

I. Introduction

- A. Story: I was a little kid, camping with family. Walk in woods with dad and older sister, Kiah. Dad was teaching us safety in the woods. "If we get separated, stay exactly where you are, I'll come find you." Then he tested us.
 - 1. Even when it's scary, or uncertain or seems like God is not there, we follow His commands, knowing He is always in control.
 - 2. For my sister and I, the last clear command was "stay put."
 - 3. For Paul, it was "Go to Rome."
- B. Obedience to Jesus' will and way places us in the protective custody of Jesus' sovereignty.
 - 1. This does not mean we will avoid hardship or suffering.
 - 2. It means that Jesus will guard and guide our faithfulness to Him, all the way to the end of the road where He says to us "Well done, good and faithful servant!"
 - 3. This may be the narrow road, but it is also the joyful road where the peace of God guards our hearts and minds.
- C. Context
 - 1. Paul is in custody on false charges.
 - 2. He's been kept in jail for two years under Governor Felix (trying to extort money).
 - 3. Now a new governor, Festus, has taken over and Paul is in custody under him.

II. Scripture

- A. *Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him, asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem—because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way. (Acts 25:1-3)*
 - 1. Festus, the new governor, after arriving in Caesarea, the Roman seat of government in Israel, travels to Jerusalem to meet with the power-players of the Jewish people.
 - 2. One of the issues the Jewish leaders addressed with Festus was the issue of Paul.
 - a. Two years later, they have the same grudge and same plan to kill Paul.
 - b. They ask that Paul be brought to Jerusalem for trial.
 - c. This is all deception. They don't plan to give Paul a trial, but rather an execution.
- B. *Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. "So," said he, "let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him." After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove. (Acts 25:4-7)*
 - 1. In God's providence, Festus declines the request for a Jerusalem trial and asks the Jewish council to come to Caesarea.

2. Luke summarizes the charges brought; probably similar to two years ago, none of which they can prove.
 - a. Teaching against Jewish law, profaning the temple, stirring up riots
 - b. But we do see in Paul's response that perhaps they had intensified that third accusation "stirring up riots" to something even more serious:
- C. *Paul argued in his defense, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense." (Acts 25:8)*
 1. Paul specifically mentions that he hasn't committed any offense against Caesar.
 2. Some scholars believe this might mean that the Jewish council are now accusing Paul of more than causing riots, but more seriously, a charge of sedition against Caesar himself.¹
 3. Sedition, (stirring up rebellion against the Emperor) was punishable by death.
 4. The Jews, failing in their own plot to kill Paul, pivot to a "murder by Rome" approach
 - a. "If we can't kill him, maybe with some well-crafted lies, Caesar will."
 - b. The Jewish council are trying to manipulate the power of the Empire to attain their desired outcome. This is a dark game they're playing.
- D. *But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?" (Acts 25:9)*
 1. Festus is a new governor, and his job is to keep peace in Israel.
 - a. He knows who the power players in Israel are. This is a good political move.
 - b. One commentator noted that Festus' question was really not a question at all. "A Roman governor's question was as good as a decision."
 - c. Festus is likely intent on sending Paul to Jerusalem. He is not genuinely presenting this to Paul as an option.
 2. Again, Paul is being used as a pawn. Rome and the Jews keep trying to get him back to Jerusalem.
 - a. But remember, Jesus has command Paul to go to Rome.
 - b. Paul sees the machinations of the enemy—using the Jewish council and another politically motivated governor to send Paul the opposite direction of Jesus' command.
- E. *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." (Acts 25:10-11a)*
 1. Paul's response: The Jews have no evidence that I have wronged their laws.
 2. If I've done something against the Empire deserving death, I won't resist that.
 3. But to send me back to the Jews who, for two years have presented zero evidence against me, would be a complete violation of Roman legal precedent.

¹Keener, ACTS. New Cambridge Bible Commentary, p. 573

Keener, Craig S. 1993. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Bock, Darrell L. 2007. *Acts*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

- F. "I appeal to Caesar." Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, "To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go." (Acts 25:11b-12)
1. Paul invokes an appeal to Caesar:
 2. Two kinds of appeal to Caesar in Roman law:
 - a. "Appellatio": When a Roman citizen appealed their verdict/sentence AFTER a trial.
 - b. "Provocatio": When a Roman citizen appealed to Caesar BEFORE their trial was finished. In rare cases the accused viewed an appeal before or during a trial as advantageous. This would move their case to a higher court (Caesar, or one of his delegates).
 - 1) "Provocatio" was much less common. Most people would wait to see how their case in a lower court would go and then if it did not go well, they would invoke the Appellatio appeal.²
 - 2) If Paul would have just let his trial before Festus play out, there seems to be a very high probability that he would be found innocent and released.
 - 3) BUT, Paul also knows that Festus is seeking to please the Jewish council and send him to Jerusalem. This is the wrong direction!
 3. So, instead of waiting to see the outcome of the trial under Festus, Paul invokes the rare "provocatio" appeal, which will move his case to Rome before Caesar.
 4. But WHY would Paul do this?
 - a. Jesus' will WILL be done. The question is "Do I want to push against it or be carried by it?" Do I want to work with Jesus or struggle against Him?
 - b. We know that Jesus commanded Paul to testify to Jesus in Rome. Two things have to be true for this to happen.
 - 1) Paul has to be in Rome.
 - 2) Paul has to not be dead!
 - c. There are a few possible motives Paul could have had in appealing to Caesar.
 - 1) To save his own neck. But does this seem like Paul?
 - 2) To demand his entitlements as a Roman citizen. Does this track with Paul?
 - 3) To make a political statement. "Corrupt trial! I won't go silently!"
 5. Story: *Band of Brothers*, book by Stephen Ambrose (101st Airborne, WW2)
 - a. Story of Lieut. Richard Winters rising up in ranks, his commanding officer, Capt. Sobel, was harsh, unreasonable and unjust.
 - b. While stationed in England, Sobel, wanting to show Winters who's in charge gives him an order to perform a certain duty. Sobel then changes the order but doesn't inform Winters. Sobel writes Winters up for disobeying an order and hands down a punishment.
 - c. Winters has a choice: take the punishment for the minor infraction or request a court martial. Winters, in a move to check Sobel's volatile leadership, requests a court martial. I think, not only for himself, but all who were suffering under Sobel's unjust leadership.

² Keener, Craig S. 1993. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

6. Sometimes, when there is injustice, God allows us to leverage our rights to resist the injustice. God hates injustice.
 - a. But for Paul, what was Jesus' last clear directive? "Fix the unjust legal system" or "Go to Rome"?
 - b. So I don't believe Paul's motive here is to make a political statement.
7. Another motive scholars have suggested for Paul's appeal is:
 - a. To use his case in the Roman courts to set up precedence that would protect other Christians in the whole of the Roman Empire. This is an interesting thought, but I don't see any evidence in what Luke writes to support this viewpoint. At best it's conjecture.
 - b. I think there is a more obvious reason that Paul invokes this right as a Roman citizen.
 - c. I don't want to be reductionistic, so it is possible that a mix of reasons could be in play here.
 - d. But it does seem (from what we know of Paul, Roman law, and the context of Jesus' command to Paul) that Paul appeals to Caesar because it is the most direct road to obeying Jesus' assignment to testify to Jesus in Rome.

III. Conclusion

- A. What is MY most direct road to obeying Jesus' assignment?
 1. It is ingrained in us over and over and in many ways to take the easiest way: to walk the widest, most comfortable path.
 2. We are experts at running from trouble and taking the most circuitous routes to avoid discomfort.
 3. And for those of us who love Jesus, there is a real temptation to follow Jesus but in a way that requires no sacrifice.
- B. The heroes of the faith will not be those who have the appearance of godliness. They will be those who have the scars of obedience.
 1. I'm not being dramatic here. This is real. Paul, speaking of the sacrifice demanded of him for the Gospel says, "I bear on my body the marks of Jesus." (Galatians 6:17)
 2. We do not chase suffering. Nowhere in Scripture do we find God commanding us to seek suffering for suffering's sake.
 3. But we also do not take a circuitous route to avoid it. We accept suffering as part of the narrow path of obedience to Jesus.
 4. Paul's appeal to Caesar (NERO!) was a request to take the Gospel into the belly of the beast.
 - a. Other than avoiding ambush, this appeal isn't very beneficial to Paul. Ambush not likely to be successful: last time, escort was 470 soldiers!
 - b. In all likelihood, if Paul had gone to Jerusalem, his trial would have been over and he would be free in a matter of days or weeks.
 - c. This appeal to Caesar has now guaranteed Paul's incarceration for YEARS.
 - d. AND, this would put him before Caesar on charges of sedition against Caesar.
 - 1) Paul is placing his head in the mouth of the lion he was alleged to have stirred rebellion against.
 - 2) All in all, this does NOT seem to be a good legal move on Paul's part.

3) It DID guarantee that Paul would be alive and be in Rome, taking the Gospel into the very belly of the Roman beast.

C. What decisions am I making that prioritize my comfort, convenience, or control, over my mission and assignment from Jesus?

D. What does courageous obedience look like for me today? This month? This year?