**BCM Bible Study – November 7 & 8, 2018**

**Acts: Paul Before Festus and Agrippa (Acts 24-26)**

*We concluded last week at the end of chapter 23 - Paul is in Caesarea awaiting trial by the Roman governor Felix. The high priest and some others charge Paul with inciting riots and profaning the temple. Paul explains what really happened and insists on his innocence with respect to both Jews and Romans. We will pick up after Paul has finished his defense.*

Paul appeals to Caesar – **Read Acts 24:22-27**

* *Drusilla, the daughter of Jewish king Herod Agrippa I, had been previously married to another man, but was convinced by Felix to leave that man to marry him. As a Jew (especially Jewish royalty), it was unacceptable to marry a non-Jew, but she was drawn by the high position of authority that she could attain by marrying Felix. Their relationship “seems to have been based upon greed, lust, and expectations of grandeur.” (Expositor’s Commentary)*
  + In light of this information, why does Paul reason with them about the specific things listed in verse 25?
  + Felix and his wife are put off by Paul moving the conversation from “divergent religious views to personal morality and responsibility.” (Expositor’s)
  + In your own faith conversations, even though it may elicit a negative response, why is it important to move from mere knowledge to personal belief? What does it look like to make that shift?
* **Read Acts 25:1-12**
  + As a Roman citizen, Paul is invoking another one of his rights in appealing to Caesar. Why does he decide to do so in this situation?
  + Look back at Acts 23:11. Paul notices an opportunity during his trial to go to Rome and he takes advantage of it.
  + In this and several other situations in Acts, Paul uses wise action to further God’s purposes and effect God’s promises. What does this teach us about our own role in bringing about God’s plans and purposes?

Paul before Agrippa and Bernice

* Agrippa and Bernice visit Caesarea and upon hearing about Paul’s case, they wish to speak with him. Agrippa was the great-grandson of Herod - the same Herod from the gospels who sought to kill baby Jesus and succeeded in beheading John the Baptist. The Emperor had given Agrippa rule over the temple in Jerusalem and the right to appoint the high priest. Thus, he was the Roman-appointed Jewish ruler. In v.13-23, Festus brings Agrippa and Bernice up to speed on Paul’s case. **Read Acts 25:23-26:23**
  + What are the most inspiring and powerful elements of Paul’s story as you hear it?
  + Paul aims to tell his story in such a way that authenticates his ministry. To accomplish this, he focuses on his dramatic life change that came about as a result of encountering Jesus. Why do you think Paul chooses to communicate his testimony in such a way? Why not just start at verse 12 and his experience on the road to Damascus?
  + What is the power in talking about your own past and how Christ has transformed you? What elements of your life would you include to this end?
* Why does Paul say that he is on trial in vs.6-7? (See also 23:6 and 24:21)
  + What does it mean to put your hope in something or someone?
  + In what things or people do you tend to put your hope outside of God?
  + Why is hope central to the gospel? Why is God the only reliable source of hope?
  + What disappointment or pain has resulted from misplaced hope in your past? How can hope in God redeem that situation?

Chains that Advance the Gospel: **Read Acts 26:24-32**

* The final sentence of this chapter is arresting. Paul has been in Caesarea, imprisoned for two years – and he could have been free! In Paul’s situation, in would have been easy to get discouraged or frustrated. We are going to read a passage that Paul wrote while he was imprisoned in Rome, but the principles apply to his situation in Caesarea. **Read Philippians 1:12-14.**
  + How have Paul’s chains served to advance the gospel?
  + None of us are imprisoned, but broader biblical theology tells us that suffering righteously/with hope often serves to advance the gospel. Why is this so? What about hopeful suffering communicates the gospel to the world or those who are watching?
* What is interesting about this story is that Paul is in chains because of the lies and pride of other people. They intended to stifle God’s plan to spread the gospel to the Gentiles by imprisoning Paul – in reality, their efforts served to advance the gospel! A parallel story is that of Joseph, who was cast into slavery by his brothers only to find himself in high standing with Pharaoh. When a plague ravaged the Middle East and Joseph’s family went to Egypt for food, Joseph was there to provide for them. Moreover, this series of events brought the Israelites to Egypt, setting the stage for the Exodus. Reflecting on this, Joseph says these famous words: **Read Genesis 50:19-20.** In Joseph’s and Paul’s stories we see a foundational piece of God’s character: he is the Redeemer. He takes broken things and makes them new. He responds to attempts to thwart his plan by using them to advance his purposes.
  + In what way does the redemptive nature of God resonate with you? What situations does it bring to mind?
  + Where have you seen God’s redemptive hand at work in your life?
  + What do you desire for God to redeem? What is broken that needs healing?
  + Perhaps you are in a situation where God seems absent or the Enemy is winning. Perhaps you feel like God is too slow to act – I wonder if Paul felt this way during his 2-year stay is Caesarea. How can God’s redemptive nature influence your hope and expectancy this week?