

**ACTS**

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Acts chapter 26 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

As we have seen in our previous studies, the governor of Judea changes hands. It moves from Felix to Festus and as Festus takes over he has some baggage that Felix left behind that he needs to deal with, namely, Paul!

As Festus hears Paul he finds no fault in him, he is not guilty of any crime and as Festus asks Paul if he would go to Jerusalem and share with the religious leaders there just as he had done here in Caesarea, Paul tells Festus, **“I appeal to Caesar.”**

Thus, his hands are now tied, and all Festus could say, **“You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!”**

But Festus still has some problems with sending Paul to Caesar. And it is a huge problem. You see, Festus has no charges against Paul to send with Him to Caesar Nero.

But, being a new governor, he has other leaders coming to visit him and welcome him, one of them being King Agrippa who was king over Jerusalem and being an Edomite, he was fully aware of the Jewish practices, he studied them, and thus, he might be able to help Festus out with these documents to send to Caesar with Paul.

As you look at all that is going on in the life of Paul, you would think things were out of control. He is in a mess, a mess that he seems to have gotten himself into and he has no one to blame but himself.

That is not true, God was working and as his witness in Jerusalem was given, it will also be given in Rome! God promised Paul he would go to Rome and that is what is transpiring here, even though you would find many people who would not agree with that!

But remember what the Lord told Paul, to encourage him back in Acts 23:11, “**... ‘Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.’**”

Let me share these words with you and then we will get to our text this evening. We are told,

In the late 1800s a clergyman by the name of Bishop Wright thought it was impossible for man to fly. “Flight,” he said, “is reserved for the angels.” On December 17, 1903 his oldest son, Wilbur, took his seat in the first power-driven plane ever built and was airborne at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, for twelve seconds and 120 feet. There were some who thought the Wright brothers were a little touched before that fateful day, but today they are everyone’s heroes.

It was the same for Christopher Columbus. People were so sure this crazy explorer would sail off the end of the earth that many of their coins carried the Latin inscription, “Ne Plus Ultra” – “no more beyond.” After 1492 when he sailed the ocean blue, the new coins read “Plus Ultra” – “more beyond.”

When Robert Fulton gave his first public demonstration of his steamboat, some bystanders chanted, “It will never start, never start, never start . . .” When it started, the astonished crowd began to repeat, “It will never stop, never stop, never stop . . .”

Similarly, many of the Apostle Paul's contemporaries considered him out of touch with reality. Even today some maintain that Paul had a hallucination on the Damascus Road and that his subsequent teachers perverted Judaism. But the fact of the matter is, Paul was the sanest of theologians, and his teachings were anointed by God.

Acts 26 records Paul's sanity being questioned. Besides the great apostle, the cast of characters in this divinely orchestrated drama includes Festus, whom we met in Acts 25, and Agrippa and Bernice, a couple who were even more unsavory than Felix and Drusilla.

- R. Kent Hughes, Acts – A Church Afire, p. 325

How true that is. And as we left off last time; Festus, Agrippa, his sister and lover Bernice as well as many others are all gathered in this amphitheater in Caesarea to hear Paul speak.

With that as our background, let's begin reading in Acts chapter 26 beginning in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us this evening as we study His Word.

## **ACTS 26**

### **VERSES 1-3**

Now let's put this into perspective. Paul stood before the man whose great-grandfather had tried to kill Jesus as a baby; his grandfather had John the Baptist beheaded; his father had martyred the first apostle, James. Agrippa's family history made him unlikely to receive Paul warmly. And yet, Paul stood before them with the confidence of the Lord upon him!

As you read this story you might come to the conclusion that Paul's reason for being before these leaders is to make his case so that he can be released from prison. But I don't think that is what Paul had in mind.

I think Paul wanted to share Jesus with Agrippa, Festus and the others so that they might come to saving faith. Remember what the Lord told Ananias about the ministry of Paul in Acts 9:15-16, **“But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.’”**

So here is Paul, standing in the auditorium in the city of Caesarea as he is going to speak to Festus, Agrippa, Bernice, commanders of the Roman Legion, and all the prominent men of Caesarea

And keep in mind that King Agrippa knew the Scriptures and thus Paul is going to share his testimony, what Jesus did for him, and then why he should believe, the evidence for Jesus being the Messiah.

It is as Paul said in II Corinthians 5:17-20, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”**

That was his calling and it truly is ours, Paul was an ambassador for Jesus and so are we!

VERSES 4-8

Paul starts out by giving his testimony, which is powerful. It shows how God transformed his life but before he can share that, he lays down the information of what his life was like before he got saved!

Paul was born in Tarsus, several hundred miles from Jerusalem. Yet at a relatively young age he came to live at Jerusalem. To be trained up in the Jewish Law!

In fact, the Jews knew what Paul was like. He was a Pharisee, one of their own, a member of the Sanhedrin, a keeper of the Law or at least that is what he thought he was doing.

Then Paul states the reason he is in trouble, because he believes in the promises of God, the promises made to their fathers, the promises made to the 12 tribes of Israel that God will raise the dead!

Now the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, but they did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah or that He was raised from the dead.

The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection, life after death and they only held onto the first five books of Moses or the Torah.

And yet Moses spoke of the resurrection in Exodus chapter 3 and Jesus expounds on this to the Sadducees who tried to tell Jesus this crazy story to illustrate how foolish the resurrection really is.

Listen to what took place in Matthew chapter 22, as Jesus said to them, “... **‘You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.’**” Matthew 22:29-32.

Long after Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were dead, Jesus spoke of them living, He is speaking of resurrection life!

Not only did Moses believe in the resurrection, not only did Jesus teach of it, but so did Job as he tells us, “**For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!**” Job 19:25-27.

Thus, God does raise the dead, Jesus did rise from the dead, He is the Messiah, and they should not think this is an incredible act for God to do.

Paul is challenging King Agrippa to think about these things.

Now what about us? How often it is difficult for us to believe that God can do miracles when we are in the middle of a difficult situation. Pastor Chuck put it like this in regard to the resurrection of Jesus and miracles. He wrote,

When God is the agent that is doing the work, talk of difficulty is absurd. Why should you think it a thing incredible that God should raise the dead? Can God raise the dead? Of course! It's often said, if you can believe the first verse in the Bible, you should have no problem with the rest of the Book! If you believe in a God that is big enough to create the heavens and the earth, then surely He can raise the dead! He can create all kinds of life forms. He can create a great fish that can swallow a man and accommodate him for three days. He can do all of the things that the Bible has said that He has done if He is God, who created the heavens and the earth.

So it is man's limited concept of God that gives him difficulty with the stories in the Bible. Why should you think it a thing incredible that God? So Paul is putting it in the right perspective, bringing God into the equation. The mistake that we so often make as we are facing the issues of life, and looking at things which we think are totally impossible, the mistake that we make, is that we don't bring God into the equation. And that's why we so often faint because we don't take God into consideration. Why should you think it a thing incredible that God should raise the dead?

- Pastor Chuck Smith

If it is no big deal for God to raise the dead, then it's no big deal for Him to work in your life. May we not only know that intellectually, but believe it by faith, and then live it!

#### VERSES 9-11

Now Paul describes his life before he got saved, fighting against Christians, voting to have them put to death as with Stephen, the first church martyr.

In Jerusalem, Paul had a field day running around and arresting Christians, throwing them in prison with the authority of the chief priest, the religious leaders behind his actions.

Paul even tried to get them to renounce their faith in Jesus!

Paul, in Galatians speaks of this time as he tells us, **“For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.”** Galatians 1:13-14.

Paul was trying to destroy the church, he had a zeal but not really for God but for the traditions of the fathers, which were wrong!

In fact, we are going to see the Lord tell Paul that he wasn't serving God but persecuting God, fighting against what God was doing!

And for Paul, Jerusalem was not enough, he traveled to other cities persecuting Christians and on one of his journey's, on the road to Damascus, he is going to have an encounter with God!

Let me share a few other points here. First of all, when Paul says that he **“cast [his] vote against them”** in verse 10, I believe Paul is telling us that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, having a vote against Christians who were tried before the Sanhedrin

Not only that, but this man who said he was so in love with God and was just serving God, was **“exceedingly enraged against them.”**

Make no mistake about it, Paul was an angry man before his conversion. And that anger just showed that his relationship with God was not right.



That is what the Law will do, and Paul was a keeper of the Law, or so he thought. He saw the freedom that others had, those who were believers in Christ, and it made him angry and he went after them and we see that today with people.

I am so thankful for the grace of God, it brings great joy in my life and what a wonderful witness that is to others! And I am sure it brings great joy in your life!

And Paul is going to share with us again that all the zeal he had for the Lord, was wrong. He was not serving the Lord but fighting against the Lord. Listen to what he says next.

#### VERSES 12-14

The Lord needed to get Paul's attention and He did so in a mighty way. The glory of God, the Shekinah glory shined down upon Paul and he fell to the ground.

Paul is on a mission from God or at least that is what he thinks he is doing. And as he is on the road we see this bright light and then these words, "**... 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'**" Acts 26:14.

In other words, what Paul is doing, persecuting the church, in reality, because Jesus relates so closely to us, Paul is really persecuting Jesus by his actions!

He isn't working for God but fighting against God. He is, as Jesus said, kicking against the goads, and it is a hard thing to do.

A goad was a long sharp stick that was used to get an ox moving and as the Lord is trying to move Paul, he is kicking and fighting, and I am sure it was not easy because Paul kept seeing the angelic face of Stephen as he was put to death. He saw the joy he had in the Lord, that relationship that Paul desired. He saw the love of Stephen towards those who were putting him to death. And as much as Paul may have wanted that, he was fighting against it because he did not want to receive Jesus as his Lord and Savior!

I think that is something that we need to look at in our own lives as we serve the Lord. Are we serving Him or are we serving ourselves, our own desires, what we want instead of what He wants? Are we kicking against the goads, fighting against what God desires in our lives? Important lessons we can learn from.

Listen to the question of Paul in Acts 26:15, and I think he knows the answer to the question before he asks it!

### VERSE 15

His worst fears are now before him, Jesus is God, and Paul was trying to extinguish the light of God through His followers by persecuting them!

Notice what the Lord said to Paul, **“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”** Acts 26:15. “Are you kidding me?” No, that is not what Paul said, but he may have thought that!

These words changed Paul’s world. He immediately understood that Jesus was alive, not dead. He understood that Jesus reigned in glory instead of being damned in shame. He realized that in persecuting the followers of Jesus he persecuted Jesus, and in persecuting Jesus he fought against the God of his fathers.

- David Guzik

And I believe that at this point, Paul is saved. He comes to that saving faith in Jesus! In Acts 9:6 we are told of the response of Saul or Paul, **“So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’”**

We need to understand that Saul has been under the constant conviction of the Holy Spirit for some time and was now simply surrendering to what he knew was true.

And look again at his response in Acts 9:6. He calls Jesus **“Lord.”** You see, Saul answered a very important question – *“Who is Jesus?”* And by calling Jesus **“Lord”** Saul was identifying Him as God, the One who has come to save us from our sins!

Next, Saul asks Jesus, *“Lord, what do you want me to do?”* That is what we ask once we are saved, what does God have for us, what does He want us to do! So, I believe that at this point Saul is saved.

Now, there are many out there who have a zeal for God but without knowledge and thus, they are not saved, they are without Jesus. You see, they reject the fact that Jesus is God or that He is the only way of salvation. Many add works to salvation and that negates the grace that God has extended to us!

Jesus said in John 8:24, **“Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am [He], you will die in your sins.”**

If you do not believe that Jesus is God, if He is not your Lord and Savior, you will die in your sins. It can't be any clearer than that! And yet, many try to deny the deity of Jesus or make Him a lesser God. That is foolishness. He is Almighty God and the second person of the Holy Trinity. One God manifested in three distinct persons.

And as far as good works go for our salvation, Paul put it like this, **“knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”** Galatians 2:16.

Jesus goes on to say to Paul . . .

### VERSES 16-18

First of all, let me deal with a few words that have somehow lost the true meaning of what they are saying.

The word **“minister”** in Acts 26:16 speaks of “an under-rower.” This word refers to a lowly servant on a galley ship.

Today we tend to use it as a title instead of a designation of service. A minister is not a celebrity but a servant!

Then there is the word **“witness”** that is also found in Acts 26:16. It is the Greek word MARTURAS from which we get our English word martyr from. And when we think of a martyr we think of someone who has died for their faith.

But that is not exactly what the Greek word is speaking of. This word meant someone who was a living witness, not a dead one! And think about it. Our testimony is not just about how we got saved, but how are we living out our faith today, it is a ***WITNESS!***

Make no mistake about it, Paul was created for a time like this, for a purpose by God.

The thing is, Paul had a choice. He could have rejected what God had for him just as the Jewish religious leaders were doing.

Paul was to be a witness of Jesus, he is to share the things that God has shown him and will show him. And Paul repented of his sins and came to saving faith in Jesus and thus, his life reflected that!

And when you think about it, 14 of the 27 New Testament books were written by Paul, if you include Hebrews. That is almost 52% of the New Testament writings.

God did His part and Paul received it, stood up and walked by faith and look at how God used him.

Just as God did with Paul He desires to do with us, for who knows if you were created for a time such as this! And I will let you in on a little secret – ***YOU WERE, AND YOU ARE!*** Now we must walk as He is leading!

Let me share this with you. In the book of Esther, we read of wicked Haman who got the King to put forth a decree to kill all the Jews on a certain date.

Mordecai, a Jew, found out that plan and told Esther, his adopted daughter you might say, her uncle, for he raised her after her family was killed. And through a series of circumstances she became queen in Persia.

And as Esther is made aware of this plan to kill her people, she was afraid to go to her husband, King Ahasuerus because if he didn't want to see her, if he did not hold out the golden scepter, she could be put to death.

And I love what Mordecai tells her in Esther 4:13-14, “**. . . ‘Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’**”

Mordecai tells her that becoming queen, even though she was a Jew, she was not Persian, and all these things that have happened may be to save your people, don't miss out on this opportunity, walk by faith. And if she does not do this, God will raise up someone else, but she would miss out!

And Esther did walk by faith and God used her to spare His people!

Again, what is God telling you this evening, because who knows if you have come to this point, this situation to do a work for God? Walk by faith!

Now back to Paul and what he is sharing with Agrippa and the others. He speaks of his ministry and that his ministry was not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles with three specific things and then the two results of those who listen and obey this message from God.

First of all, Paul's ministry was to ***OPEN THEIR EYES***. You see, the message that Paul was preaching would do that. The Gospel of Jesus Christ would open their eyes to the things of God so that they may see.

We are told in II Corinthians 4:3-4 by Paul, "**But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.**"

You see, as the Word of God is spoken the Holy Spirit will open the eyes of those who have been blinded by Satan.

It is as Psalm 146:8a says, "**The LORD opens the eyes of the blind . . .**"

Thus, the Holy Spirit is working on their hearts as Jesus said in John 16:8-11, “**And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.**”

The second part of Paul’s ministry was to *TURN THEM FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT*. Make no mistake about it, outside of Christ we are living in spiritual darkness but as we turn from darkness to the light, Jesus Christ, we are saved.

You see, as the Word of God is spoken the light of God shines brightly upon us! It is as Peter tells us “**But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.**” I Peter 2:9-10.

Also, John says “**But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.**” I John 1:7.

And the third part of Paul’s ministry was to *TURN THEM FROM THE POWER OF SATAN TO THE POWER OF GOD*. You see, as the Word of God is spoken, and we receive it into our lives we are no longer under the power of Satan but now we are under the power of God!

It is as Paul said in Hebrews 2:14-15, “**Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.**”

Also, as Jesus said in John 8:36, “**Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.**”

We next come to the results of your salvation, of accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of your life!

The first one is ***THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS***. What a glorious promise God has given to us, that our sins will be forgiven, not might.

The Psalmist said, “**As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.**” Psalm 103:12.

And in Isaiah 43:25 we are told, “**I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins.**”

How awesome is that! God places our sins in the sea of forgetfulness and then places a sign that says, “***No Fishing!***”

Also, Paul tells us in Romans 4:7-8 as he quotes from David, “**Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.**”

And John tells us “**I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake.**” I John 2:12.

And finally, Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:7, “**In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.**”

What a blessing that God, because of His rich grace towards us, has forgiven me and you of all of our sins as the blood of Christ cleanses us from all our unrighteousness!



The second point in regard to our salvation is that we will receive *A GODLY INHERITANCE*. As we receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, we are adopted into the family of God and with that, as Paul said, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”** Ephesians 1:3.

Also, Paul said in Colossians 3:24, **“knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.”**

And lastly, Peter tells us **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.”** I Peter 1:3-4.

We will spend eternity with the Lord – it doesn’t get any better than that!

This is probably the greatest summary of the gospel in the New Testament!

#### VERSES 19-20

Here is the summary of Paul’s message – repent of your sins, return to God, and do the works that show you are saved.

And please understand that good works don’t save us, but they are the evidence of our changed life, our salvation. We are told in Ephesians 2:8-9, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”**

And this should just make sense. Repentance is part of salvation. Think about it. You were moving away from God, you were in sin and when you came to Jesus you repented of your sins. You realized you were separated from God because of your sins and you needed a Savior, you needed Jesus, so you turned to Him!

What did Paul tell them here? “**. . . that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.**” Acts 26:20. Let your life, the way you live, show others that you are saved!

### VERSES 21-23

Paul wants them to understand why the Jews tried to kill him and thus, he plainly states the truth of the case.

It was only because he sought to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles that the Jews seized him and tried to kill him.

It wasn't because he was a political revolutionary or because he offended the sanctity of the Temple. No crimes against Rome!

But Paul also wants them to know that yes, he was almost killed by the Jewish religious leaders, but God spared him!

Wait a minute; I thought the Roman Commander saved Paul?

No, he was just the instrument that God used to save Paul. God can use anything as this true story illustrates for us. This is an amazing story, but our God does amazing things. We are told,

I Read about a preacher named Frederic Nolan. Fifty men were chasing him through a hilly area of North Africa. Trapped in a canyon, he saw a mouth of a cave, and scooted in.

Laying at the back of the shallow cave, the exhausted Nolan knew that within ten minutes he would be discovered and killed.

But as he lay there, a spider appeared and began to quickly weave a web over the cave's mouth.

Twenty minutes later, when Nolan's persecutors arrived, four or five guys stopped at the opening of the cave, saw the web, and said, "He's not in there."

And Frederic Nolan went on to record something in his journal which I think is wonderful: Where God is, a spider web becomes a wall. But where God isn't a wall is like a spider web.

- Jon Courson, Acts 15-28, p. 303

How true that is. And thus, there is no such thing as good luck, chance, but it has everything to do with God!

And notice how Paul sums this up for us. He says regarding what the Old Testament Scriptures said of the Messiah and how Jesus fulfilled them, "**that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.**" Acts 26:23.

Now wait a minute, that is not true, is it? That Jesus "**would be the first to rise from the dead**"?

It is absolutely true. Jesus was the first to rise from the dead? Then what about Lazarus? What about the widow's son? What about those in the Old Testament that were raised from the dead?

Jesus was the first to rise from the dead never to die again. He was the "**first-fruits**" of resurrection.

Now, how will they respond to this message? Let's read on and see.

#### VERSE 24

Isn't it interesting that Paul can't seem to finish a sermon without someone interrupting him or a riot breaking out!

And keep in mind that Festus, having no real clue about the Jewish faith, what they believe, comes to the conclusion that Paul has lost his mind. My family still feels that way about me.

He probably saw Paul studying the Scriptures and thought he just took things a little too far. That was not true, in fact, it was Festus who didn't take it far enough to get saved!

It is as Paul said in I Corinthians 1:18, "**For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.**"

Let me encourage you with this. "Let the scoffers say what they may. But let us stand by what Paul declared to be the heavenly vision. That is, God is capable and desirous to change men, to take them out of the power of Satan, and to place them into His glorious, gracious kingdom." (Pastor Phil Ballmaier)

VERSES 25-26

Paul's defense about Festus calling him crazy? "No, I am not crazy!"

Now if you think about it, that is not much of a defense. If you are crazy or mad and you tell people you are not, I don't think many will be convinced.

Thus, Paul says he is not crazy, he is not mad to Festus and then goes to Agrippa and tells Agrippa that he himself knows these things to be true; they were not done in secret but out in the open.

Jesus lived, walked among the people, died on a cross and rose from the dead on the third day. If they are true, and Paul says that Agrippa knows they are, then Paul is not mad as Festus said.

That is a good defense!

Then Paul nails Agrippa in verse 27 of Acts chapter 26 with these words.

VERSE 27

First of all, Paul knew that Agrippa believed in the prophets and thus, the logical conclusion is Agrippa has to believe in Jesus, the One the prophets spoke of.

And that is what Paul says, "***Since you believe the prophets you have to believe in Jesus!***"

Can you see the predicament Agrippa was in? Festus just accused Paul of being mad, he was crazy and now Paul tells Agrippa that he knows the truth about what the prophets of God had spoken regarding the Messiah, about Jesus. What was he going to do about the truth? Could he handle the truth? Let's read on and see.

VERSE 28

Now we don't know how Agrippa meant this, "**You almost persuade me to become a Christian.**"

Was he sarcastic or was he sincere? Did he really mean that?

We don't know for sure, but I tend to see it as Paul almost convinced Agrippa of the truth of Jesus. Agrippa was convicted by the Holy Spirit, he had the information, but it never became part of his life, he never crossed over from darkness into the light!

No matter how you take what he said, this is truly a sad and tragic statement by Agrippa that had eternal consequences attached to them.

I tend to think he was under a lot of pressure not to come to Jesus even though the evidence was overwhelming that Jesus is the Messiah!

There was Bernice, who was a sinful and immoral companion. Thus, if he came to Christ this relationship would be over as well as the friendship with his other immoral friends. He refused to make that sacrifice and it had eternal consequences.

Not only was Bernice there, but on the other side of Agrippa was Festus. And remember, he already was thinking Paul was crazy and if Agrippa came to Christ, was he crazy too? That is what Spurgeon wrote regarding what Agrippa was thinking, "I can't become a Christian. Festus will think I'm also crazy." Because he wanted the praise of men, he rejected Jesus. "Alas, how many are influenced by fear of men! Oh, you cowards, will you be damned out of fear? Will you sooner let your souls perish than show your manhood by telling a poor mortal that you defy his scorn? Dare you not follow the right though all men in the world should call you to do the wrong? Oh, you cowards! You cowards! How you deserve to perish who have not enough soul to call your souls your own, but cower down before the sneers of fools!"

And history tells us that Agrippa died in 100 A. D. but there is no record that he ever made a commitment to Jesus Christ. His whole eternity was bound up in that one word, “**almost**”

Please understand that almost is not good enough. Think about that for a minute. “The parachute almost opened” or “The surgery almost worked”, when a person stands before God someday and they say, “Well, Lord I almost became a Christian” He will say to them, “Yes, and I almost was able to save you.”

### VERSE 29

Remember that Paul was once a man who was filled with anger and that anger overflowed into action on his part as he persecuted the believers in Jesus.

But now that he has come to Christ, that has all changed. And what we see here is the heart of Paul; he wanted not only Agrippa to be saved but all who were in that amphitheater to be saved, to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

You see, if they did then their spiritual eyes would be opened. They would turn from spiritual darkness to the light of God. They would be released from the power of Satan to the power of God in their lives. They would receive the forgiveness of their sins. They would receive an eternal inheritance!

That is what Paul wanted them to have and that is what Agrippa rejected as well as the others who heard Paul that day.

What is interesting is that Paul wanted them to have all that he had except for one thing, the chains he was bound with. He did not want them to be chained for their faith in Christ if they would call upon Jesus!

I like the way that Morgan put it as he said, “He would die to save Agrippa, but he would not put his chains upon Agrippa. That is Christianity. Magnify it, multiply it, apply it. The sincerity that dies to deliver, but will not impose a chain, is Christianity.”

Notice the change that Christ has made in the life of Paul, it is powerful. And that same change should be seen in our own lives. Lives that are filled with love for people, love for the lost and not anger, bitterness, hatred! Only God can truly do that!

### VERSES 30-32

Here we see that Paul’s direct challenge was too much for Agrippa, Festus, and the others on the platform. It was getting too close, too personal, and they felt they had to end it quickly by standing up and ending the proceedings.

The problem for Festus is simple, Agrippa cannot help him with the paperwork to send to Rome, there are no charges against Paul, he committed no crime against Rome.

Festus may not have understood what Paul said, maybe not wanting to understand, and he rejected the Gospel message. He had the opportunity to have his eyes opened to the truth, but he refused and remained in spiritual darkness and eternally lost, separated from Christ! Tragedy number one!

Then there was Agrippa who also rejected the message although he may have come closer than Festus, it seems that he was convicted. But maybe he also was afraid to receive Christ because of what Festus said or maybe his sister and lover, Bernice influenced him to reject Paul’s message, as I have said. Whatever the case, Agrippa also is in spiritual darkness eternally separated from Christ! Tragedy number two!



And tragedy number three is that of all those who were there and heard Paul and rejected Christ!

You see, whatever these men were holding onto, whatever kept them from Christ that seemed so important to them at that moment, is now worthless!

Folks, it is as Jesus said, you have “**. . . a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**” Luke 12:33-34.

Jim Elliot, who was martyred for his faith as he tried to bring the Gospel message to the Auca Indians, people who ended up putting him to death, said the following statement that is very powerful.

He said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”

I guess, on the opposite end of the spectrum, for Festus, for Agrippa and the others, we can say “He is a fool who holds onto that which he cannot keep, to lose his eternal soul in Hell, which God does not want!”

And we see as this chapter ends that Agrippa said that Paul could have been set free at this point, he did nothing wrong. But since he appealed to Caesar, Festus was obligated to send him to Caesar Nero, to Rome!

Now, as some read this they feel that Paul made a mistake here; if he didn't appeal to Caesar he would have been set free!

But, in saying that, they miss out on what God said to Paul, where he was to go, the ministry that God had for him.

In Acts 9:15-16, as Paul is told of his ministry after he got saved, **“Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.”**

Also, in Acts 19:21 we see what the Lord puts on Paul’s heart, **“When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’”**

And in Acts 23:11, **“But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.’”**

This was the will of God for Paul’s life and God was going to send Paul to Rome at the expense of the Roman government!

May we understand that what may seem like a mess, like things are out of control, that God is in control and His will, His purpose, His plan will come to pass.

We will see that next time as Paul will be on his way to Rome to fulfill that promise that God made to him.

And God will fulfill the promises that He has made to you, never forget that!

### **Amphitheater in Caesarea where Paul gave his defense before Festus**

