**I APPEAL TO CAESAR!**

Acts 25:1-27

Key Verse:11

“If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!”

In today’s passage, Paul stood trial before a new governor Festus. Once again, Paul was accused by the Jewish leaders and he was alone to defend himself. But he did not give in. He kept God given vision to testify in Rome as Jesus had encouraged him in a dream. May we ponder upon Paul’s vision and faith to follow God’s leading in an adverse circumstance.

1.Paul’s trial before Festus (1-9)

The previous passage ends with the verse 27, **“When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.”** While staying in prison, time must have flowed very slowly for Paul especially when he had limited freedom. What he could do was to wait for God to act. Then one day, an opportunity came to him.

Look at verses 1,2. **“Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem where the chief priests and the Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul.”** As a new governor, the key to governing Israel well was to make friends with the Jewish leaders. So Festus took the initiative and went up to Jerusalem. There the Jewish leaders requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem. Although 2 years had passed, the Jews were unyielding in their attempt to kill Paul. They were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way to Jerusalem. Two years earlier, a Jewish squad of 40 men had formed a conspiracy with an oath to kill Paul through waiting ambush, but failed.

How did Festus respond to it? Verses 4,5 say, **“Festus answered, ‘Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. Let some of your leaders come with me, and if the man has done anything wrong, they can press charges against him there.”** Festus wanted to uphold the Roman law. After spending eight or ten days with them, he went down to Caesarea and the next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him. Festus lost no time with speedy convening and opening the court. The trial began in Caesarea again under a new governor, Festus. Verse 7 says, **“When Paul came in, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him. They brought many serious charges against him, but they could not prove them.”**

We can picture the courtroom especially Paul who was surrounded by the Jew all by himself. This reminds us of the situation of the prophet Elisha. The King of Aram sent horses and chariots and a strong forces and surrounded the city to catch Elisha. The servant of Elisha saw this, he got panic saying, “Oh no, my lord!” Then Elisha said, **“Don’t be afraid,” “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”** As Elisha prayed to open his servant’s eyes, then the Lord opened the servants’ eyes and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.(2King 6) Likewise, Paul was not frustrated by many enemies. He remained calm because God stood behind him.

What was his opening statement in his defense? He said, **“I have done nothing wrong against the Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar.”** He denied having committed any offense. His conscience was clear before God and man. Here, Festus began to waver on whether or not Paul should go free. Before, Festus seemed resolute in serving justice. But now political pressure was beginning to shape his decisions. He said to Paul, wishing to do the Jews a favor, **“Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?”** Festus knew that a fair trial was impossible in Jerusalem. Yet he asked Paul the question because he wanted to please the Jews.

What is the meaning of going up to Jerusalem for Paul? What happened to Paul when he stood in Sanhedrin court in Jerusalem 2 years ago? The dispute became so violent that Paul was about to be torn to pieces by them. And what had happened at Sanhedrin court in Sanhedrin 28 years ago? Our Lord Jesus was tried before the Roman governor Pilate in the early morning. All the religious leaders stood around Jesus before Pilate. Although Pilate found no guilty in Jesus and tried to release him with all possible ways, he failed. When the Jewish leaders kept shouting, **“If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar”**(Jn19:12) This shouting made Pilate be afraid of losing his job as a politician. He finally handed Jesus over to them to be crucified. So going up to Jerusalem meant unfair justice and his death.

2.I appeal to Caesar! (10-27)

What did Paul say? Look at verses 10-11. **“Paul answered, ‘I am now standing before Caesar’s court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. If, however, I am guilty of dong anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!”**

Paul made an important decision on the spot. In this chapter, the word, “Caesar” appears 6 times. Why is it critical for Paul to appeal to Caesar? Paul did not appeal to Caesar not only for the sake of being released. Certainly, Jesus’ words of promise must have been in his heart. Jesus said, **“As you have testified about me, you must also testify in Rome.”**(Acts 23:11) But he had been stuck in Caesarea prison for 2 years. He must have wondered how this promise could be carried on. He had been actively seeking a way to go to Rome.

In that difficult situation, Paul looked up at God. It was God’s will for him to go to Rome and testify about Jesus. But there seemed to be no way. But when Paul strove to obey God’s will, God gave him a sparkling wisdom. He remembered his Roman citizenship. Every Roman citizen had the right to appeal to Caesar from anywhere in the Roman Empire. Based on this appeal, the Roman citizen would be brought to Rome for trial. Paul saw God’s opportunity in this situation to go to Rome. The Roman government would even pay his travel expenses. Paul must have said to himself, “Yes! That’s it!” Then he pronounced clearly, “I appeal to Caesar!” In doing so he committed his life and future into the hand of God. When Paul appealed to Caesar, he was not looking at Caesar to depend on him. He was looking at the One who is above Caesar. Paul believed the sovereign Ruler of history who is far above Caesar.

In fact, Rome was the farthest mission field for Paul and the way to Rome was perilous. According to his report in 2Corinthians chapter 11, Paul named various dangers in his missionary journey. He said, **“I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea and in danger from false believers.”** Dangers were everywhere Paul traveled. Getting to Rome in a safe way was another concern for Paul. But God prepared the most unexpected, yet safest way to bring Paul to Rome as a prisoner in chains.

Why is it important to preach the gospel in Rome? Rome was the capital of the Gentile world at that time. There is a saying, “All roads lead to Rome.” Roman roads were built from about 300 BC through the expansion of the Roman Empire. The stone paved Roman roads provided efficient means for the overland movement of armies, officials, civilians, and trade goods. God prepared these ways for future gospel work. Later on, the gospel would be spread fast through these vast Roman roads to the Western and Eastern world.

Paul believed that the gospel of Jesus would be preached and change the people in Rome. This was his vision based on Jesus’ words of promise. God’s word of promise gives us vision through his word. When we face adverse situations and time just passes by without visible achievement, it is not easy to stand firm. However, we need to wait on God to act and seek for an opportunity to move forward like Paul. Now Paul had to go to Rome as a prisoner escorted by the Roman soldiers. Yet, his burning desire to share the gospel with the Romans did not die down. When he kept his vision in his heart, the closed door began to open through the most unexpected way.

Look at verse 12. **“After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!”** The time of adversity is the time to deepen our commitment to God. The time of adversity is the time to look up at God. When we commit our lives more deeply to God, he gives us wisdom and helps us to find a way. Festus was happy to get rid of the case that gave him headache. But he had nothing definite to write to the Emperor about Paul. To send a prisoner to Caesar without a valid charge was unreasonable for the governor. He needed a help in filing proper paperwork.

Look at verses 13,14. **“A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul’s case with the king. He said: “There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner.”** Festus shared the details of Paul’s case with the Jewish king hoping to get some help. He reiterated Paul’s trial to the King Agrippa. Even Festus recognized that the focal point of their dispute was the resurrection of Jesus. He said in verse 19, **“Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive.”**

King Agrippa was intrigued by the case. He wanted to hear from Paul himself. The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high ranking military officers and the prominent men of the city. When they had taken their seats at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. Festus declared in verse 25a, **“I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor I decided to send him to Rome.”**

Festus and the king Agrippa and all the high authorities did not know the real reason why Paul was going to Rome. But Paul was filled with God’s hope for the world and was going to Rome to testify about Jesus there.

Whenever Dr.Samuel Lee studied the 4 gospels, he found that each book ends with Jesus’ world mission command, “Go into all the world.” So he began to send missionaries to America and Germany. Later on, his family came to USA in 1977 at the age of 48. It was difficult for Koreans in 1970’s to get American visa. But he remembered his birthplace was Osaka, Japan. So he got the American visa through his Japanese passport. In 1985, he gave the prayer topic for pioneering Russia at World Mission Report. Dr.Lee applied for a tourist visa to Russia to plant prayer. Dr.Lee wrote down his job, a minister and his visa was rejected. So the next time, he wrote down his job, “unemployed” and got the visa. As they passed the Moscow State University, he got down from the bus and knelt down on the grass and prayed for the pioneering the university.

When I came to UBF as a new student in 1987, people were praying fervently for world mission at every meeting. We had to practice Russian dancing in many conferences which required strenuous movement such as high jumping, tumbling and standing up and downs as an prayer offering for world mission. God heard their prayers and opened the iron curtain of Russia in 1989 through Perestroika movement by Mikhail Gorvachev. In this way, God sent many missionaries to the world in various ways such as sewing operators or chicken killer missionaries, students, nurses and genitors. God’s work took place through these people who caught God’s vision.

God has also gathered one by one in our church who caught world mission vision from different backgrounds. Some came for studying ESL courses with a visitor’s visa, but later on changed their direction to stay. Some became missionaries since they married to missionaries. Whatever the case, it is vital to keep faith and vision burning in our heart to serve God’s mission. Now, many settled down compared to early stages of their missionary life. We are not here to seek better or comfortable life. We are here as promise holders.

Paul’s vision to share the gospel in Rome challenges us. Although we are stuck in pandemic, may we keep our world mission vision kindling in our heart. As I learned through UBF Forums, the time of crisis is the time of opportunity. Now is the time to prepare ourselves for the future revival ministry. We might face unexpected circumstances like Paul in prison. However, let us ponder upon God’s plan and look up at God who is behind us. May we hold fast to God’s vision through His word and pursue His leading as God’s faithful servants. May God enable us to serve UTSC pioneering ministry this fall semester.