

I APPEAL TO CAESAR!

Acts 25:1-27 (Key verse: 25:11)

"If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!"

As believers how can we know we are indeed living for Jesus. Is it because we pray, come to Church, have bible studies and so on. At the core of our lives, who or what are we really living for? In this passage we shall see that Paul had a choice, to choose a comfortable life or choose to obey Jesus absolutely. May God help us learn, the true meaning behind Paul's appeal to Caesar! What did it mean for him? And what can it mean for us today in our generation. Amen!

Look at verse 1-2, "Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem. 2where the chief priests and the Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul." Paul is still in prison and it has been about two years. We learned from the previous chapter that, Felix who had trialled Paul was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And because Felix favoured the Jews he left Paul in prison instead of releasing him since there was no evidence of what he was been accused of. Paul had previously received encouragement from Jesus, that just as he had testified about him in Jerusalem he will also testify about him in Rome. However, it had been two years in prison. What could be in Paul's heart during that period? It must not have been pleasant. He had the passion and vision to go to Rome however he was stuck in prison. And now after three days after Festus arrived in the province he went to Caesarea to Jerusalem. This was another tactic for him to make friends with the Jews. In this way he would appear as good governor and ultimately gain political points. Verse 6 tells us that he spent eight or ten days with the Jews.

On the other hand the religious leaders also saw an opportunity through Festus to actually kill Paul. Look at verse 3, "They requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way." This here really reveals the heart of the Jewish religious leaders, sadly they were not interested in the truth. But rather to end Paul's life quickly. It was no longer about doing what God desired but rather about achieving their own desires. They became worse than even a person who does not believe in God. In Acts 23:3 Paul once said to the high priest, "Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! **You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!**" They were applying God's laws on other's yet they did not subject themselves to the same laws of God. Even Jesus Christ the son of God subjected himself to the laws of God. Now that the gospel Paul was preaching was exposing their sin, and revealing our true messiah and king, they could not allow themselves to submit to king Jesus and our messiah. They could not withstand the message of the cross. Paul in his defence once said, in Acts 24:15a, "and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked." The resurrection confirms the death of Jesus and his resurrection. It confirms that Jesus is the Messiah whom they should call on for salvation. The religious leaders in wating to kill Paul actually reveals their hearts. They wanted to remove the gospel message from the face of the earth. Paul was not the issue, it was the gospel message that was under scrutiny. Unfortunately, this is the reality today, as religious people we can easily become enemies of the gospel message when we choose not to submit to the entirety of the what the bible teaches. When we pick and choose, what applies to us and what does not apply to us. It is a rejection of the gospel of salvation. May our bible studies, testimonies, prayer or any religious practice drive us to a deep desire to submit to Jesus and obey him absolutely.

Let us see what was Festus response to the religious leaders request. Look at verse 4-5, "Festus answered, "Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. 5Let some of your leaders come with me, and if the man has done anything wrong, they can press charges against him there."

Festus knew the Roman law very well, as much as he wanted to please the religious leaders he still had to abide by the law. In Roman law an accused person had to be given an opportunity to face his accusers and defend himself against their charges. So he really did this to ultimately do what the religious leaders had requested him. In verse 7-8 we read that the religious leaders after they had convened a trial brought in many serious charges against Paul without any single prove while Paul again denied any of their charges [7-8]. This was really a tick box activity for Festus since the real thing he wanted was to honour what the religious leaders really wanted. Look at verse 9, "Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?" This was what ultimately Festus wanted for Paul to agree to go to Jerusalem. He definitely knew that they wanted to kill Paul since he had spent some days with the religious leaders. Or even if he did not know about the plot to kill, he definitely knew that Paul would not get a fair trial. Right then he could have made a decision in favour of Paul since their charges were baseless and had no evidence. Paul's defence was ignored by Felix and now its been ignored by another leader Festus. There was no help on sight. Paul could have become hopeless and helpless. If Paul answered YES then his fate is decided by the Jews. If he answers NO then he remains in prison till a possible release. The obvious response was actually a NO, and remain for a while in prison since he would be released ultimately from charges that were baseless.

However, let us listen to Paul's answer, let us all read verse 10-11, "Paul answered: "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. 11If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!" Caesar Augustus, the first emperor, established a good judicial system to rule the big empire. One merit of the Roman law was the appeal process. All Roman citizens were entitled to appeal to Caesar's court when they disagreed with the local court. Paul focused on Caesar's court. Paul through the work of the Holy received the wisdom on how to respond in that critical moment. However, the easiest option for Paul was to actually remain in Caesarea where he would ultimately be set free. Humanly speaking this looked as though Paul was crazy because he was actually asking for more trouble. Appealing to Caesar was a bigger court than the one he was at. And already two prominent political leaders Felix and Festus were already in favour of the religious leaders. What was his chances of success? Or what was Paul really aiming for? Why did he take this harder option? What drove Paul to this decision and direction?

First, Paul accepted Jesus vision and direction, remember in Chapter 23:11, "The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "**Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.**" The appeal to Caesar was an opportunity for Paul to go to Rome. Jesus did not make it clear whether he would testify in Rome in chains or as a free man. However, what was clear was that, It was Jesus plan to have him in Rome. So Paul actually used his Roman citizenship to testify to the world. And because Paul had Jesus vision in his heart, his fatal situation did not turn him into a victim but rather active gospel worker. Humanly speaking Paul did not need to go to Rome, he did not need to go the highest court in the land. The religious leaders did not present a case with serious crimes. Look at what Festus says when he was visited by king Agrippa and Bernise in verse 18, "When his accusers got up to speak, **they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected.** 19Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive." Festus concluded that they did not bring serious crimes against Paul. So, Paul could have chosen to remain. Based on Roman laws he would be released in some time. However, at the center of the religious leader's charges was about the resurrection of Jesus. Even Festus could clearly see why Paul was charged for by the religious leaders. Paul did receive Jesus vision, he met with the risen Jesus in prison. Jesus vision and direction could then be Paul's reason for living. He could boldly appeal to Caesar. As he had previously said, his conscience before God and before man was clear. So Paul chose to obey Jesus absolutely even at the cost of losing his

human freedom and a comfortable life. An appeal to Caesar was his practical way of exercising his faith to obey Jesus.

Second, Paul was driven by resurrection hope. Paul could submit to Jesus' command even if it meant dying or choosing a harder choice in his life. Paul did say in Acts 21:13, "Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Because of resurrection hope Paul was ready to die for Jesus, for he was sure of the resurrection. He had a firm and sure resurrection faith in his heart. In this way he could obey Jesus' command absolutely. This is the power of resurrection hope, it kept Paul alive in spirit. Paul's appeal to Caesar was around AD60, a time where the Roman empire was not in favour of the Christian faith. Historians have claimed that, it was a time when an emperor intentionally burned the slum sections of Rome and blamed Christians for the fire and persecuted the Christians. Yet Paul was choosing to appeal to Caesar. The appeal to Caesar was in Paul's way to put to practice his faith in the risen Jesus. In Philippians 3:10-11 Paul says, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his suffering, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection of the dead." Paul's real hope was not freedom or a comfortable life or happiness. It was to know who Jesus is. To Paul, Jesus was alive, risen from the dead. And he wanted to know him by any opportunity even if that opportunity could lead to death.

In summary of what followed after Paul's appeal. Firstly, Festus agreed and declared, "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!" [11b]. The plan for Paul to arrive in Rome was now a matter of time. Although it was Paul who had to apply a decision of faith to reach Rome, the truth is that, it was God who worked behind the scenes. As I mentioned king Agrippa and Bernice visited Festus due to his new [position in replacing Felix]. And Festus presented to them his challenge, look at verse 20 -21, "**I was at a loss how to investigate such matters;** so I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. 21But when Paul made his appeal to be held over for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him held until I could send him to Caesar." Festus further says in verse 26-27, "But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore, I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write. 27For I think it is unreasonable to send a prisoner on to Rome without specifying the charges against him." This reminds us also of when Jesus was persecuted, when he was being tossed about from one political leader to another simply because they had no serious charge against him. But because they wanted to please the religious leaders, they compromised and accepted a religious charge that had no bearing in the Roman laws. When Paul chose to appeal to Caesar he was choosing to know Jesus better. He was now practically experiencing how Jesus was also trialed because of resurrection faith. By choosing to appeal to Caesar, Paul was actively refusing to be a victim of troubles and persecution. He could be decisive and take a path not followed by many. This is the difference we see from those who choose to surrender to Jesus command because of resurrection faith and those who choose to surrender to fear of man. Felix and Festus feared to disappoint the religious leaders for political power. They were thinking more for themselves than serving the truth and justice. They became undecisive leaders and compromised truth and justice. Paul on the other hand because of the risen Jesus, resurrection faith, he could live for Jesus. Not in nice religious words, but in action with his life. Following Jesus was a matter of life and death to Paul, it was not only during some period of the day, or when coming to church. His whole life was submitted to Jesus command and vision. In less than 300 years Rome became the world mission center and played a pivotal role to carry the gospel to the West and later to America. We live in modern day Rome. The gospel must be preached here and must go out to the end of the earth. It is the focus of our Lord Jesus Christ at the present time.

What about us? What drives us? When we wake up in the morning till the day ends, what really drives us? What motivates us to keep living and doing the things we do. Students study hard to pass in hopes

of a good life after graduation. Their hopes can be on finding a good company for a job and be able to also drive nice car and help family. Those who are not at University, can be hoping to get promotion at work for better salary and quality of life. All in all, I think we all want a good life. A peaceful life at the fundamental level. That kind of life may look like a big house, nice BMW car, good job or owning own company, reputation, human honor, having and raising children. So we give our hearts and lives to these things. I know that one of the things I am also eager for is to contribute to research and a promotion, to become a professor. So lately I have been asking myself many questions, why do I want to be professor, why am I doing what I my doing, each day I see myself doing same thing. Wake up, gym and go to work come home and sleep. Ofcourse I do other things at home with family and ministry. However, there is this daily pattern. What am I achieving as a man? What is my end goal as a man in this generation? when I die what kind of regrets will I have? What am I really living for? Though I have accepted the calling to be a campus shepherd, which is simply to live for Jesus. However, I still find myself living for self and not for Jesus. I want to also learn from Paul, who could make a clear decision of faith to submit to the risen Jesus. To have one life, not a life as an academic, a life as a campus shepherd, a life as a father and husband, a life as a son and brother. Paul had one life dedicated to obeying Jesus. He could then make an appeal to Caesar even though he had an option to a comfortable life. I pray that I may have living hope in the risen Jesus so I may live for him and not for self. I pray that I may become professor shepherd not for self gain but so God may use me to grow his gospel message on campus. May God raise me as his servant in my home, among friends and In ministry, one life. This is my appeal to Caesar! Amen.

In conclusion, Paul's appeal to Caesar was a decision to follow Jesus practically. Humanly speaking it looked like a foolish decision. It looked like a waste of his life and time. But because of the risen Jesus, Paul could follow and obey Jesus absolutely. Many of our missionaries in that critical moment could have chosen to remain in their home countries, **but they chose to appeal to Caesar**. Today we have a bible house which is a home and center for God's work from one simple family, because they chose to appeal to Caesar. What is your appeal to Caesar? What are we living for at the core of our lives? Despite hardship Paul chose to go to Rome. He boldly said, "I appeal to Caesar!" May God help us to follow his good example. Then God will give us great victory to carry out his world salvation work. May the Lord help us to stand in the mainstream of God's salvation work with a clear sense of history. Amen!