

Testifying to the King with Confidence

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[0 : 00] Well, well done again to our readers. Can you imagine being there on that day? Actually, here's a photo that a former mission partner, Andrew Reid, took of his daughter.

That's young Alyssa there, for those who know the Reeds. But this is the hall in Caesarea where they think that courtroom drama took place. And here is an artist's rendering of the scene, although I don't think it quite captures the occasion.

I mean, can you just picture the occasion? I think we can probably do a better job picturing it. Here is the king with his sister and then the governor, who was below the king, obviously, Festus, plus all these leading military men, this big long line processing in and people shouting, you know, to be upstanding and then sitting and all the like.

The hall is surrounded by all these people. And there in the middle is little old Paul, surrounded, looked down upon by the rulers.

In fact, Christian tradition says that Paul was literally a little fellow. Yet he speaks with such calm confidence and courage, doesn't he?

[1 : 22] Even after Festus interrupts him and tells him that he's mad. How can Paul testify to King Jesus before King Agrippa like that?

And how might we? Because sometimes we can feel like the little guy in the room and not perhaps in a courtroom, but in our society or amongst our family and non-Christian friends.

And so how can we have confidence and courage to testify to King Jesus if the opportunity arises? Well, no doubt it's remembering two weeks ago that the Lord Jesus stands near us as he stood near Paul.

And last week, remembering the resurrection of the dead in general, where three things happen. We will all have to give an account. We who believe will be raised to everlasting life, but those who don't won't, but will face everlasting judgment, a judgment they need to be saved from.

And so those three things will motivate us to testify to. And this week, it's remembering or rather knowing the content of the gospel and the certainty of the gospel, which will help us have confidence and courage.

[2 : 48] Those are the two things that Luke seems to highlight in our chapters today, along with Paul's courage. And so they're the two things that I want us to look at.

As I said, I can't work all the way through the chapters. It's just too much there. And so I'm going to just highlight a few verses, firstly, to show you the content of the gospel, point one.

And so in chapter 25, Paul appears before Festus. I don't know about you, but whenever I hear the name Festus, I think of this guy from the Addams family. I mean, that's just who comes to mind immediately, this kind of creepy, untrustworthy sort of guy.

But apparently this Festus in the Bible wasn't as bad as the others, as bad as Felix last week, if you're here last week, who was a brutal dictator. And so he'd only been in office three days when the Jews tried to bribe him and move Paul from Caesarea to Jerusalem so they could ambush him along the way.

And Festus denies the bribe, doesn't he? He does the right thing. He says, no, no, let me do this the right way and brings Paul in to sort things out.

[3 : 56] Although, admittedly, it doesn't take long for Festus to get into the groove of a politician and then to try and do that favor for the Jews shortly after.

And so Paul, therefore, is forced to appeal to Caesar. About a few days later, as we heard, King Agrippa arrives in town. And when Festus speaks with him, notice how Luke includes from the conversation of what Festus says a central content of the gospel.

And so Festus says to Agrippa, you know, when the Jews came in, they didn't charge him with any of the crimes I expected. Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus, whom Paul claimed was alive.

Here is the central content of the gospel, isn't it? That Jesus, who was once dead, is now alive. Luke uses Festus' conversation to highlight this central content of the gospel.

The good news of Jesus, once dead, now alive. And why is this good news that he is now alive? Well, because it means, first of all, that he is God's promised king.

[5 : 12] Who can save? This is what Paul unpacks bit by bit before King Agrippa. And so later on in chapter 26, Paul says, It's now because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today.

This is the promise our 12 tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. But King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

Last week, he spoke about the hope of resurrection in general. You know, everyone being raised to everlasting life or everlasting judgment on the last day.

But now I think he speaks about the resurrection of Jesus in particular. Because it proves Jesus is the Messiah, the king, the Christ, the Lord, whom God promised to send, to usher in God's kingdom and be that judge on judgment day.

The promise of this king is the promise the 12 tribes were hoping to see fulfilled. And initially, Paul thought it can't be Jesus, which is why in the very next verse, he says, I too was convinced that I ought to do all that I was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

[6 : 36] Then, of course, as we heard on the road to Damascus, a light and a voice from heaven stopped him in his tracks. And notice, Paul said, Who are you, Lord? And Jesus replied, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

And notice what Luke calls him, the Lord replied. Jesus is the risen Lord. He's alive and it makes him the Lord.

I mean, can you imagine? You've been doing everything you can to oppose this Jesus, but then, crikey, he's alive. This Jesus must then really be the Lord, the King, the Christ, the one they were all waiting for.

You see, the resurrection proves he's no ordinary man, but God's promised King. And again, this is good news because this King would save his people from their sins and give them a place amongst God's people for life eternal.

This is what Jesus goes on to tell Paul about. He says, I'm sending you to them, to the people, the Jews and Gentiles, to open their eyes and turn them from the darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

- [7 : 51] In other words, to help them repent. Why? So that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.
- A poor will open their eyes and help them to turn, to repent, not by his own power, but as he proclaims the gospel about the risen Lord Jesus.
- For God's spirit works through God's gospel. Yes, sometimes hardening hearts, but other times opening eyes, turning them from the darkness to the light, from Satan's lies to God's truth.
- And so we need to keep praying for our non-Christian family and friends, don't we? That as they hear the gospel, whether from us or from others, that God's spirit would work through that to open their eyes.
- But the content of the gospel is the good news that Jesus died and is alive, as Fester said. And so he is Lord. And by faith in him, he brings forgiveness of sins and a place amongst God's people who are sanctified, that is, set apart from the world for life eternal with God now and in the world to come.
- [9 : 17] If they have faith in Jesus, if they believe in Jesus, you know, that is his death that paid for our sins so that we could have forgiveness.
- It's his resurrection which proves he can raise us to life eternal in God's family. If you don't yet have faith or believe in Jesus, whether you are in the room or online, then you are missing out on forgiveness from God.
- A place amongst the people of God. An eternal life with God. And you're facing eternal punishment to come, so please believe in Jesus.
- And for us who do then know the content of the gospel. One of the things that stops us from speaking the gospel confidently is not being sure exactly what it is.
- I mean, we kind of use the word quite a lot, but what exactly is it? Being unsure means that we're unlikely to speak.
- [10 : 25] For example, I remember my daughter asking me to explain to her quadratic equations for her upcoming maths test. But I wasn't exactly sure what a quadratic equation was.
- Now, I suppose I could have just winged it and said something, but that wouldn't have been helpful for her if she went into the test. It would have landed her in judgment with the teacher. You know, wrong.
- And so because I wasn't sure and I didn't want to mislead her, I said nothing at all, except why don't you email your teacher and ask them. And it's the same with the gospel.
- If we're not sure of the content, and we don't want to mislead people to judgment either, then often our response is not to say anything at all. And so we need to know the content of the gospel that we might be confident to share it and even defend it when others tell us it's wrong.
- I remember a student minister who was here at our church a number of years ago, and they were studying at Ridley and just here with us on Sundays. He was coming up to Good Friday, and they had a bishop visit them at Ridley College and tell them to just try not to talk about sin and judgment this Good Friday, will you?
- [11 : 41] That was his instruction to these Ridley students. He wanted to remove those things from the content of the gospel to make it more palatable. The bishop has since retired.
- Or other churches would say the gospel is about promoting social justice in our world and helping the poor. It's about loving one another. And we should do all those things.
- We should. But that's the fruit of the gospel, the outcome, what it leads to. It's not the content of the gospel. It might be evidence that we are genuine Christians, that we really believe Jesus is Lord who tells us to love one another, but it's not actually the gospel that saves.

No, no, the content of the gospel is the good news that Jesus is King and Savior, the Lord who saves. The Lord who saves. Whose death and resurrection means forgiveness of sins and a place in God's family for life eternal.

And that's the message that Paul was to preach. That's why we started our evangelism training with understanding what the gospel is.

[12 : 52] If you missed it and are not sure of it, then please speak with me or Ricky. We can help you. We need to be confident of what the content of the gospel is so that we might then be confident to share it when the opportunity arises.

And second, we need to know the certainty of the gospel, point two, so that we can be confident we're not barking mad. And remember when Paul mentioned the resurrection of Jesus, Festus interrupted Paul's defense and says, Festus, you are out of your mind.

Your great learning is driving you insane. And I doubt Festus is alone in thinking Christians are mad. People might not tell us to our faces because they're too polite, but I'm pretty sure there's lots who think we are barking mad today.

And at one level, it's understandable because dead people don't normally rise, do they? And yet, as Paul replied in the very next verse, I am not insane, most excellent Festus.

What I'm saying is true and reasonable. Paul is certain the gospel is true and that the Christian faith is not blind faith, but reasonable, rational faith.

[14 : 15] So while we may be barking mad for other reasons, like, I don't know, supporting Essendon, I couldn't resist, Alan, sorry. We're definitely not barking mad for being a Christian.

Why? Well, for several reasons, which we see in our passage. First, because of the historical eyewitnesses. That's what Paul goes on to say in the next verse. He says, The king is familiar with these things and I can speak to him freely about them.

I'm convinced that none of this has escaped his notice because it was not done in a corner. Jesus' death and resurrection were not done in a secret corner, but in the public arena.

So that there are eyewitnesses, people who saw it. That means King Agrippa has heard people talk about these things, even the resurrection of Jesus.

After all, Jesus had appeared to hundreds of people over 40 days, more than a month, and even to 500 people at the one time. So King Agrippa has heard eyewitness testimony, both firsthand from those who saw him and many of whom became Christians, like Matthew and John, which we can read about in our Bible, and from second-hand eyewitnesses who interviewed people who saw him alive, people like Mark and Luke in the Bible.

[15 : 44] Historians still consider these books of the Bible to be eyewitness accounts and good sources of history. In fact, a highly regarded American historian, Paula Fredrickson, who is not a Christian, said, I know in their own terms, what they saw was the raised Jesus.

That's what they say. And then all the historical evidence we have afterwards attest to their conviction that that's what they saw.

She just doesn't quite want to admit it. So she goes, I'm not saying that they really did see the raised Jesus. I wasn't there. I don't know what exactly they saw, but I do know as a historian that they must have seen something.

The point is, even a non-Christian who doesn't want to believe it still has to admit there is so much evidence for it. The point is, Jesus' death and resurrection were not done in a secret corner, but the public arena.

And since it was done publicly, it's based on eyewitness testimony, which gives us certainty. As does the fact that this gospel is not a newly invented story, but a fulfillment of what was promised earlier.

[17 : 02] And so Paul also said earlier on, I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen. That, here's the content of the gospel again, the Messiah would suffer, be crucified, and as the first to rise from the dead, would rise again, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.

Now let me see if I can give you an example to help illustrate what I mean. If I told you some news that had not been promised anywhere else before, and so it's completely new, it would come out of left field, something like this.

Wally the Wombat will be the next president of America. Here's the good news. For all Americans, you don't have to worry about the two candidates. Wally the Wombat will be the next president. Now, that'd be hard to believe, wouldn't it?

Not just because, not really. This is online. Not just because Wombats don't normally become presidents, but also because this news has come out of nowhere.

There was no preparation for it, was there? But not so with the gospel. And so again, even though dead people don't normally rise, God had promised it would happen in scripture, Moses and the prophets.

[18 : 24] There'd been hundreds of years of preparation for it. And so it's not a newly invented story made up for their moment in history, but it'd been promised long ago, which again gives us certainty.

As does the fact that it's precisely the thing you'd expect God to do. Even earlier, Paul said, you might remember, why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

In other words, the resurrection is in keeping with God's character. So it's not unlikely that he would raise someone from the dead.

I mean, if God is God, if he can create the world, then don't you think raising a person from the dead is a piece of cake? Of course it is.

In fact, if nothing supernatural happened, then you would actually have to start wondering if Jesus was really from God. And so when people say they believe in God, but they can't believe in the miracles of Jesus or the resurrection of Jesus, it's actually illogical.

[19 : 37] Because if God is God, he can do anything, can't he? You see, the miracles of Jesus and the raising of Jesus from the dead don't actually take away from the truth of the gospel, but actually add to the truth of the gospel.

That Jesus really is the son of God. That he really is God's king. For it's in keeping with God's character. So it's not unlikely. And lastly, the gospel is unstoppable.

Earlier, Paul admits he did everything to oppose the name of Jesus. But when Jesus appeared to him, he says this old proverb, which is only quoted in our passage today. He says, Jesus says to Paul, it is hard for you to kick against the goads.

Now, a goad is a pointy stick. That farmers used to kind of prod the animals so that the animals would go in the right direction. And for the animal to kick against it would be hard and sometimes hurt.

In other words, for the animal to kick against the goad is a losing battle. And Jesus' point is, for Paul to persecute the church to kick against the goad is a losing battle.

[20 : 55] For the Lord himself will ensure the church will grow through the gospel. In other words, the gospel is unstoppable. And we've seen it, by the way, it continues to convert people to Christianity for over 2,000 years.

People from all walks of life. And people who now live changed lives, like Paul himself, who went from persecutor to preacher and even died for the Lord Jesus.

In fact, people today are even converted through the gospel and still are willing to die for the Lord Jesus today. I'm sure it might feel like the church is shrinking here in Australia under our secular government, but Australia's move away from God has probably just sorted out the real Christians from the cultural Christians.

And we may feel also saddened that the gospel is not yet converting our loved ones, which is why we need to keep praying for them, as I said. But when you look at Christianity around the world, the church is still growing.

It's still the largest religion in the world. People are still being converted, even here in Australia, even here at our church. It was great to hear the testimony of Jenny the other month, how she found purpose in Jesus.

[22 : 20] She heard the gospel and is now a Christian. The gospel is unstoppable. It still works. It still converts. And so that helps us to know that it's still real.

And so are we barking mad to believe this gospel? No way. Rather, we can be certain of the gospel that it's true and reasonable. For it was done publicly. Therefore, it's based on eyewitness testimony.

It was promised in Scripture, so it's not a newly invented story. It's in keeping with God's character, so it's not unlikely. And despite opposition, it's unstoppable. It continues to convert people to Christianity, even today.

And so when you feel like the little guy in the room, at work or home or in our society, then know the content of the gospel and know the certainty of the gospel so that when the opportunity comes, you might be able to speak with confidence and courage or even perhaps invite someone to our Meet Jesus Sunday services.

Let's pray that we would. Let's pray. Gracious Father, we do thank you so much for your word which reminds us of your Son and gives us great examples like the Apostle Paul himself who knew the content of the gospel and the certainty of the gospel so that he was able to speak it with calm confidence and courage.

[23 : 55] Help us to do the same, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.