealed to Augustus.” I can imagine this little speech that he’s giving, and others are listening. And I do have to have something to say to those in Rome about him. Therefore, King Agrippa, after examination is had, I’d like to have something to write to Rome. He doesn’t say this, but he means “which will deliver me from my difficulty.” Because, “it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.” That’s obvious; you don’t have to say that. The very fact that he says it makes it very plain that he feels that he’s in the wrong somehow.

Now, I’d like to conclude with just a comment, concerning, a comment or two, concerning this, because next week, the Lord willing, we’ll hear Paul’s defense. We’ll hear Agrippa’s response and Festus’ response, too.

First of all, I would like to suggest to you that we have here the tragedy of Festus, the man shackled by self-interest. He had heard the story of the cross, the story of the resurrection. He didn’t need anyone to tell him the facts that were at dispute. He understood that Paul had said that there was this man Jesus, that he had died, and that he had been raised from the dead. And, obviously, in the apostle’s account of that he would have made it very plain that the Lord Jesus was the Messiah; that’s what he preached all through the Book of Acts, and that men were responsible to respond to that evidence of the love and grace of the Lord God.

James Denney was one of the greatest of the modern Scottish professors and preachers. And Dr. Denney went into his class one day at the University of Glasgow, with his divinity students and he held up a little crucifix. And Dr. Denney was not a Roman Catholic, but he said to his class, he said, “You know, I would like to be able to

take this crucifix into every one of our Scottish churches and say, ‘God loves like that.’”

In other words, the expression of the love of God is found most plainly and clearly in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the shedding of the blood of the messianic king, we have the evidence of the love of God. We don’t need any other kind of evidence; we have that in the ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Festus heard that; he was callous to the things of God. He spoke about certain questions of their “own religion.” You know how people talk about religious people. He thought of this as simply religion; not realizing or not wanting to realize that this is the fundamental issue of life, your relationship to the Lord God, that’s the issue of life. The issue of life is not economic, it’s not cultural, it’s not political; it’s spiritual. It’s the relationship of an individual to the Lord God. That’s the fundamental issue of life. And to be right about everything else and to be wrong on that is to be wrong about the most fundamental of life. May God help us to realize that fact in Believers Chapel, at least.

And, finally, he regards the spiritual man as mad. He blurts out, in the midst of Paul’s preaching, “Paul, you’re a religious fanatic, due to excessive study of the Scriptures.” The Jews had called our Lord mad. Opponents of the Gospel had called the apostle mad. Do you know that in Mark chapter 3, even our Lord’s own family called him mad? It’s so easy for us to think that the man of the spirit is mad. But it’s the one who thinks of the man of the spirit as mad who is truly a spiritual lunatic.

The Pope said a few things about Luther. He said, “Luther ought to be in bedlam.” The Wesley’s had many, many things said about them that were not good. They said, “Fools and madmen let us be, yet is our sure trust in Thee.” When Charles Haddon Spurgeon began his preaching, still a teenager, and was making so much of an impression on the English people, Punch magazine, The Saturday Review, important literary periodicals in London made fun of him constantly. They drew pictures of him and made fun of him as a religious fanatic, a wild man, a mad man. But we remember Spurgeon and many of you wouldn’t know anything about The Saturday Review, the

London periodical. You might remember something about Punch because that has persisted. But in the final analysis, the Lord's interests prevail.

I would like to suggest another thing; that Festus was a polite man who thought truth was only for the religious. Have you met people like that? He's a religious man. That may be a deprecating remark. It may be an accusation. Or it may be just simply made in an offhand kind of manner. He's a religious man. Do you not know that we are all religious? We all are. Our religion may be different. Some of you are fervent believers in our Lord Jesus Christ and that's your religion, the Christian religion. Others of you have a different religion; banking, insurance, or whatever it may be. That's really the thing that is of ultimate concern to you; and that is precisely what a religion is, ultimate concern, that's your religion. Call it what you like, if that's your ultimate concern that's your religion, that's your faith, that's that upon which you stand.

So he was a polite man, he thought truth was only for the religious. Like many today who live for years in Christendom, hear the sound of Christmas bells, hear the gospel preached over the radio or over the TV, married by a Christian minister, carry on other things in contact, close contact often, with the church of Jesus Christ; but think spiritual truth, well, that's for the religious. We who think that we are immortal, and we have no interest in eternity, I ask you, who is really mad? Who is the one who is deranged?

He never explained Paul's words. So far as we know, he never really asked for a serious explanation of them from the apostle. He simply said that he was perplexed. He was at a loss.

It reminds me of an experience I had ten or fifteen years ago, I was coming from Calgary back to Dallas, after some meetings there. And the Western Airlines plane landed in Denver and so there were people who were traveling from Calgary to Denver. And I was sitting up front and as the plane was almost ready to go, two people were ushered in by an attendant. And I had anticipated a marvelous trip, because I was sitting by the

window and there were two seats by the side of me and no one was in them. And I had had a week of meetings and I thought, “This is going to be nice, I’m not going to have to say a word to anybody, and just enjoy looking out at the Rockies.” As you fly down from Calgary to Denver, you can look off and see the Rockies, over toward the west. And these two people were ushered in and I could tell after a few moments that they were blind. And so they were ushered into those two seats that, obviously, had been kept for them.

Well, when they sat down, we had a few words. They were rather pleasant and so finally, I took the liberty of asking them, “Were you born blind or did you become blind later?” And the lady, the other was a young man, the young lady spoke and she said, “Well, one of us became blind as a result of diabetes. He did. I became blind as the result of an automobile accident.” And I just simply commented upon the fact that it must be a terrifying experience to become blind, after having ones sight, particularly. They responded in a very friendly way. We had a nice little conversation. And so I thought the time has come to ask the significant question. So I said to them, “Are you Christians?” And the young man then spoke up and he said, “Oh, yes, we were born Christians. We are Catholics.” And I said, “Now, I understand what you’ve said, and I appreciate what you have said, but you must know that one is not born a Christian? Jesus said, ‘Ye must be born again.’ And one must receive the Lord Jesus as one’s own personal savior.” The young man made a noise that resembled a grunt and his friendliness left him immediately; and for most of the rest of the flight, they both were very cold. As they get off the plane, nobody was there to help them, so I helped them a little bit to get off the plane. And, thinking about it afterwards, it was obvious that their physical blindness was a clear picture of their spiritual blindness. When it came to the fundamental issues of life, they had no understanding. Sad, but true. Festus was like that.

Finally, then, was Paul mad? No, Paul was not mad. He said, “I speak the words of truth and soberness.” Paul was the sober man in that whole gathering, so far as I

know. In the presence of Paul, Felix trembled. In the presence of Paul, Festus was perplexed. In the presence of Paul, Agrippa is very uneasy. In fact, Paul is the only regal figure in all of these gatherings. It's he who for some reason or other has the presence of mind to meet the circumstances of life.

I suggest to you that the reason is a very simple one. The last hour belongs to us; that is, those of us who are believers in Christ. The last hour, I mean, when it comes to the breathing of our last breath that belongs to us, we go immediately into the presence of the Lord. Therefore, the next minute is of no concern, ultimately. So my dear Christian friend, the last hour belongs to you. And by God's grace, what happens in between is on the way to that.

May God help us to realize that having come settle our eternal destiny upon the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ's sacrifice on Calvary's Cross, we experience the love of God that knows no anxiety. Perfect love casts out fear. Those who realize they belong to the Lord? They don't need courage. They have the love of God to sustain them. In Scripture, opposite fear is divine love; not courage. Anxiety, love of God. That is the sustenance that Christians have.

You may have it too. In this audience, if you have never believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, we remind you of the atoning work, the blood that was shed on Calvary's Cross for sinners, such as you are. Flee from divine condemnation and judgment to the Lord Jesus, embracing him and what he has done for sinners. And by God's grace, relying upon him the last hour becomes yours; and, in the meantime, you need not fear what happens in the next minute.

May God bring you to Christ if you don't know him.
Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these marvelous accounts, which reveal so many important principles that affect our lives today in nineteen eighty-five. O Father,

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if there are some in this audience who have never believed in Christ, by Thy grace, bring them to him, whom to know is life eternal.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.