

Paul Preaches Before A King

Acts 26

We start today with Paul standing before King Agrippa who is about to hear his case. Now if you remember king Agrippa's family had bad history toward Christians. His great grandfather is the man that tried to kill Jesus as a baby. His grandfather is the man that had John the Baptist beheaded. His father had murdered the first apostle, James. So somehow, I think it makes it highly unlikely that this king would really care what Paul has to say. We have lot to cover so let's dive in ...

***26** Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: ² I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: ³ Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.*

So the king says, "ok Paul, tell me your story". Then Paul stretched out his hand and said I am so happy to have you hear my case sir. Picture that for a minute. Paul being brought to court in chains and now he stretches forth his hand. He cant even stretch it out all the way because of the chains but he does it anyway. Why, because he wants to highlight the fact that he is not ashamed of them and he doesn't deserve to be in them.

He goes on to highlight here that he knows that King Agrippa is very learned in Jewish affairs, customs, and theology. Though he was a prisoner, Paul *was* happy to speak before Agrippa. First, because he was pleased to have the evidence of his case examined closely by the highest officials, but also because he was pleased to preach the gospel to kings and rulers. He says, "be patient with me because this may take a few minutes". Now that's a pretty awesome way to start your own defense, isn't it? Paul then begins to preach and tell of his conversion story.

⁴ My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; ⁵ Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

Paul was born in Tarsus but moved to Jerusalem at a very young age. He is sure to point that out here and that he was known by all the Jews. He goes on to say that if any of them would testify that he had lived according to the strictest Jewish ways. Notice the one thing Paul says there, “if they would testify”, he is making it known once again that there are no witnesses against him on anything he is being accused of. Then he talks about being a Pharisee. The Pharisees were the largest, most influential, and strictest Jewish party of the time.

Galatians 1:14, ¹⁴ And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

Philippians 3:4-6, ⁴ Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:

⁵ Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Paul is stating in these scriptures just how strict the Pharisees were and how intently he followed their rules and laws. To the point of persecuting the Christians just as what they are trying to do to him now.

⁶ And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God, unto our fathers: ⁷ Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. ⁸ Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

Paul get's right to the point here. He kind of ask the king, “why am I even on trial”. I stand before you being judged because of the promise of God that was made to our fathers. Is that a crime? Paul defended himself by showing that he had not invented a new religion but was following the ancient faith of the Jews through the promises of scripture. He said I am serving God, day and night, with the hope of things to come, just as the tribes of Israel do. He made it abundantly clear that

in his heart and mind he always remained a faithful Jew. His belief in Jesus Christ was merely an extension of that. I am earnestly worshiping the God of our fathers.

Paul says, “for hopes sake”, I am being accused. He is saying that he has a trustful expectation, particularly with reference to the fulfillment of God’s promises. I have confidence that what God has done for us in the past guarantees our participation in what He will do for us in the future. Does this not contrast to the worlds definition of hope? The feeling that what is wanted to happen will happen. As Christians we live in hope because of what God has done in Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within us. This is what Paul is saying here.

Then he asks the king, “why is it so hard, even for you, to believe that God can do anything”,. I think Paul was making a reference to Matthew 19:26; ²⁶ *But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.* So King Agrippa it should be easy for you to believe that God can even raise the dead. Especially since you are an expert in Jewish ways and give the fact that the Old Testament made some clear statements regarding that fact. Which of course the King would be aware of. Verses like Job 19:25-26; ²⁵ *For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:* ²⁶ *And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:.* Clearly speaking about resurrection or God raising the dead.

⁹ *I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.* ¹⁰ *Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.* ¹¹ *And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.*

Paul is saying that he knows that he himself has sinned against God. I have done many things contrary to what Jesus would have us do. I have persecuted Christians, put them in prison, put them to death, and in some cases forced them to renounce Jesus, right here in Jerusalem as many of you know. Because I did it with the authority of this very council. I even went to strange cities to do this because I too hated the Christians at one time. I even fought against the resurrection and the Risen Lord and the name of Jesus Christ and His glory revealed in scripture. I was a faithful Pharisee. But then Paul begins to talk about his conversion.

¹² Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, ¹³ At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. ¹⁴ And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. ¹⁵ And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

This is the third time that Paul has given account for his conversion in this case. However, this time it is his most detailed account of his experience of what happened on the road to Damascus. He says, "I was on my way there to persecute Christians with the full authority of the chief priests". At about noon a light from heaven shined down brighter than the midday sun. the light was so bright that me and all those with me fell to the earth. Then I heard a voice from heaven, in our native tongue, asking me, "why do you persecute me". Then God said, "it is hard for you to kick against the pricks".

What does that mean? It is a Greek proverb for useless resistance: an animal only succeeds in hurting itself. At that moment Paul realized that the Jesus that was crucified was the God of glory. God was letting Paul know that he was like an animal fighting against its Sheppard. Paul, you are like that sheep that runs into the thorns just to avoid what the Sheppard wants you to do. You Paul are fighting against the gospel, my people, my church, and me. Why? Then I asked the voice, "who is this?". The voice answered and said, "I am Jesus", the one you are avoiding and fighting against.

Those words changed Paul's life forever. He knew in an instant that Jesus was alive and well and was reigning in heaven. He knew that by persecuting the followers of Jesus he was persecuting Jesus Himself. He was fighting against the very God of his fathers. The very God of Abraham, Isiac, and Jacob that the Jews believed in and that he had been taught about. Paul knew that he had to repent immediately. That he had to be transformed by the saving grace of God.

¹⁶ But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; ¹⁷ Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, ¹⁸ To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God,

that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Jesus tells Paul to get on his feet and get moving because you have a job to do. You are going to go and preach and teach about all you have witnessed here today and what I will show you along the way. Look at the word witness. This was a term that was often used by the apostles. To them it meant something or someone that bears testimony to things seen, heard, transacted, or experienced through Christ. So you Paul, are going to testify of your transformation and bear witness to many other things through me, Jesus Christ. Paul is now called to serve the Lord and to experience Him in all His glory. Jesus then says, “now Paul I want you to go and preach to the Jews and the Gentiles, which I will deliver you from, and open their eyes to the truth that can only be found in Me.

To open their eyes means to give them sight instead of blindness. Isaiah 35:5 says; *⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.* This is referring to receiving Christ as your savior. That is when you truly see and hear.

To turn from darkness to light – I think 2 Corinthians 4:4-6 says it better than I ever could. *⁴ In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. ⁵ For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

To turn from Satan unto God of course means to receive salvation through Jesus Christ. Salvation gives us distinct but inseparable graces, and sanctification that is a new status of righteousness in Gods sight. Acts 13:39 told us; *³⁹ And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.*

Paul is preaching to these people is he not? This is what he is saying as part of his defense. Jesus is an extension of the law and if you believe in Him you will be saved.

¹⁹ Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

²⁰ But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all

the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

Paul says from that moment on the road to Damascus until now I haven't disobeyed what God had given me to do. Considering the powerful way that Jesus revealed himself to me I had to put my entire life in His hands. This is why I have lived and preached the way that I have. Even before you this very moment. I have gone all throughout the Roman Empire teaching the Jews first and then the Gentiles. I taught them all that they need to repent and turn to God and do works demonstrating their repentance. Then Paul begins to close his testimony.

²¹ For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

²² Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: ²³ That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

This is the only reason the Jews want me dead. If it wasn't for God's help and favor I would not be here to preach to you today. However, please note that I have not said anything that the prophets or Moses didn't say would happen. That Jesus would suffer and die and be the first to be resurrected and bring the truth to us all. You know this to be true oh king because you are an expert in the Jewish religion and it is written in the scriptures.

²⁴ And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. ²⁵ But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

In the middle of Paul's closing arguments Festus stands up and yells, "you are crazy". You are obviously an intelligent man but all of this learning has made you nuts. Given Paul's demeanor throughout this trial you can see how someone like Festus would think he was mad. Mad meaning crazy not angry. Just look at Paul actions:

- He was in chains yet happy
- He preached that God could raise the dead
- He experienced a heavenly vision that changed his life

- He was more interested in preaching than his own freedom
- He believed in a message of hope for all mankind

Put Festus in the context of 1 Corinthians 1:18; ¹⁸ *For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.* Festus thought that Paul was full of foolishness.

But Paul said, “I am not crazy sir”, I believe these things with all my heart. Paul knew that the gospel was true, and that God may sometimes act above reason or soberness but never contrary to it.

²⁶ *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.*

Paul’s message was characterized by truth and soberness, because it was based on historical facts (such as the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus), things which were not done in a corner, but open to examination. The historical foundation of Paul’s message made it true.

²⁷ *King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.* ²⁸ *Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.* ²⁹ *And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.*

So, Paul asks Agrippa if he believes in the prophets and then says before you answer that question I know that you do. Paul’s question presented King Agrippa with a dilemma. If he said yes, Paul would press him to recognize that their words were fulfilled in Jesus; if he said no, he would be in trouble with the devout Jews, who accepted the message of the prophets as the very word of God. It is altogether proper to press people to make a decision about Christ. Paul was defending himself, but he could not resist such a great opportunity to present Christ as the answer to Agrippa’s need as well.

Then the king answered and said’ “Paul, you almost convinced me to become a Christian with that passionate defense. Agrippa’s answer was an evasion of Paul’s question and an answer to what he anticipated Paul’s next question to be. His point was that he would not be persuaded by such a brief statement. Agrippa

was no different from many today, for whom no amount of proof is enough. Their problem is not intellectual, but spiritual.

Paul then says, “ I wish that each of you were like me”. That all of you would receive Jesus and be transformed by His saving grace. I want you all to be just like me except for being in these chains. Paul revealed his heart’s desire here. Preaching Christ was more important than his own defense, and he spoke in hope of bringing his audience to faith.

³⁰ And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: ³¹ And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. ³² Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.

When Paul was finished, they all got up and went to speak privately to determine Paul’s fate. They unanimously agree that Paul is innocent and should be set free. Then Agrippa reminds them that Paul had asked to be heard by Caesar, which was his right as a Roman, so they are going to send him there.

Some people believe it was a bad thing, and that Paul was trusting in the power of the Roman legal system instead of in the power of God. They say that Paul might have been set free by Agrippa if he had not appealed to Caesar. However, we should see the fulfillment of God’s plan through all these events. By his appeal to Caesar, Paul will have the opportunity to preach to the Roman Emperor the way he had to Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, thus fulfilling the promise set back in Acts 9:15.

¹⁵ But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

But also remember what was said in Acts 23:11; *¹¹ And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.*

Where was Caesar? Rome. The outcome here was inevitable because God had a plan and that plan had to be fulfilled.

As faithful servants of Jesus our righteousness should mirror His, although imperfectly, and thus even the world must admit that that we have done nothing worthy of persecution. Just as in the case of Paul.

Let me ask you this question in closing. If you were brought to trial before men, could they find you guilty of no other crime than being a faithful follower of Jesus Christ?