

Episode 114

Then Festus said, "King Agrippa, this is the man whose death is demanded by all the Jews, both here and in Jerusalem. But what shall I write the emperor? For there is no clear charge against him. So I have brought him before you so that after we examine him, I might have something to write. For it makes no sense to send a prisoner to the emperor without specifying the charges against him!"

- Acts 25: 24-27

As I read Acts 25, the thing that stood out to me is how Paul remained steadfast in his profession of faith and commitment to Christ. Even after having been unjustly held in prison for two years without being brought to trial, enduring the fear and uncertainty of his death being demanded by the Jews in both Caesarea and Jerusalem, and even the judge of his case being unsure of how they are going to phrase the charges they want to lay against him, Paul remained steadfast in his confidence that the Lord would be his defender.

Paul was completely willing to be accountable for his actions, to the point that he declared "If I have done something worthy of death, I don't refuse to die!" When last were you in a situation when you said those words? But this does not mean that Paul sat back and did nothing. He appealed to Caesar.

Historians tell us that at this time, Roman law protected Roman citizens who invoked this special right called "Ad Caesarem Provoco" (I appeal to Caesar). This right was only ever invoked as a very last resort against an unfair sentence or shamelessly unfair trial, so Roman citizens who were guilty of murder or pirates caught in the act were barred from making this legal appeal. It was also an exclusive right reserved for fully-fledged Roman citizens with an unblemished record, which meant common Roman subjects would never try to invoke it.

Paul's words must have exploded in the courtroom like a hand grenade. The Roman governor had misjudged this respectful man. Beneath Paul's polite exterior was a cast-iron resolution along with his God-given wisdom.

By granting this appeal, Festus seemed relieved to remove himself from the case, transferring it to the Emperor. He was gladly washing his hands of the situation, but now he had a new problem. He had to defend himself in writing, explaining why this Roman citizen felt so unfairly treated that he had to appeal to the highest court in the empire.

Where we often struggle to live out our faith is in the grey area of compassion and kindness. Perhaps you have been accused of being 'nicer than Jesus' by shrinking back from conflict as you don't want it to reflect poorly on the gospel? In our day and age, we need wisdom more than ever before. We need courage and faith to stand by our convictions, but also the humility of Christ to lovingly lead others in the ways of God.

But take heart, you are not alone. Even the great prophet Samuel needed a rebuke from God when he was told that he had mourned too long for Saul, and it was time to act!

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