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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A1764 ~ Paul Appeals to the Emperor.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

No matter how many times the Apostle Paul had been brought to trial, he'd always maintained calm under a heavy load of criticism and false accusations by others. He didn't let his emotions rule his reasoning powers and by doing this, he showed the audience and his accusers that he had integrity and credibility. Paul told the court to look at his record. He hadn't taken advantage of the privileges he could have received as a Roman citizen prisoner, by escaping onto a passing ship and disappearing over the horizon.

Paul is a good example for how we should consider doing things when under pressure or criticised. Firstly, Paul always stayed with the facts of the case. He didn't make up any falsehoods to help his defence. Always avoid telling lies, because when you do, you weaken your case and your integrity before God and people. Paul told the truth with a clear conscience and his clarity of recall and justification made his opponents nervous. They remembered that he had been taught by their nation's finest religious teacher, Gamaliel, and they recognised that speaking against Paul wasn't very easy. It also became harder when the accusers against Paul hadn't been eye witnesses to the riots and uproar that they were accusing him of causing. And each time the Jewish leaders came against Paul in court, they had no new information to add.

Secondly, Paul refused to surrender and quit. He wanted his accusers to name his crime but they couldn't find anything in him worthy of death. It's not justice when the sentence is decided before the charges are laid. But Paul didn't become impatient or bitter about this either. He remembered that the Lord said that he would be going to Rome to witness there, so he waited and he watched to see how his circumstances would play out.

On this occasion, there was a new judge and once more, Paul gave his defence against all charges brought against him by the chief priests and rulers.

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Again Paul denied all the charges against him. He denied that he had ever done anything wrong against the Roman Emperor Nero. He said this in response to the charge that Paul had been stirring up riots all over the Roman Empire. Festus though, as the new Roman Governor, wanted to gain the goodwill with the Jews. He knew that the Jews had strongly opposed Felix, the last governor, and he didn't want the Jews opposing him in the same way.

However, Festus was no better a judge of Paul and spiritually discerned things than Felix was. If the prisoner Paul couldn't be found guilty of any crime, he should have been let go free. This was Paul's trial No. 3. Through the centuries, the practice of keeping political opponents in jail for years without laying any charges was against the law of the land and seen to be unfair. Other laws were then introduced to ensure that a court order summoned a person under arrest to be brought before a judge or into courtroom before a certain time had passed.

This principle of 'habeas corpus', which is Latin for 'you may have the body', ensures that a prisoner can be released from unlawful detention if there is a lack of sufficient cause or evidence to retain the person. This right started in the English legal system and is now available in many nations.

Festus saw a way of making the Jews happy by suggesting to Paul that his trial be moved to Jerusalem. But Paul wouldn't agree. He insisted that he was then standing in Caesar's court and that Roman citizens should be tried before Caesar's court and not in Jerusalem. Paul was calling Festus' court "Caesar's court", because Festus was the official representative of the Roman Emperor.

Paul wasn't fooled for a minute that the Jews were just waiting for an opportunity to kill him. Paul may also have been concerned that the Jews could be successful in persuading Festus to pronounce Paul guilty without any evidence. So it was a very dangerous step for Paul to go to Jerusalem. Paul may have wondered what else this new governor would do to him to keep the Jews happy. It was possible that Festus in time would hand Paul over to them anyway.

As a Roman citizen, Paul had the right to appeal directly to Caesar, the current emperor in Rome. Knowing that he was more likely to get a fair trial in Rome than in Jerusalem, Paul decided to appeal to the Roman Emperor, thus forcing Festus to move Paul's trial to Rome. The chief priests and elders were probably rather unhappy with that, as they would have to travel a long way to present their weak case against Paul before an unsympathetic judge.

At that time, in 59 AD, Nero was the Roman Emperor. In the beginning of his reign, Nero didn't appear to be an evil ruler. So it was reasonable for Paul to hope that he would judge Paul's case fairly. But in 62 AD, Nero began to severely persecute Christians throughout his empire. He did unspeakably cruel things to the people and the history books say that Nero was the most wicked of all the Roman emperors that lived.

At the end of Paul's trial before Festus, Festus realised that he had a problem in sending Paul to Rome. What could he tell the emperor that Paul had done that needed such a specific judgment on? Festus finally thought that he had the answer to his problem when King Agrippa came to visit and welcome him to his new post. King Agrippa was the son of King Herod and the brother of Drusilla, the wife of Felix. The Roman emperor had given Agrippa a small kingdom north of the province of Judea and Agrippa ruled there under the emperor's authority.

Being a Jew himself, Agrippa knew much more about Jewish customs than Festus did. So Festus took the opportunity to discuss Paul's case with Agrippa. The Jews had

spoken such evil things about Paul that Festus supposed that he must be guilty of some great crime. But when Festus examined Paul's case, he couldn't find any crime that Paul had committed. So he concluded that Paul's case involved only a dispute over Jewish religious matters.

When Agrippa heard what Festus had to say, he asked to see Paul himself. Agrippa had undoubtedly heard something about this "dead man named Jesus whom Paul claimed was alive." Now Agrippa wanted to hear more.

The following day, Agrippa and his sister Bernice came to the judgement hall with great pomp and ceremony. The city officials and high ranking officers made the whole thing quite a spectacle. The prisoner was to be brought in bound in chains. It would have been hard not to compare Paul with those present, yet in God's sight, the man in chains was by far the more important out of everyone there in the judgement hall. Today, the Apostle Paul is famous and the only reason we remember Agrippa and Festus at all is by their brief time together with Paul that's mentioned in the Bible.

Whenever you're tempted to get into comparisons with other people, try to remember that comparisons will lead to a competitive spirit. For each person living a committed life to Christ, their primary goal is to please Christ and to live in Him constantly. There's a song that goes like this: "Not to the strong is the battle, Not to the swift is the race, Yet to the true and the faithful Victory is promised through grace."

What does 'grace' mean? Paul seemed to have received special revelations from God about God's 'grace' more than any other New Testament preacher. Grace is the free, undeserved goodness and favour of God to people that empowers, builds up and enables us to accomplish things that we could never do in our own strength or ability. Having a mindset that sees God in everything is evidence of a Christian's growth in grace and a thankful heart.

Now that Paul's life on the road as a travelling preacher seemed over, we become aware of Paul's call to speak about the Age of God's grace. Paul's ministry in prison

was to make this Gospel known to as many people as possible. Each Bible letter he signed starts with an announcement of grace and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ to Paul's intended audience.

In the epistles, we find that we are *justified freely by God's grace*, that *where sin increased, God's grace increased much more*. We read that we are *not under law, but under grace* that we may be successful in *every good work*. The Age of God's Grace was indeed committed to Paul for him to make it known to us.

The Corinthian church had more problems and difficulties than most of other new churches mentioned in the Bible in the same era. Paul urged the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain. Those new converts were not to turn away from God's gracious opportunity to hear the gospel of forgiveness that Paul had so faithfully preached to them.

Paul warned the Corinthians: "But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully."

Paul could not stand idly by and allow his diligent efforts to become undone. He couldn't permit his spiritual children to be deceived by a false gospel or be led astray from the true path of sanctification, which is the process of holy transformation. Paul's duty before God, like that of all faithful ministers, was to exhort people **not to receive the grace of God in vain**. Paul was concerned first that the Corinthians did not understand they had received God's grace with regards to salvation. As it is in any church, not everyone in the Corinthian assembly was redeemed. Some had intellectual knowledge of the gospel but didn't have saving faith yet. That is why Paul challenged them, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognise this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?"

Those in the congregation who were not regenerate were in grave danger of being deceived by false teachers. To follow those preaching another Jesus, another Spirit or another gospel would lead them to spiritual ruin. The legalists in the congregation sought to turn all the Christians away from living in the power of the Spirit to instead, living back in the strength of the sinful flesh.

A story is told about a frontier town where a horse bolted and ran away with a wagon carrying a little boy. Seeing the child in danger, a young man risked his life to catch the horse and stop the wagon. The child who was saved grew up to become a lawless man and one day, he stood before a judge to be sentenced for a serious crime that he had committed. The prisoner recognised the judge as the same man who, years before, had saved his life. So he pleaded for mercy on the basis of that experience.

But the words from the bench silenced his plea. "Young man, then I was your saviour; today I am your judge and I must sentence you to be hanged." One day, Jesus will say to all rebellious sinners. "During that long day of grace, I was your Saviour, and My forgiveness was near. But today, I am your Judge. Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!" Many people miss their opportunity to have Jesus as their Saviour in their lifetime. But then there is no alternative but to face Him as their Judge.

If you're not sure that you're ready to meet your Maker, call on the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive you of your sins, make you holy through His shed blood on the cross that has all power to wash away the sins of the world and receive you into His eternal kingdom.

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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