
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

June 5, 2016

Not Ashamed of Jesus (Location: Caesarea)

*“Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You may speak for yourself.’
So Paul gestured with his hand and began his defense.”*

Acts 26:1 (Common English Bible)

Along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, between Tel Aviv and Haifa, rises the restored city of Caesarea, built by Herod the Great in 20 B.C. and named in honor of the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus. Caesarea served as the Roman capital for the province of Judea for nearly 600 years and was the official residence of its governors, including Pontius Pilate who sentenced Jesus to death. It is here that several major events in the formative years of the Christian church took place including the baptism, by Paul, of a Roman military officer named Cornelius (see Acts 10:1-8).

For two years, the apostle Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea for preaching Jesus Christ and Christ’s resurrection from the dead. During his imprisonment, King Agrippa and the king’s sister, Bernice, came to Caesarea. During a conversation with Porcius Festus, the current governor of Caesarea, King Agrippa and Bernice learned of this man, Paul, and that he was being held there in that city as a prisoner. Fascinated with the story of Paul, his preaching and teaching and Paul’s imprisonment, Agrippa said to Festus, “I want to hear the man myself.” The very next day, King Agrippa and Bernice entered the auditorium of Caesarea with considerable fanfare and Paul was brought from his prison cell to address the King and honored guest.

Recently I sat in what remains of that auditorium, a place that can still seat hundreds, and imagined the apostle Paul standing in chains before the King and the city’s most prominent men. Asked to speak, Paul “gestured with his hand and began his defense.” In that day, the hand gesture was a common movement to quiet the audience and signal the beginning of an important speech. In that single movement of his hand, Paul delivered a bold sermon. Though he stood before a King, himself a prisoner in chains, Paul had the audacity to say, with that hand movement, “Listen, and be silent, for I have something of deep importance to say.” Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

For whatever reason, I have entered a place in my life where I sense things more deeply than ever before; I am easily brought to a place of tears. Seated in that ancient auditorium, looking down to an empty stage, a place that was once occupied by Paul in chains, I pictured him making that hand gesture and I had to hide my tears from my colleagues. Paul thought nothing of his present humiliation, a prisoner in chains, and placed all his energy into one thing, the message of Jesus and Jesus’ power to change lives.

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