

AGRIPPA who lost the chance of a lifetime
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(Acts 26:28)

The scene was set for one of the greatest trials in history. Preliminary investigations had been completed, and with the arrival of King Agrippa the time seemed opportune to settle Paul's case once and for ever. "And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth. And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer" (Acts 25 : 23, 24). Intense silence greeted the statement, and every eye was turned toward Paul when Agrippa ultimately said, "Paul, thou art permitted to speak for thyself" (26:1).

The King Who Recognized the Truth

Paul's shrewd eyes recognized that his illustrious judge was no stranger to the ways and beliefs of Israel. He said, "I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because . . . I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to bear me patiently" (v. 3). Later, when the speaker had told his remarkable story, his impassioned voice cried, "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest" (v. 27). These two statements reveal that the judge was acquainted with the holy Scriptures. His constant interest in the life of the nation had made him expert in all Hebrew affairs. It would also follow that he knew about the Lord Jesus, and the ways of the Christian Church, for when Festus accused Paul of madness, the prisoner replied, "I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are, hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

The King Who Resisted the Truth

Perhaps we shall never be sure why Agrippa replied, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." It has been suggested this was an answer of mockery, and meant "With such little persuasion, would you try to convert me?" Yet, a man expert in Jewish ways; a man who believed in the hope of Israel; and one who had heard the testimony of the great Paul, could hardly scorn such a wonderful message. Each reader must decide for himself what Agrippa really meant; but one thing is above dispute. At least the king realized what it meant to be a Christian, and confessed he had not yet become one. Whether he was near or far from the place of surrender, he had seen a vision of the power of God, and the extent of Christ's Kingdom. Christians were people who owned no other Master. No man can follow Christ without becoming conscious of a duty to bear a cross daily. If Agrippa supported this cause, unpleasant repercussions would be known throughout the nation. A royal conversion would be a sensation, and would necessitate many fundamental changes in the king's conduct.

The King Who Renounced the Truth

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Beyond the bounds of that court-house, heaven waited for the royal verdict. The court adjourned, and Agrippa, Bernice, and Festus, went aside to discuss their findings. They agreed that the prisoner was innocent, but excused their inaction by saying, "This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar" (v. 32). And possibly had Caesar been present he would have dismissed them for their willingness to waste money in transporting a prisoner and his escort to Rome, when according to their own statements he was guiltless. This story has bequeathed to posterity three vital suggestions. (i) The inevitability of decision. Every man challenged by the Gospel of Christ makes a decision, whether he wants to or not. (ii) The inadvisability of delay. To plan a future decision is to provide evidence of folly. The future is unknown. (iii) The inexorability of death. The last enemy of sinful man is always triumphant. All men must die, "and after death the judgment." When Agrippa turned away from the Christian preacher, he turned away from Christ.

Poor Agrippa, he was so near to the Kingdom of God, but he missed the chance of a lifetime!

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