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ACTS

Season 3

Season 3 - Courage Under Fire: Paul's Testimony

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, give us what Paul had in that room — confidence that doesn't need to win the argument to stay calm, and compassion that keeps appealing even after it's been dismissed. Speak the truth with confidence and compassion through us today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

OPENING QUESTION_(OPTIONAL)

Tell us about a time you had to explain or defend yourself to someone more senior, more educated, or more intimidating than you. How did you handle it — and how do you wish you'd handled it?

Acts 25:13–27 — the scene: Festus's dilemma, Agrippa's curiosity

13 Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus. 14 And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a man left prisoner by Felix, 15 and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. 16 I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him. 17 So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. 18 When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. 19 Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. 20 Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them. 21 But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar." 22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," said he, "you will hear him."

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. 24 And Festus said, "King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. 25 But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. 26 But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. 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. 27 For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him."

Acts 26:1–29 — Paul's defense before Agrippa (main text)

So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense: 2 "I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, 3 especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. 4 "My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. 5 They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee.

6 And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, 7 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! 8 Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? 9 "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. 11 And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities. 12 "In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. 13 At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. 14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' 15 And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16 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, 17 delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you 18 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.' 19 "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 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. 21 For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. 22 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: 23 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." 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." 25 But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. 26 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. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." 28 And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?"[b] 29 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."

MAIN REFLECTION POINTS

This hearing exists because of a paperwork problem. Festus has a prisoner, serious charges, and — by his own admission — "nothing definite to write" to Caesar (25:26–27). Agrippa's interest is almost incidental: "I would like to hear this man myself" is the curiosity of an expert being consulted, not a seeker looking for truth. And yet God places the gospel in front of the one man in the empire best equipped to actually weigh it — through a hearing nobody arranged for spiritual reasons at all. Luke wants us to notice that: the doors that matter most are rarely the ones we plan. They're the ones we're faithfully present for when they open anyway.

What follows is a masterclass in address. Paul opens with "I consider myself fortunate" — not flattery, but fact: Agrippa is genuinely versed in the Scriptures and customs Paul is about to invoke, so the compliment is accurate, not strategic. He retells his Damascus road encounter, but shaped for this room — not "look how far I've come," but "look at the specific commission I was given": servant, witness, sent to open blinded eyes and turn people from darkness to light. Then he grounds the resurrection itself in "nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen" — not softening the scandal of a dying, rising Messiah, but showing Agrippa it was never a foreign idea to begin with. This is the same gospel Paul preached to a hostile Jerusalem mob, told here with a different entry point because he understands this particular listener.

And then Festus shouts him down — "You are out of your mind, Paul!" Paul's answer has no edge in it at all: "I am not insane, most excellent Festus... true and reasonable words." No defensiveness, no matching the outburst. He simply turns back to Agrippa and finishes the appeal, personally, by name — "do you believe the prophets? I know you do." Agrippa deflects, half-serious: "You think you can persuade me that quickly?" And Paul's reply is the theological center of the whole scene: he wishes his exact life — minus the chains — on everyone in that room, including the governor who just mocked him. That's not a man defending his dignity. That's a man who has already let go of it, appealing anyway.

Key Reflections:

Doors open through ordinary circumstances. Nobody arranged this hearing for spiritual reasons — Festus needed help with a report. Stay faithful in the unglamorous room; you don't always get to see why God opened the door.

Respect first, and let it be true. "I consider myself fortunate" wasn't flattery — Agrippa really was qualified to judge Paul's claims. Honour people accurately. Don't manipulate them.

State your calling plainly. Paul didn't blur his commission to seem more agreeable in an expert room. Clarity doesn't need the room's approval to remain true.

Same gospel, different entry point. Paul didn't have two messages — one for a mob, one for a king. He found what Agrippa already believed and showed him the gospel fulfilled it, not contradicted it.

Don't soften the scandal. A suffering, dying, rising Messiah was offensive then and now. Paul frames it wisely — he never dilutes it.

Composure survives mockery, or it isn't real. "I am not insane... true and reasonable words." No sarcasm, no wounded pride — just a calm correction and a return to the appeal.

The appeal outlasts the rejection. Agrippa deflects. Paul doesn't walk away offended — he blesses him. Generosity, not vindication, is the last word.

"Except for these chains." Paul names his real circumstances honestly, without bitterness, in the same breath as a genuine blessing. That's what confidence without resentment looks like.

Gospel Invitation:

- If you recognise yourself in Agrippa — close, informed, even respectful of faith, but still holding it at arm's length with some version of "you can't persuade me that quickly" — hear how gently Paul still pursues you. No shame, no walking away. Just truth, plainly told, and a genuine hope for your good.
- Responding to Jesus doesn't require having every question resolved first. Agrippa never gets a tidy resolution in this text — the invitation stands anyway. You can respond today with repentance and faith, unresolved questions and all.

Missional Activation:

- Name your Agrippa. Write down one specific person — by name — who is thoughtful about faith but still outside it. Pray for them daily this week using Paul's exact posture: confidence and compassion.
- Speak the truth with confidence and compassion. Find one place this week where you've been softening your convictions to seem more agreeable. Say the true thing plainly, respectfully, without apology.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Festus calls this hearing for administrative reasons, not spiritual ones. Can you think of a time God used an ordinary, unplanned situation — a meeting, an appointment, a chance conversation — to put the gospel in front of someone
2. Paul opens by telling Agrippa he's "fortunate" to have this audience — and means it honestly. What's the difference between genuine respect and strategic flattery? Where have you seen (or done) each?
3. Paul retells the same true story of his conversion but shapes it for this specific, expert audience. What does it look like for you to tell your own story of faith differently depending on who's actually listening — without changing what's true
4. In verses 22–23, Paul roots the resurrection in the Scriptures Agrippa already believed, rather than presenting it as something totally new. What's the "prophets and Moses" equivalent for someone specific in your life — something they already believe that the gospel actually completes, rather than contradicts?
5. Festus publicly shouts Paul down, and Paul responds with total composure — "true and reasonable words." What usually happens to your own composure when you're dismissed or mocked for your faith?
6. Agrippa deflects with "you think you can persuade me that quickly?" — and Paul answers with a blessing, not an argument. What would it look like to keep appealing to someone even after they've brushed you off once?
7. Who is a "King Agrippa" in your life needing invitation — someone thoughtful, maybe even respectful of your faith, who you've stopped appealing to because the last conversation felt too high-stakes or got dismissed? Will you name them, specifically, right now

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, You open doors through circumstances we never plan and rooms we don't choose. Make us people who are ready in the unglamorous moment — honest about our calling, clear about the gospel, and generous even toward the ones who mock or dismiss us. Give us Paul's posture: whether short time or long, help us keep appealing, in confidence and compassion, until the door closes.