

Part 40: A Well-timed Appeal

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In 1836, a military leader, pinned down by the enemy wrote a letter titled: "To the People of Texas and All the Americans in the World." The letter describes his dire situation—he's surrounded, the enemy said he must surrender now, or they will storm the fort and kill all his men. But he wrote to his allies, "I shall never surrender or retreat. I call on you in the name of Liberty, of patriotism, and everything dear to the American character to come to our aid with all dispatch...if this is neglected, I am determined to sustain myself as long as possible and die like a soldier who never forgets what is due his own honor and that of his country - Victory or Death."

Valiant as his cause was, brave as his heart stood, he knew everything came down to this letter being answered. He made his appeal, and in that appeal, was all his hope.

This commander shot his shot, and you might shoot yours. That's because when our back is against the wall, when we feel like we don't have any other choice, we all know the power of a well-timed appeal. Maybe it's a second opinion on a medical diagnosis, convincing a coach that you're worth that final roster spot, or asking your girlfriend or boyfriend to talk things through one final time before they break it off, or even mercy before a judge.

That's the context Paul find himself in this morning in a sermon I've titled: "A Well-Timed Appeal." Paul finds himself standing trial in two courts today: a Jewish one, and a Roman one—a religious one, and an imperial one. Given the apathy of his Roman judge, and the blood thirst of his Jewish persecutors—Paul plays the only legal option he has left: an appeal to Caesar.

Much like our court of appeals today, Paul appeals to Caesar, an action which Luke uses to frame everything we will read in our passage today. Legally, Paul's appeal takes him to Rome. Theologically, we know that Paul's appeal is the way in which Jesus fulfills his word to get Paul to Rome.

In this sense, Paul's appeal is rooted in profound confidence. He knows what's going on, and he knows how he'll make it through. The irony is that Paul, the imprisoned defendant, is the only one with confidence. Those who seem to be in positions of worldly power—they are the ones who seem the most pressure.

Paul's on trial for the gospel and he's clear headed and bold—but those who are confronted with Paul and his gospel are the ones who are seemingly grasping at straws. What's coming to the foreground in Luke's narrative is that the gospel exposes life's inescapable realities. And when we feel like we are pinned, when we only have one shot—you'd better make sure that your well-timed appeal actually makes a difference. Because whatever problem Paul seems to be in—his appeal not only helps him—but it can help anyone who needs deliverance.

Our main idea this morning is this: **The gospel gives us a confident appeal.**

We are going to work through this in three ways. First, we will notice the **Worldly Appeals** of Paul's opponents and notice how they were unanswered. Then Paul will help us see how God promises

deliverance by his **Divine Appeal**, and lastly, being already delivered—Paul’s final appeal is not for himself but an **Evangelistic Appeal** for the deliverance of others.

We are going to begin this morning by looking at the **Worldly Appeals** of three characters: the Jews, Festus the Roman Governor, and Agrippa the King of the Jews.

Have you ever had someone playfully point out a habit or tick that you were previously unaware of? Well, this passage does just that for all of us. Whether you’re aware of it or not—your life is a constant stream of appeals for someone, or something to bring you peace, comfort, and deliverance.

It’s so common that we are often unaware of what they look like, or how we even do it—but this passage shows us three sources of deliverance we often run to for hope: power, peace and pride.

While any trial in life might cause us to run to any of these—the discomfort our characters feel today is discomfort which is exposed by the gospel message that Paul is preaching. When you first hear the gospel, or if God is beginning to work on your heart—you might be prone to resist and relieve that tension in many ways.

For the Jews, Paul is living rent free in their minds at this point. He’s been imprisoned, and moved out of Jerusalem, but that’s still not enough. For them to find peace, they’ve got to have peace through power. They want Paul dead, and they make **an appeal to power** in hopes that they can find relief.

We can see this in **Acts 25:1-3**. Their plan was to try to trick the Roman power, Festus, to deliver Paul back down to Jerusalem so that on the way they might flex their own might—and kill Paul on the way.

The Jews felt powerful themselves because they looked the part of God’s people. They had national heritage, they had the right morality, they right habits—and yet the gospel Paul preached said their markings of worldly prestige were powerless to save them. If they wanted the promise of God’s salvation, if they wanted freedom from sin, they had to come to faith in Jesus.

This made them mad. And it often makes us mad too. We want to have the power to define our salvation in our own terms. And when we can’t—we appeal to our own power, or the power of others to deliver us.

It’s this violence which lead these men to want to kill Pau, and it’s the fear violence which causes many pastors in closed countries to preach knowing someone might stand up and kill them mid service.

Our own appeals to power might appear more civilized—but a violence towards God is at the heart of every sin. One 16th century pastor said this: **“Every sin is...an aim at the destruction of the being of God...[it might not be the known] intention of ever sinner but [it is the intention] of every sin.”** Every sin is a powerplay.

The gospel says that Christ is king—and him alone. And when we don’t like that claim, we will fight power with power. For some of you it looks like finding your own Rome. You might be frustrated that you can’t seem to silence your conscience, or fully shut the door on Jesus—so you go and read books or listen to podcasts by enlightened scholars who are hostile to Christianity in hopes that they might use their power and kill God for you.

Even inside of faith, Christians might do the same thing. We might embrace what we like about following Jesus. But when following Jesus puts us at odds with things we’d otherwise like, we make an

appeal to culture, “Look at how many people are totally find living otherwise.” We not only believe there’s safety in numbers—but power to make us feel safe.

But if our hope is in our power, or the power of men—we will be disappointed. Already, the plan of the Jews fails—instead of getting Paul closer to them it moves Paul farther away.

Festus knew the Roman laws, he knew he couldn’t hand Paul over to the Jews without just cause. So he calls the Jews up for a proper trial. And there, Festus and Paul realize the Jews don’t have a real case. Festus asked Paul if he wanted to go back, and Paul said no and we read this: **Acts 25:10-12**, “But Paul said, “I am standing before Caesar’s tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.” Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, “To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.”

The power they appealed to for deliverance was in the end the same power who would send Paul to Rome—removing the promise of peace even further from them.

And now we meet Festus, and he shows us what it looks like to make *an appeal to peace*. If you look back at the end of chapter 24, you’ll see Festus inherited this Paul problem when he took over for Felix.

Festus just wants to live his life. He’s not terribly interested in the gospel, but he’s not hostile towards it either. He tells us what he knows about it in verse 19 when he says that Paul’s trial has something to do with Jesus, a dead man whom Paul says is alive.

But now he’s inherited this legal hot potato, and he’s worried about how he will be seen. He’s got to make a choice about Paul—and he knows that choice will cause people to see him differently. He doesn’t want to anger the Jews—he actually tried to do them a favor asking Paul if he’d go back to Jerusalem. He doesn’t want to step out of Roman law and release or condemn Paul without cause. But now that Paul has appealed to Caesar—he has another issue. He needs to write to Caesar a letter which outlines what Paul has done and why he’s on trial. But Festus doesn’t know what to write!

He doesn’t want to look like an idiot. He doesn’t want to look like a zealot. So he just wants someone else to make a decision for him. Did you notice that? He told the Jews, “Come up and try him here.” Then he told Paul, “Would you please go back?” He’s trying to unload responsibility so that he can just live his life—but no one will remove the burden from him.

He’s got to make a decision—and he knows it’s going to be a weighty one. But life’s biggest decisions are weighty ones. The gospel isn’t a choice about what you do on Sundays. It’s not a choice about a style of music. The gospel requires us to make a decision of life or death. We must either say: “The Bible and all it says is absolute garbage” or, “The Bible and all it says is true, and I’ve got to change everything.”

And no one else will make that decision for you. You can try and straddle people groups and please everyone—but to chase the opinion of others is an exhausting road that never brings peace. If we can’t find peace before God—we will exhaust ourselves trying to find peace with men.

But, Festus has one last shot. King Agrippa, the King of the Jews shows up and here is the potential that he might make a decision. We know this because look at how he introduces the court room: **Acts 27:26-27**, “Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after

we have examined him, I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him."

Agrippa is going to bail Festus out. And Agrippa is eager to do so. Here's our final appeal, ***an appeal to pride.***

Herod Agrippa II was the Roman appointed King of the Jews. We already met his father King Herod Agrippa the first back in Acts 11. The context then was actually similar. Foreign nations came and appealed to him for help—and putting on his fancy robes he went out to prove himself wise and just—eager to be seen as the hero—but God struck him dead and he was eaten by worms.

Well, the apple doesn't fall from the tree here does it? As soon as Festus says, "I've got this really tricky situation," what does Agrippa say? **Acts 25:22**, "I would like to hear the man myself tomorrow." And notice how he is introduced in that hearing: **Acts 25:23**, "So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in."

What's the tone of the appeal here? "Don't worry guys, I've got this. Help has arrived. You've come to the right place." He's smart, he's powerful, he's important, he'll be wise and crafty enough to figure it out on his own. But by the end he himself has no answer.

The Jews appealed to power and it failed. Festus tried to find inner peace and he couldn't. And Agrippa thought his pride would steer him through...but all their appeals failed.

But now, the only one required to make a legal appeal is called to the stand. And here we see our second point: A **Divine Appeal**.

Paul isn't blind to the desperation of his opponents. He sees their own vain hopes and if you read his full defense carefully you'll notice how he goes for the jugular. He's in essence saying, "You guys are all trying to resolve the pressures of life, you're all looking for deliverance from someone—and I'm here to tell you that God has already made an appeal to you so that you might be saved."

Paul's on trial for his life, but his confidence is on account that he's already been delivered. He reminds everyone that he's on trial because of hope in deliverance: **Acts 26:6-8**, "And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?"

Legally, Paul is saying, "If you want to convict me for rebelling against Judaism--you'll have to try harder. Because the hope of salvation I preach today is the same hope of salvation the Jews have always hoped in. Why would the Jews who always hoped that God would save them and give them new life now be surprised that I'm saying God has saved us and given us new life."

The Jews saw the message of the gospel as something that blew up their whole construct of salvation. They were secure in their confidence. But Paul here is saying that despite how disruptive that might seem—the gospel alone is salvation. The gospel comes with things that disrupt our old way of life—but the gospel is God's promise of life.

Human history showed us that we can't find it on our own. But the beauty of the gospel is that God doesn't wait for us to ask, or to make the first appeal, God appeals to us. God reveals salvation to those who couldn't otherwise find it. **Acts 26:15b-18**, "And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'"

We all have our backs against the wall. You're right in thinking you need power to save you—you're under the power of Satan. You need powerful help. You're right that you need peace because this world is dark and scary. And you're right that you need to feel clean, right, and pure. But the only place we can find those things is by faith in Jesus Christ. He defeats Satan, he ends the night, and he gives us his identity. That general sent a letter out, in hopes someone would hear his appeal. But in the gospel—God makes his appeal to those who have no idea the danger they are in.

Our God is a God who saves. And because Paul's deliverance was already granted? What does Paul use the rest of his legal appeal for? This is our last point this morning: **Evangelistic Appeal**.

Acts 26:19-23, "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles."

Who can get in on this? Anyone. It is for the Jews and the Gentiles. If the Jews want relief, if Festus wants relief, if Agrippa want's relief—you've got to come into the powerful light of Jesus.

And remember apathetic Festus? Well, he's not so apathetic anymore. Look at **Acts 26:24**, "And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.'" What moved Festus? The reality that this gospel of Paul wasn't merely a matter for the Jews, nor for the religious, nor for the weak, the broken, or the powerless. It was a message even for the Gentiles, even for those who thought they held the power. The gospel, the appeal of God, doesn't allow for bystanders. It forces a response.

It was not the wisest political move for Paul's defense in a Roman court to be: "Listen, the Jews are wrong and they have no ground to persecute me. But also, you Roman Gentiles are wrong and are under the power of Satan unless you too repent."

But when we've already been delivered—the best defense is a good offense.

Read what follows: **Acts 26:25-29**, "But Paul said, 'I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.' And Agrippa said to Paul, 'In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?' And Paul said, 'Whether short or long, I would to

God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.”

Do you see Paul’s appeal? The appeal of all those around Paul is: “You can be like us, except for Jesus! If you give up Jesus—you’ll get freedom—you’ll be just like us.” But what Paul says is, “I actually want all of you to be like me—just without these chains.”

The salvation of others is so profoundly precious to Paul that he would rather stay in chains for the sake of the gospel—and preach Christ persuasively to his prosecutors—than be free while others die as slaves to sin.

When we understand the power of God’s appeal to us in Jesus Christ—it changes how we use our appeals in life. As Christians we are going to walk into trials. Some of them are caused by our foolishness, others are caused by life’s brokenness. But in the midst of all of our trials—we know that God has answered our cry for deliverance. We know we have been delivered from sin—we know there is a resurrection life ahead of us.

The letter I read earlier, was the letter William Travis wrote when he and his troops were pinned at the Alamo. And if you know anything about history—his appeal wasn’t answered. Yet, even his unanswered confidence lead to the ethos: “Remember the Alamo.” It was a rally cry to believe there’s hope in dark times.

But I’d like to point out—their appeal was never answered. So dear Christian, knowing that your appeal for salvation has been answered—how much more so ought we to stand trial in life’s struggles and be boldly confident because we remember the cross.

Look at how Paul connect this in **2 Corinthians 5:18-20**, "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. "

Because we have been saved, we know that in the midst of our trials we are afforded the opportunity not to save ourselves—but to save others. What if life’s difficulties were seen as opportunities to share our peace those who have none instead of opportunities for us to resolve peace by returning to worldly appeals?

We stand trial every day. Every point of tension, every problem you are presented with is a trial. And if we are honest, what is the appeal those who are watching walk away with? Do they see only a rearticulation of worldly hopes? Do they see you hoping in the same things they are hoping in?

Or do your trials provide you an opportunity to show the failure of worldly comforts to save and instead our lives and our language preach to others the wonderful work of Jesus?

We have a confident appeal. So let us not waste it.