Paul's defense before Festus, Agrippa and Bernice

CHARACTERS: Paul, Festus, Agrippa, Bernice, soldier and crowd
COSTUMES: Biblical
PROPS: none specified
SETTING: Audience hall
RUN TIME: 5 minutes
SCRIPTURE/BASED ON: Acts 25 & 26
FK reading level: 6.8

DIRECTOR'S NOTE: Communication is a two way street and the facial reactions and body language of those listening can add much to Paul's monologues. Especially with a longer monologue, it is easy for audience attention to wander, but watching various reactions to the speaker keeps audience interest and aids in their emotional response, comprehension and retention. JEWISH LEADERS should scowl and shake their fists at him occasionally, especially if he mentions Jesus. A couple of the CROWD should be vigorously pro- Paul, shaking their heads "yes". A couple of the CROWD should be confused, shrugging their shoulders and looking at each other with puzzled faces. FESTUS and some others should seem skeptical, leaning back, hands under chin, heads cocked to one side, occasionally raising their eyebrows.

It is helpful during rehearsal to assign cast members these roles and have them imagine what they are thinking as their character and thus consider which parts of his speech would most influence them. Those are the times when they should shift position slightly to get a better look at PAUL or to look meaningfully at each other.

At rise: FESTUS is on a throne with a small group attending him. AGRIPPA and BERNICE arrive with great pomp and are seated on thrones. FESTUS beckons and a SOLDIER escorts PAUL to stand before them.

FESTUS: King Agrippa, and all present with us, this is Paul, the man the Jews want executed. But I could not find that he had done anything that deserved the death sentence. He has appealed to the Emperor, but before I send him I want us, and especially you, King Agrippa, to more completely investigate his case. I cannot send a prisoner, without specifying the charges against him.

AGRIPPA: *(to PAUL)* You have permission to speak.

PAUL: *(Bowing his head towards the thrones*) King Agrippa! I consider myself fortunate that today I am to defend myself before you, particularly because you know so well all the Jewish customs and disputes.

Ever since I was young, I have lived as a member of the strictest party of our religion, the Pharisees. I am on trial because I believe in the resurrection of the dead. *(to all the audience)* Why do you find it impossible to believe that God raises the dead?

I once thought that I should do everything I could against the cause of Jesus of Nazareth. I put many of God's people in prison; and when they were sentenced to death, I also voted against them. I had them punished in the synagogues and tried to make them deny their faith. I was so furious with them that I even went to foreign cities, like Damascus, to persecute them.

(PAUL looks up and as he continues, he acts out what happened) While traveling there I saw a light much brighter than the sun, coming from the sky and shining around me and the men traveling with me. All of us fell

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to the ground, *(PAUL falls)* and I heard a voice say to me in Hebrew, 'Saul, Saul! Why are you persecuting me? You are hurting yourself by hitting back, like an ox kicking against its owner's stick.'

(PAUL looks heavenward, shielding his eyes like they hurt) Who are you, Lord? I asked.

And the Lord answered, 'I am Jesus, whom you persecute. But get up and stand on your feet. *(PAUL rises to his knees, still covering his eyes)* I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant. You are to tell others what you have seen of me today and what I will show you in the future. You are to open their eyes and turn them from the darkness to the light and from the power of Satan to God, so that through their faith in me they will have their sins forgiven. *(PAUL stands and looks directly at AGRIPPA)*

And so, King Agrippa, I did not disobey the vision I had from heaven. Since that time, I have preached that everyone must repent of their sins and turn to God and do the things that would show they had repented. Though the Jewish leaders try to kill me, God has helps me, and so I stand here giving my witness to all, to small and great alike. *(PAUL bows his head)*

FESTUS: *(shouting)* You are mad, Paul! Your great learning is driving you mad!

PAUL: I am not mad, Your Excellency! I speak the truth. King Agrippa! You know about these things. I am sure that you have taken notice of every one of them, for this thing has not happened hidden away in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do!

AGRIPPA: *(somberly, considering)* Do you think you will make me a Christian in such a short time?

PAUL: Short time or a long time, my prayer to God is that you and all the rest of you who are listening to me today might become followers of Jesus.

AGRIPPA, FESTUS, BERNICE rise and exit. Pausing just before they go off they speak to each other

BERNICE: This man has not done anything for which he should die or be put in prison.

AGRIPPA: This man could have been released if he had not appealed to the Emperor.

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