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- I. As followers of Jesus, our true character is both revealed and refined in hardship and injustice.
 - A. James, the brother of Jesus, describes this in James 1. The essential question for us is this:
 1. Will my character hold firm when justice gives way?
 2. Will my holiness stay anchored in Jesus when everything and everyone around me would give me a pass if it didn't?
 - B. In Acts 24 there's this contrast of character on display: Paul v. Jewish leadership v. Roman Governor Felix.
 1. Paul was not a perfect man, but I do think Luke, who wrote Acts, wants us to see Paul under pressure; to see how character effects mission.
 2. Jesus has given all of us who follow Him an assignment to make disciples. And when the heat turns up, the question for us is, "Will my character buckle, or will it hold true?"
 - C. Context
 1. Paul has been arrested on false charges in Jerusalem.
 2. While in Roman custody, a plot to kill him is discovered and he's moved out of Jerusalem to Caesarea, a place on the coast where Governor Felix resides.
 3. Here, Paul is being kept until his accusers arrive for a hearing.
 4. Paul has endured false accusations, betrayal, and sham trials.
 5. But in Acts 23 we see Jesus appear to Paul and tell him that His will is that Paul "testify in Rome."
 6. Two weeks ago, Kyle made this point:
 - a. "... what we very clearly see in the life of both Paul and Jesus, is that whatever the road looked like at whatever moment in their life, their eyes were fixed on something ahead.
 - 1) Paul: Rome
 - 2) Jesus: the cross
 - b. Both of their roads were marked by extreme obedience.
- II. Here's what Jesus had previously said about the exact situation we see Paul in:
 - A. *But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for My name's sake. **This will be your opportunity to bear witness.** Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I*

will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. (Luke 21:13-15)

B. As followers of Jesus, hardship, injustice and opposition are first and foremost an opportunity to **bear witness** to Jesus.

1. The depth of your character will be defined by your willingness to accept hardship for the sake of bearing witness to Jesus.
2. This is not to say that individual rights and justice are unimportant. Next week, we'll actually see Paul leverage his rights as a Roman citizen. But FOR WHAT PURPOSE? We'll actually see him leverage his rights to throw himself even deeper into the belly of the Roman beast! Why? Because Jesus told him he must go to Rome.
3. At the end of the day, can I accept that I may need to accept injustice for the sake of my witness?

III. Acts 24

A. And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul. And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying: "Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude. But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him." The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so. (Acts 24:1-9)

1. The Jewish leadership from Jerusalem has "lawyered-up" and hired a "spokesman" (attorney) named Tertullus to argue their case before Governor Felix.
2. This lawyer uses two approaches: flattery and political pressure.
 - a. Flattery:
 - 1) Oh wise Felix! Your reforms have brought so much peace to Israel and this Paul came here to disrupt it!
 - 2) Don't let this trouble-maker come here and destroy what you, in your excellent wisdom, have built!
 - 3) But the lawyer conveniently leaves out the part of the false charge about bringing a gentile into the temple. Felix is a gentile!
 - 4) A red flag of character decline: caring more about winning than what is true.

- b. Political pressure: “Felix, this Paul character has stirred up chaos in other parts of the Roman Empire. Are you going to let him bring that into YOUR region?”
- B. And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied: “Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense.” (Acts 24:10)
 1. Paul does not try to flatter Felix.
 2. He addresses him respectfully, acknowledging his experience, and then moves on to the facts:
- C. You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem, and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me. But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. **So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.** [This statement is KEY to this narrative.] (Acts 24:11-16)
 1. Paul’s accusers claim that Paul is straying from the teachings of Judaism and therefore being disruptive.
 - a. Continuity in worship of the God of Israel
 - b. A faith laid down by the Scriptures (Law and Prophets, Old Testament)
 - c. Hope in God based on the same premise that the accusers say they believe
 - d. Belief in the resurrection
 2. Paul, however, claims that his faith and following of Jesus is WHAT MAKES HIM a faithful Jew.
 3. Disruptive or not, deep faithfulness to Jesus is the only option for God’s people.
 4. “Success” (in this life) is not defined by money, numbers, influence, popularity, or power. It is defined by a character of faithfulness to King Jesus.
- D. Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia—they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me. Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: “It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.” (Acts 24:17-21)

1. Paul's accusers claimed that he came to Jerusalem and caused an uproar. This is a complete lie.
 2. Paul came for generosity's sake. He followed all the rules and didn't even say anything publicly until AFTER the uproar happened.
 3. It was actually his ACCUSERS who caused the uproar! (And didn't show up to the trial). This is against Roman legal protocol.
 4. This Jewish council cares nothing for truth, they just hate Paul and will do anything and say anything to get Felix to side with them.
 5. Arrogance, dishonesty, and manipulation are the tell-tale signs of a compromised character.
 - a. There is surely something corrupted or deeply damaged underneath that veneer.
 - b. It doesn't matter how much someone aligns with you on "issues." This kind of compromised character goes all the way back to the snake in the Garden.
 - c. They are the oldest tricks in the book to deceive you. At the same time they are the tell-tale signs of someone you should not trust, because they're "snakey"
 - d. Beware of arrogance, dishonesty, and manipulation in those who influence you. Be double aware of this in your own heart.
- E. *But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, "When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case." Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs. After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you." (Acts 24:22-25)*
1. Felix's reputation seems to be widely known at this time: Marital infidelity, bribes, and horrible cruelty in his governing of Judea. This would explain Felix's alarm!
 2. And speaking this way is risky for Paul but his response does not reflect fear OR overconfidence. He gives respect to whom respect is due and yet maintains an unflinching Christlike character. (We even see him admit fault in chapter 23 - high priest)
 3. A person who is confident in their conviction needs only to speak truth, walk in love, and do so from a posture of peaceful humility.
 4. We read on in verse 26 to see Felix's lack of character further played out here:

F. At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him. When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison. (Acts 24:26-27)

1. So Felix keeps Paul in custody without any valid charges for two reasons:
 - a. Greed and politics – to hopefully squeeze money out of Paul and to pacify the Jews.
 - b. Felix's character seems anchored not on what was true and just, but rather on what was convenient and politically beneficial.
2. So Paul is stuck between religious leaders who lie and falsely accuse and a Roman official who is a political opportunist.
3. Does Paul fight fire with fire? Does he lie? Does he falsely accuse his accusers? Or does he seize on an opportunity to benefit himself by bribing the corrupt Roman official?
4. He does neither. Rather, he takes the third way. He speaks truth. He does so directly but without character assassination or exaggeration. He maintains his integrity by not bending his character to appease a corrupt politician.
5. This is the way of Jesus. We do not mirror the failed character of those who oppose us. Rather, we meet sinful opposition with sincere faith in Jesus and loyalty to His character. When we fail in this, we admit fault with sincerity.

IV. The sneaky plan of the devil I see being worked out in our culture.

- A. If you ask most people in Jesus' Church if both TRUTH and LOVE are important, the answer will be a resounding "YES!"
1. We will, at least in theory, agree that Scripture demands both loyalty to God's truth and loyalty to God's way of love from all Christians everywhere.
 2. But then there are these issues that come up in our culture and some followers of Jesus will often be rightly alarmed by movement away from what we see as God's truth in Scripture.
 3. As the culture moves farther away from what we see as TRUE, our flinch reaction is to move in an equal and opposite direction in an attempt to keep the equilibrium. "The more extreme 'the other side' gets, the more extreme 'WE' must get to balance it out."
 4. So slowly but surely, in a desire to somehow "protect the truth," we unwittingly respond in a less and less loving and true way.
 5. We'll think that by moving to the extremes, we are standing firm for truth, but look at what we get deceived into. What was once a firm stance planted in both truth and love, now we have actually MOVED; sometimes away from both truth AND love! You did not stand firm, you fell off into the ditch beside Jesus' narrow way.

- B. The opposite happens to us as well.
 - 1. We see people departing from loving and kind responses. In a desire to “protect” God’s character of deep love and grace we begin to compromise the commands and truth of Jesus to maintain a posture of love.
 - 2. Once again, we have not stood firm on what we all agreed was necessary: both love AND truth.
 - 3. Both of these equal and opposite reactions are unintentional departures from the way of Jesus.
- C. The way of Jesus is neither.
 - 1. The way of Jesus is to stay firmly surrendered to His truth and commands as revealed in His Scripture, all the while refusing to sacrifice love and kindness to do so.
 - 2. If you step outside of love to “defend the truth,” you have been deceived by the enemy.
 - 3. If you step outside of truth to “defend love,” you have been deceived by the enemy.
 - 4. Story: Kids fighting; in frustration over how they’re treating each other, my reaction is swift, graceless, and often worse than the original crime!
- D. Jesus said that His way is a narrow way. We do not honor Him by driving off into the ditch on EITHER side.
- E. Be aware that there will be times that you stand firm in truth and love, but because others are moving away from it, it will FEEL like you are neither loving or truthful.
- F. The day and age we live in calls for deep wisdom, conviction, and humility from all Christians everywhere.