*He came down with them and stood on a level place with a great crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases, and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And everyone in the crowd was trying to touch Him, for power came out from Him and healed all of them. Then He looked up at His disciples and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven, for that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. “Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. “Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.”* Luke 6:17-26

*After several days had passed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to welcome Festus. Since they were staying there several days, Festus laid Paul’s case before the king, saying: “There is a man here who was left in prison by Felix. When I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me about him and asked for a sentence against him. I told them that it was not the custom of the Romans to hand over anyone before the accused had met the accusers face to face and had been given an opportunity to make a defense against the charge. So when they met here, I lost no time but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. When the accusers stood up, they did not charge him with any of the crimes that I was expecting. Instead, they had certain points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died but whom Paul asserted to be alive. Since I was at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wished to go to Jerusalem and be tried there on these charges. But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of his Imperial Majesty, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to the emperor.”*

 Acts 25:13-21

 *Two guys, one Jewish and another a Christian indulged in a friendly argument about their respective faiths. “Most of the good things you Christians have, you’ve taken from us,” the Jew said. “The Ten Commandments, for instance.”*

 *“I’ll admit we took the Ten Commandments from you,” the Christian guy answered, “but you can’t say that we’ve kept them.”*

A Certain Jesus

1. Quite a while ago I came across a sermon illustration involving a pastor on the way to the airport and while in the taxi, the cab driver asking him: *“What is Christianity all about? Please, tell me in a few words since we are so close to the airport.”* At first the pastor was stunned with the question but after he started to explain he realized he could not find a suitable way to do so in just a few words. I gave some thoughts to this as I read the illustration, and I believe that all of us being in similar circumstances would have the very same problem. We come to the Worship Service, participate in whatever liturgy we may be used to, listen to the message and consequently as church goers we are used to a long and sometimes even complicated, theological explanations to what our faith is about as offered by the clergy. It seems to indeed be very difficult to explain what we believe in just a few words. Then I realized that in this very reading from the Book of the Acts, Festus without even realizing what he does, wonderfully explained what we as Christians believe indeed. In just few words Festus, this Roman Governor of Judea, offered the Jewish King Agrippa the message that was concise and yet has truly impacted and changed the world.

2. It's been countless times in all the years of my ministry that I was asked by different people of what is the difference between my church and the church they belonged to, be it the Roman Catholic, the Orthodox or any form of the Protestant or the Evangelical church. Every time I would find myself in such a situation I tried to offer to these people the answer that would explain the different views on various sacraments or of the lack of them in some these traditions. I would talk about where these traditions originated and what these traditions mean, but I always felt that my answers truly fell short, and I was more like a teacher or a professor of *“Christian Church History,”* lecturing my students. Looking back on all those past encounters I see now that in the end through the long and elaborative presentations, although I tried to be quite thorough, I was not really offering a simple and short explanation. Yet here, I believe to find the crux of the answer the cab driver’s question posed to that pastor: *“a certain Jesus, who had died but whom Paul asserted to be alive.”* This is exactly what Festus was able to deliver in his very short statement, encapsulating the essence of Christianity.

3. It is not my intention here to introduce Festus as some sort of a theologian, after all he was a politician and not even a Christian, but what he was able to do, was to simply express the fundamental truth, one that we all hold to so dearly. Christianity simply said is all about Jesus and by itself Festus’ statement was indeed a remarkably and perfectly correct answer. What we as Christians believe is truly not about *“the Golden Rule,”* nor about how active we are in our concurring churches. Christianity is not about Martin Luther or what he wanted to do in the Church. It is not about the so called *“liberation theology”* or what is popularly known in some circles as the *“social gospel,”* or the *“social justice.”* What we believe is certainly not about any other man, regardless if this would be Martin Luther King, Billy Graham, Pope, or Karl Barth whom I believe to be the greatest theologian of the 20th century. Christianity is not about speaking in tongues, about healings, or prophecies. Christianity is about Jesus from Nazareth, a dead man whom Paul claimed to be alive, a man who became our Christ! This is what Christianity is about, and Festus recognized this with his statement.

4. In all the years of my schooling I have done a fair bit of studies, and I believe to have a reasonable amount of knowledge and understanding of not only the ancient philosophies, and teachings of such figures like Moses, Mohammed, or Buddha, with the last two eventually leading to the creation of two major religions, Buddhism, and Islam. I have also studied the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, Seneka, to name just a few as well as more modern ones such as Descartes, Kirkegaard, Kant and even Nietzsche, alongside with those of Marks and Engels. I read the works of such giants of Christian theology and the pillars of Christianity as Karl Barth, Hans Kung, Detrich Bonhoeffer and many other contemporary Christian theologians. In the end all I can say about them all, is that their views always evolved around the already established idea, weather a Christian theology or the philosophical’ view of the world and the meaning of life. This is not a case with Christianity. As the followers of Jesus, we focus on Him and the reason why He came to this world, the purpose for Him to be born.

5. Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, long promised as the Messiah, was born of Mary in Bethlehem Ephrata in Judea and He was born as a special man, both human and divine. His way of life was also unique just as was His way of teaching. Jesus did not create a new religion, He was a fulfillment of the one already in existence. He fulfilled the promises of old, of the past established at the time of Creation. As Christians we are, after all, the *“New Chosen People,”* the *“New Israel.”* Jesus’ birth and His message were eventually been acknowledged by other people who wrote a series of texts about Him and what He taught. These writings were directed to the particular audiences. Each and every one of the authors of the New Testament collection, offered his own view of Jesus and His importance. Mark the Evangelist, whose gospel is the first one written, called his work in the opening statement: *“the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.”* In one of the concluding chapters of his gospel, the latest one written, John the Evangelist says: *“these are written that you may believe that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”* Jesus did not create the system of doctrines and dogmas, these are the creation of the centuries of tradition and even though we try to live according to them, all of them are worthless if we do not acknowledge the basic truth that Jesus is our Christ, our Savior, our Messiah. It is being said that Karl Barth just before he died said: *“The last word as a theologian I would say is not a term like grace, but a name: Jesus Christ. He is grace, He is beyond theology, the world, and the Church.”* Christianity indeed is all about Jesus Christ, “*the One ‘**who had died but whom Paul asserted to be alive.’”*

6. Christianity is about the cross, the death of Jesus and is about *“the power of God and the wisdom of God,”* according to Paul’s words. The message of the cross is that even though we may defy God, we may turn away from Him, we may say: *“we do not need you,”* He will always say: *“I will always ‘love you and I will never abandon you.”* The cross teaches us about Jesus’ supreme love which says: *“I will always ‘forgive’ you.”* God is always ready to embrace us if we only accept Him embracing us. He is always ready to greet us, no matter what we have done, and He will always receive us like the father of the *“prodigal son”* did, but we must accept Him for who He is, our *“Savior.”* The cross teaches us that as a matter of fact we do not even need or have to prove our worthiness to Him. He designed His plan of salvation a long time before the events of the cross occurred. He did it already then, in the *“Garden of Eden.”* Long before Jesus came to this world God said that when the *“Messiah”* will come, He will come to die and to die for our transgressions, our insubordination, our wrongdoing, our rebellion, our sinfulness. And Jesus indeed came and died on that cross so that: *“at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord.”*

7. Festus recalled that Paul claimed this man to be alive. It is a very interesting statement. As a seasoned politician Festus declares Paul’s belief without himself acknowledging this as a fact. By doing this he shows what we often see in our day and age with many politicians and other leaders, not only civil but even spiritual. There are so many people who would acknowledge someone else’s view without accepting it themselves, because they do not want to be associated with the view. What they do not realize is that they spread the narrative, whether false or true, as a fact. Unfortunately, this is also happening within the Church’s leadership today. There are many of the so-called *“Christian teachers”* that will say or act in a way whereas they do not have to acknowledge Christ. Thus we have all sorts of ideologies within the modern Church that have nothing to do with acknowledging Jesus as our Savior but serve as a myriad of *“social views”* to be embraced in the name of *“Christianity.”* There is nothing more important for a Christian however to acknowledge the divinity and the messiahship of Jesus, first and foremost. I do not care whether it is the Pope, a bishop, or any other clergy statement, but if anything else but Jesus Christ is more important to them and their ideology, they do not have a place in the leadership of the Christian Church, for our faith is based upon the person of a man *“who had died but whom Paul asserted to be alive.”*

8. I believe Jesus Christ to be alive and that anyone who believes in Him may directly reach to Him. His Church is founded on this very truth. The writers of the New Testament witness to this truth and they focused their works on His resurrection. Jesus’ Resurrection is the focal point of the New Testament’s teaching. We can learn about Jesus’ life and ministry from the NT, we may study all other aspects of His life such as His ministry, His teachings, or His birth but, all that being said, what is the foremost important is indeed Jesus’ resurrection. For me the statement of Festus contains all the doctrines of our faith, the Incarnation, the Atonement, and the Resurrection. My genuine wish is that this message may become again a center of our faith and our life and that we again may proclaim to the world the Resurrected Jesus Christ as the true understanding of what Christianity is all about.