

**Text:** Ac 25.13, 23; 26.30

Last week we talked about Festus. (*Porcius Festus*, let's not forget!)

This week I want to talk about Herod Agrippa and his sister Bernice. Our focus will mostly be on Bernice, but what we say about her applies to him as well.

Our subject last week was the inability of the lost to truly comprehend the gospel. I think I'd like to add that the inability isn't some kind of deficiency:

1. They are *able* to understand
2. They are *unwilling* to understand

That's what makes unbelief blameworthy. It is one thing for someone who has never heard the gospel, but when you hear and refuse to accept, you earn greater condemnation.

God did everything for you. He created you, he gives you life and breath, and he sent Jesus to take the penalty for your sin. If you won't accept that, you are poking your finger in the eye of God.

How well do you think that will work out?

Today our subject is a little different. The royal couple, brother and sister, are people of the world. They are near the top of the heap in the Roman Empire, among the elites. From a worldly perspective, they have it all.

That brings me to our title:

### *Having It All Isn't Enough*

Our texts for the message are the three scattered mentions of Bernice in Acts 25 and 26. We will read portions of these texts:

Read Ac 25.13-14, 22-23; 26.30-31

The texts don't tell us much about these people. What we know of them comes from secular history. Our texts show their elevated social position, their pretentious display (pomp and circumstance), and their treatment of the gospel as a curiosity and nothing more.

People in our world are tempted by the power, position, prestige, possessions, and pretensions of the "It" people – those who "have it all."

Now, let me say that having resources make things easier. My dad was in a Bible study once and the pastor's wife told me he got a little twinkle in his eye and said this:

“I’ve been rich and I’ve been poor. Rich is better.”

But whether rich or poor, it is that lusting after riches, position, and influence that is the spiritual downfall of many. They look to this world for satisfaction, they hope in better circumstances, in the things this world offers, and they forget the most important thing: the world to come.

Christians teach a work ethic. If you work hard, in normal circumstances, you should be able to provide enough for you and your family and your old age.

Sometimes things will get in the way and interfere with “normal circumstances,” and things might work out differently.

What I am preaching about today is the soul who sets its heart on the world to satisfy its spiritual longings. I think we will see these things as we look at a biography of these two, especially Bernice.

### *Having It All Isn't Enough*

**Proposition:** The world will never satisfy, no matter how high you climb. Fix your heart and your hope on Jesus Christ, and love him forever.

## I. The privileges of birth

### A. Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12.1-5, 18-23)

1. Father of Herod Agrippa II and Bernice (or Berenice)
2. Sent to Rome by his grandfather, Herod the Great, after Grandpa executed his father, Aristobulus (all through much in-family plotting)
3. Grew up in company with future the son of emperor Tiberius and future emperor Claudius, and was a friend of Caligula
4. As a young man, a kind of unstable person, much in debt, played the system until finally settling down with the help of Claudius, who made him king of Judea and Samaria
5. Ruled well, grandson of Mariamne, Herod the Great’s favorite wife and daughter of the Maccabean priests

Agrippa lived outwardly as a pious Jew, well thought of by the people.

6. Grew in power and pride, finally brought down by God for his arrogance [AD 44] (Acts 12.18-23)

B. Herod Agrippa II (Roman name: Marcus Julius Agrippa – after his father)

1. Raised in the court of Claudius, who would have put him in his father's place except he was only 17

2. Later began acquiring much responsibility over other districts, including authority to appoint the high priest in Jerusalem

a. Shows trust the emperors had for him

b. Shows his "Jewishness" like his father

Constable: "He was the last in the Herodian dynasty and was the best of the Herods."<sup>1</sup>

c. When Nero added to his territory, he renamed Caesarea Philippi as Neronias

3. When the Jews revolted in the late 60s, he sided with Rome, living his final days in Rome after AD 70

He was about thirty yrs old at the time of Ac 25-26

C. Bernice (Greek: Βερενίκη, *Bereníkē*)

1. Already met another sister, Drusilla, wife of Felix (Ac 24.24)

2. A year younger than Agrippa

3. Both sisters reputed as great beauties

4. She was an upwardly mobile queen, married two different kings, involved with other powerful men (more later)

5. Called the "Jewish Cleopatra" for her beauty and ambition<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ac 25.13.

<sup>2</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 493.

## D. The pomp and circumstance of their lives (Ac 25.23)

1. The hearing is a gathering of the high and mighty of Caesarea, as noted last week
2. Very similar to pompous gatherings of modern society
  - a. The Oscars: red carpets, fancy gowns, etc
  - b. Political gatherings – speech from the throne, etc
  - c. Even commercial gatherings like the Real Estate Board puts on in our town

There is a worldly appeal in these gatherings, many who participate love the pomp, love recognition, like the spotlight.

Some people *live* to be part of such high social gatherings, the higher the better.

## II. The constant striving for more

### A. Agrippa's upward mobility

1. As mentioned, too young to be king of Judaea, but later Claudius made him king of Chalcis (an area in modern Lebanon) — AD 48
2. In AD 53, he gave up Chalcis in favor of territories of his uncle Philip (Trachonitus) and a man named Lysanias (Abilene)
3. Later, Nero granted him Tiberias (Galilee) and Perea (AD 55)
4. Four years later Agrippa and Berenice participated in this hearing in Caesarea Maritima (headquarters of Festus)
5. In AD 66 tried to dissuade the Jews from revolt, they deposed him and he sided with the Romans, fighting against the rebels

6. "After the capture of Jerusalem, he went with his sister Bernice to Rome, where he was invested with the dignity of praetor and rewarded with additional territory."<sup>3</sup>

A *praetor* was an imperial administrator, one of about sixteen special assistants to the emperor.

Agrippa was a capable and fairly sober man, of great reputation with the highest men of Rome, and always moving upward.

## B. Bernice's upward mobility

Her tale seems sordid, but she used her beauty to move ever higher in the empire as the only course available to an ambitious woman.

1. Married at thirteen to her uncle, Herod of Chalcis (the territory her brother would later rule) [AD 44]
2. After Herod of Chalcis died AD 48, she lived with her brother Agrippa for many years – despite sordid rumors that swirled around them
3. She was about 29 when she and her brother heard Paul's testimony in Ac 26
4. In AD 63, she married King Polemon of Cilicia, but marriage didn't last long
5. Fled Jerusalem with her brother, AD 66, met Titus, the general who succeeded his father Vespasian as emperor
  - a. Bernice supported Vespasian financially in the campaign to replace Nero
  - b. Arrived in Rome with her brother in AD 75, took up with Titus again, living with him at his palace
6. Titus became emperor in AD 79, but opposition to a Jewish queen led him to dismiss her

The tale is full of money, influence, conspiracy, and low morals.

One word can characterize Bernice: "Ambition"

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<sup>3</sup> "[Herod Agrippa II](#)," in *Wikipedia*, April 14, 2022.

### C. Assessment

1. Agrippa and Bernice were not the wealthiest people in Rome, but they had much wealth
2. Agrippa and Bernice were not the most powerful people in Rome, but they were very close to the pinnacle of power
3. Agrippa, at least, had outward appearances of faithful Judaism, but his life showed his lust for position, wealth, and power

They “had it all”

### III. The emptiness of unbelief (26.27-29)

Read Ac 26.27-31

- A. Herod knew the prophets, and could have affirmed Paul's testimony
- B. Herod's reply dismisses the gospel claim
  1. Was he under conviction?
  2. Was he making a joke? (“With this little talk you expect me to become a Christian?”)
- C. Both Herod and Bernice heard the gospel from the preeminent apostle

What did they gain by unbelief in favor of ambition?

### Conclusion:

**Proposition:** The world will never satisfy, no matter how high you climb. Fix your heart and your hope on Jesus Christ, and love him forever.