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SPEAKING UP FOR YOUR FAITH

How many of you can read minds? Not many of us are good at that. Sometimes we might think we know what another person is thinking or what his motives are, but we are not often correct. Many times we admit that we can't read minds. In trying to figure out what to give someone for Christmas, we might ask the person what he or she would like and comment something to the effect that "You'll have to tell me what you would like to have because I can't read your mind."

When we do something for someone, we assume that they know why we are doing it. Let's say that a friend is sick and you take him a pot of soup. He may believe that you think that he is rich and you hope that he will include you in his will when he dies. Hopefully, he will know you are doing it because you are his friend and that you care for him. It would be bad if he thought that you were showing care for the wrong motives. It just may be necessary to put the reason why you do something into words so that others will know why you behave the way you do.

Many times we Christians make excuses about not verbalizing our faith by saying that people can see our life and that will be witness enough. Most people need help in interpreting other people's actions and we really haven't communicated with others unless the interpretation is also made clear. Paul had many opportunities to verbalize his faith as a means of presenting a defense against accusation that other brought against him.

Paul was arrested as a result of the riot in the temple area when false accusations were made that he had brought Gentiles into the temple. While he was being held in the fortress, he received word that some Jews had taken a vow to not eat until they had killed Paul. When this became known to the Roman officials they had Paul transferred to Caesarea. Paul came before Felix, the Roman governor but no action was ever taken on the matter. Felix thought that if he held Paul long enough that Paul would offer him a bribe to be free. That did not happen and Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea for two years. Felix had been governor over the region for about 8 years and he was replaced by Festus. When Festus became governor he took a trip to Jerusalem and the Jewish leaders brought their accusations against Paul to Festus. When Festus came back to Caesarea he tried to get Paul to go to Jerusalem and stand trial regarding the accusation. Paul knew that this was a trick so that the Jews might try to kill him and he appealed to Caesar. Not too long after that Agrippa II and Bernice visited Festus and Festus sought to get some help with the case of the Apostle Paul.

ACTS 26:1 When Paul appealed to Caesar, this caused a real problem for Festus. If Paul was going to appear before Caesar, then there must be something with which he was charged and Festus did not know what offence to say that Paul was charged with. This hearing before Agrippa was to help Festus and Agrippa determine what the charges should be.

Even in those days there were lawyers available to represent people in such situations; however, Paul was allowed to present his own case and to speak for himself.

ACTS 26:2-5 As Paul stood there, he could see the prophecy about his life come into being as he was about to bring the gospel message to kings. So when he said that he was glad to be able to speak for himself about what the Jews were accusing him of, this was not just empty words. Paul knew that God was guiding his life and the fact that he had been unjustly imprisoned did not cause him to be bitter. I would imagine that when Paul first heard the prophetic words that he would bring the message before kings, he did not think that he would do so as a prisoner. God's ways are not our ways.

Agrippa was familiar with Jewish history and Paul was going to use that familiarity to present

a convincing argument that Jesus is God's promised Messiah. Paul first developed some background information about himself to establish that he was someone who was well acquainted with the Jewish law and that what he believed was not a result of being misinformed about the law and the prophets. Paul had been a member of the most strict group of Jews, the Pharisees. He also pointed out that his accusers knew what his background was and they would be agreement with him on this point.

ACTS 26:6-8 As part of the introduction to his testimony, Paul went right to the heart of the issue about Jesus. God had promised the nation of Israel a Messiah and all the Jews even to this day anticipate the coming of that person. Paul preached that Jesus is God's promised Messiah and that the proof of it was the fact that God had raised Him from the dead. Some of the Jews (the Sadducees) took issue with this simply because they did not believe in the resurrection. These were like so many of our modern day so-called Christians that dismiss anything that is supernatural. They "believe in God" but the god they believe in has no power.

Paul challenged the group there to consider the logic of whether the Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth, would have any difficulty in bringing the dead back to life. This seems like a small thing compared to the unlimited power of God. Even today people are disbelieving relative to this particular point of faith.

Paul continue with his testimony of his conversion experience and his call to take the good news to the Gentiles. Paul pointed out that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision that he had. It was this very obedience that had cause all the non-believing Jews to turn against him. The Jews could not accept that God was willing to save the Gentile. The attempt to kill him and the subsequent arrest had brought him to this point that he was standing before king Agrippa.

ACTS 26:22-23 Paul gave credit to God for the fact that he was still alive to be able to give witness to that group. He concluded his arguments at the same point that he started his defense: based on the word of God which was the Old Testament scriptures. He taught nothing that could not be substantiated by Moses and the prophets. Even the point of greatest controversy that the Messiah was to bring salvation to the Gentiles is clearly pointed out in Isaiah 49:6. "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

ACTS 26:27-29 Paul made his appeal to the king for him to believe and be converted. Agrippa was, however, like so many people that are "almost persuaded" to surrender their life to God through Jesus. As the saying goes, "Close only counts in horse shoes." God calls us to give ourselves totally and completely to Him and accept Him as Lord of all. This was the hope and prayer that Paul had for those that heard him that day in Caesarea. It should be our hope and prayer for everyone that we know and we should be ready to give voice to our faith so that everyone we know will know Jesus also.