

Paul The Defender

Acts 25-26

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Acts 25 needs to start with Acts 24:27. As I often do, I want you to back up one verse to the end of Acts 24. Luke tells us, “But after two years,” that was the length of time to date that Paul has been in chains from Jerusalem now to Caesarea, “Porcius Festus came into Felix’ room,” or place or office, “and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.”

This portion of Acts gets a little challenging to track with the names and the individuals that are going on. But as a broad overview, Paul has been arrested in Jerusalem and stood trial there. Then, the Jews were lying in wait to kill him (we’re going to see tonight that there was still a plot to kill Paul), so they transported him down to Caesarea. In Caesarea, he came before another trial where he stood before Felix and Drusilla. Now, Felix is passing off the scene and a man by the name of Festus comes on the scene. It says, “...and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound,” in Jerusalem. Festus inherits this problem. His first real trial that he had to deal with as governor was—what do I do with this prisoner, that is, Paul the Apostle—realizing (as we’re going to see tonight) that he was innocent. Paul is then going to appeal to Caesar. It put him in a real predicament. We see that Felix was a man pleaser, and the Bible says, “The fear of man bringeth a snare.” He was a politician. He wanted to please the Jews. He knew good and well that Paul was innocent, but he left him still in bonds two years.

Just a little point before we move into this fifteenth chapter; that is, God is not in a hurry. Have you ever discovered that? Did you ever discover, too, that God isn’t really on your timetable, that God has His own timetable? That’s okay, because He’s God, right? He’s God and we’re not. God knows what time to do what He wants to do and how He wants to do it; so our part is to learn to be patient, to trust, and to wait, all in faith—in faith, trusting God’s providential care, God’s timing, God’s will, that God is working in our life to bring about His purposes. God had promised Paul that he would actually go to Rome, and there he would be a witness. Paul is able to withstand all of these false accusations, all of these chains, all this imprisonment, and all this stuff that he’s dealing with when probably one of us would be freaking out. Paul had the promises of God, but we have the same thing. We have God’s promises, we have God’s presence, and we can deal with whatever comes into our lives.

I’m going to outline this whole two chapters for you tonight. It starts in Acts 25. Within the first 12 verses, Paul appeals to Caesar. This is a famous point in Paul’s life where he uses his Roman citizenship to make an appeal to go to Rome and stand trial before Caesar. Follow with me beginning in verse 1. “Now when Festus,” Festus, by the way, is the governor that came after Felix (and don’t get him confused, there’s Felix the rat not Felix the Cat) and Festus is a much better person, but again, he’s a politician and wants to be a men pleaser. Festus now comes into, “the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem.” He takes over and it’s time for an official visit, so he makes about the 60-mile trip from Caesarea. He makes the ascension up to Jerusalem, “Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews

informed him against Paul, and besought him, 3 And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him. 4 But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. 5 Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.” Again, I see God’s protection, God’s hand, and God’s care.

Festus goes up to Jerusalem to pay the official visit there. Again, after two whole years since these hostile Jews have apprehended and are trying to get Paul, they still have their hatred toward him. You know, it’s interesting that if you’re not willing to forgive someone, that hatred just grows stronger and stronger and stronger and stronger. It’s been two years and they still want to kill Paul—just this blind hatred that they had for Paul the Apostle. They desire that he would have him sent to Jerusalem, but notice again they are still trying to kill him, verse 3, “... laying wait in the way to kill him,” but thankfully Festus, a law-abiding politician, said, “No. He’s going to be tried there in Caesarea; and if you have something against him, then you can come down there and bring your accusations.” That’s the stage being set, verses 1-5, of the arrangement for the trial.

Then in verse 6, “And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought. 7 And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many grievous complaints against Paul,” but notice again, “which they could not prove.” There’s at least three trials that Paul goes through during this imprisonment. In every one of them, God, in His Word, is making it very clear that Paul was innocent of any crime. I believe that Luke was writing at this time also that he had an idea, too, that he wanted to make sure that the Roman government realized that Christianity need not be an illegal religion, that it need not be opposed by the Roman government, that Paul was not an insurrectionist, he wasn’t a law-breaker, he hadn’t violated any laws of the Jews, and he hadn’t really come against Rome in treason. Over and over again, the Holy Spirit, through Dr. Luke, is making it clear that Paul hasn’t done anything wrong. They don’t have any witnesses. They come and lay many grievous complaints against him...by the way, a little footnote. They don’t bring their attorney with them this time, Tertullus. Remember Tertullus? The guy that was flattering, buttering them up, and saying all those things that weren’t true? Well, they got rid of their lawyer and come on their own. They bring all these accusations, but (verse 7) they couldn’t prove them.

Verse 8, “While he answered for himself,” Paul gets to defend himself. He said, “Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all.” I want you to note the points Paul makes. Paul is very simple, very clear, very direct, and basically says, “Not true, not true, not true, not true. All these points they bring against me, none of them are true.” In verse 8 he says, “I haven’t violated the law of the Jews. I haven’t done anything against the temple; and against Caesar,” “have I offended any thing at all. 9 But Festus,” again, “willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me? 10 Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. 11 For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death,

I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them.” Here it is, “I appeal unto Caesar.”

Every Roman citizen—which Paul was—had the right of appeal and could appeal to the highest court, which would be Caesar himself. Paul says, “Look. I’m going to appeal,” and this would be Caesar Nero, a very wicked, very cruel man who eventually would begin a great outpour of wrath upon the Christians. Paul is appealing to Caesar. It was his right. He realized he was getting the run around. He realized he wasn’t getting a fair shake and he had that right. There are some Bible students that criticize Paul and feel that he is kind of in the flesh trying to take care of himself rather than trust in God, but I think not. Had not God said to Paul, “You’re going to go to Rome?” I believe, just like a flash, Paul saw his opportunity and realized, This is how God’s going to get me to Rome. He’s going to get me on the Roman government’s tab. They’re going to pay for my trip. They’re going to ship me in chains, but I’m going to have a free trip to Rome, and there I’m going to get to testify.

As far as Paul’s concerned here, his main focus is, in every opportunity that afforded him to speak before these kings and governors, to make the gospel known. We should have the same kind of mentality. If I’m in jail, I’m going to preach the gospel. If I’m being robbed by somebody, I’m going to tell them about Jesus.

You’ve heard about my kidnapping many years ago. I was actually kidnapped in Los Angeles at gunpoint. It was a carjacking, but they had us still in the car is what it was, and we had guns held to our head for a couple of hours threatening to kill us. I actually said to myself, no credit to me, but it was just like that grace that God gives you at that moment. I actually said, If they’re going to kill me, I’m going to tell ‘em about Jesus before they kill me. If they’re going to shoot me, I’m going to go down preaching. So, I started to preach, and I started share. The guy that had a gun stuck in my back, I said, “You know, it’s no accident that you kidnapped me.” He goes, “Oh really, why is that?” “Because I’m a Christian, and God wants you to know He loves you and He can forgive your sins and He can change your life.” Do you know what he said to me? He said, “My mom’s a Christian. She’s been telling me the same thing.” I actually said, “I told ya! I’m an answer to your mom’s prayers. You kidnapped me tonight because God wants you to know that He can forgive your sins,” and I started preaching. There were two of them, and the other guy with a gun in the car said, “Shut up or I’m gonna blow your brains out!” Well, I kept talking, and the guy that I was witnessing to starting arguing with him, “No, I want to hear this.” I thought, Well, maybe they’ll start fighting, and I’ll just slide outta here,” you know, which didn’t happen, but anyway they finally let us go, and we found help with the police department.

Basically Paul looked for every opportunity...if I’m in the hospital, I want to witness. If I’m in jail, I want to witness. If I’m at the grocery store, I want to witness. If I’m talking to a neighbor, I want to share the gospel. I want to be bold in defending the faith of Jesus Christ. So, it says they could not prove those things and Paul begins to answer. Festus said, “Will you go up to Jerusalem?” “No, I won’t go up to Jerusalem,” “I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong,” notice at the end of verse 10, “as thou very well knowest.” Festus, you know that I’m innocent. Again, this is a clear statement on

Paul's innocence, but he says, "If I have done anything wrong, I am not afraid to die," which is interesting in light of the death penalty. Paul is actually saying, "If I've done something worthy of death, then I am willing to die, but "I appeal unto Caesar." Again, he would be able to go to Caesar and be able to share the gospel before he would be released. Then it seems that he would be re-arrested, brought before Caesar, found guilty of crimes that he hadn't committed but against Rome, and Paul would be taken out and beheaded. He would be martyred for Jesus Christ.

Notice verse 12, "Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar shalt that go." Again, remember God always keeps His promises. Amen? God said he was going to go to Rome, now he's going to go to Rome. In verses 13-22, we see Paul perplexes Festus. Festus doesn't know now what to do with this guy because he knows he's innocent, but he has to send him to Caesar. When you send him to Caesar, you have to send charges with him. Caesar's going to wonder, Why did you send him to me? He's done nothing wrong. You really botched this. You should've let him go, and it's his first case, so he's like, "Ah man, great." Notice Festus and Agrippa come on the scene. Notice verse 13. "And after certain days king Agrippa," take note. I'll talk about him in just a sec, "and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus." We have Felix and Drusilla, now we have Festus, and now we have Agrippa and Bernice. They came to Caesarea to salute or to greet Festus. This is all just Roman officials, Roman governors, and they're greeting one another and going through all that kind of stuff.

Verse 14, so Agrippa shows up, "And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king," that's King Agrippa, "saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: 15 About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. 16 To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him. 17 Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. 18 Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed," so they came. They accused Paul. There wasn't anything there. "But had certain questions against him of their own superstition," and notice this, verse 19, "and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive." Now, this is going to get Agrippa's attention. He has a rich history with the Jews, and he knew about the story of Jesus, and this guy named Paul (verse 19) is affirming this guy named Jesus is alive.

All through these accounts of these trials, Paul is always affirming the resurrection of Jesus Christ which indicates that the resurrection is central to the message of Jesus Christ. It's central to Christianity. You take out the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and you don't have any Christian message. If Jesus died on the cross and was buried but didn't rise from the dead, what hope is there? Amen? So, Paul's always coming back to that resurrection.

It says in verse 20, "And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether

he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. 21 But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar. 22 Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself, To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him."

Go back with me for just a moment to verse 13. I don't want to get bogged down with the background on these individuals, and I by no means have it all retained in my brain. It's very confusing, so I want to make it as simple as I can. Who is this Agrippa and Bernice (verse 13) because when we get to Acts 26, we're going to have Paul sharing the gospel before this Agrippa and Bernice. He is known as Herod Agrippa II. He's the son of Herod Agrippa I—funny how that works, right? So, you have Herod Agrippa I, then Herod Agrippa II. Herod Agrippa I is the Herod in Acts 12 that actually had James beheaded with a sword, arrested Peter and threw him in prison, and was going to execute him the next day. He doesn't actually have a very good heritage; but he's in the line of the Herods, so he's what's called an Edomite—he's part Jewish and has a Jewish background. By the way, a little footnote is that this Herod Agrippa II is the last of the Herods in the Scriptures. This is the bye-bye Herods once and for all in the Scriptures. Before Herod Agrippa I, there was Herod Antipas. He was the man that killed John the Baptist. Remember John the Baptist was taken and brought into the prison and this young maiden did this fancy dance before him. He was drunk and told her, "I'll give you whatever you ask," and she asked for the head of John the Baptist—her mother advised her—on a platter. Herod was sad, but he had John beheaded.

Herod Antipas' father was Herod the Great. Herod the Great (which was the first Herod) was the king of Judea who had the babies slaughtered when Jesus was born. What an amazing kind of thing that Paul would actually have this opportunity to stand before this Herod Agrippa. He was an unscrupulous man. He was a very, very wicked, very cruel, very, very sinful and married to a very wicked, worldly woman. Her name was Bernice. Again, this is kind of freaky, but buckle your seatbelts—Bernice was his sister. This was an incestuous relationship, and she was married previously to an uncle. That marriage stopped, and she went to live with her brother, Agrippa. They were concerned about what kind of appearance so she left him and went to Rome. She became a mistress there with Titus Vespasianus. She came back to the land of Israel and ends up actually marrying her own full biological brother. She'd been married and divorced. It was an incestuous relationship. She was very young, but a very, very wicked woman. This is who Paul is going to stand in front of and share the gospel. This was like an official visit of Agrippa and Bernice.

Festus tells Agrippa, he knows he has a knowledge of Jewish things and says, "I've got this guy that's a real pain in the neck. His name is Paul. The Jews hate him and want to kill him. I've tried to get him to go there to be tried, but he appealed to Caesar. I don't know what I'm going to say. He's innocent, but I have to write a report and send it with him to Caesar. Would you listen to him and find out if you can give me any fuel for what I can put into the report in sending the report to Caesar?" He says, "Yeah, I'll check it out." Festus says, "Okay. Tomorrow you can hear him."

Notice as it begins in verse 23, we have Paul facing this royal group. It says, “And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice,” by the way, whenever this Agrippa II is mentioned in the book of Acts, Bernice is always right there by his side. It’s always Agrippa and Bernice. I think when he stands before the Great White Throne Judgment, it’ll be Agrippa and Bernice for all the sins that they’ve committed.

It says they came into this courtroom in Caesarea, and I love the King Jimmy here, “with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains,” these Roman soldiers, “and principal men of the city,” all the bigwigs and the politicians, “at Festus’ commandment Paul was brought forth.” You’ve got to get a mental picture. I wish I were an artist, and I could paint the picture of the contrast—all of the flamboyance and the pomp, the glamour and the glitz—of Agrippa and Bernice and Festus and all these royal people sitting on their throne with their big hats and their crowns and robes and everything.

It’s interesting that the Greek word translated “great pomp” there in verse 23 is the Greek word *phantasia* where we get our word fantasy or fantastic from. It indicates this kind of fantasy world, the play world; so Agrippa, no doubt, says, “Okay, I want everyone to get really decked out. I want you to put your best clothes on. Put on all your royal apparel.” He had his crown on, and they come in. The reason I point that out is because in front of him stood this humble man, Paul the Apostle. What a contrast! He’s been in chains for two years. In just a moment it says when Paul began to speak that he lifted his arm. He lifted up his hand, and I can see the chain hanging down from his arm. He’s got these ragged old clothes on, and he’s talking to this pompous royal group of people without any fear, without any hesitancy. He just boldly preaches the gospel. You know, if it were you or me, and we’re brought into that thing we would feel so intimidated. They would say, “You’re free to speak,” and we would say, “Me? Right now you want me to say something?” I’d probably want to run for my life!

Paul seizes this opportunity. Imagine that. Picture Paul. You know, we don’t have any physical description given to us of Paul in the Bible, but the only one we have in church history is that they believe that Paul was very short, baldheaded, a big crooked nose, a big unibrow—big bushy eyebrow—and bowlegs. He had difficulty seeing, so he’d be squinty-eyed. You see this little guy with his big, bushy eyebrows, big hooked nose, bald head, and I pray to God I’m not describing anybody in here right now this evening! If I am, God bless you. You look just like Paul the Apostle! Good for you! This always happens to me when I’m preaching. I’m talking away and I’m like trying not to look at certain people, you know. I have no one in mind here right now, okay? It’s like, “How has this happened to me?” Anyway, maybe I shouldn’t describe what Paul looked like, but I just wanted you to get the picture of these royalty on their throne and this humble man of God. What a contrast—this king, who could make any decision he wants, and this great apostle, who is in chains but he’s a representative of the Lord of all the earth! If God be for us, who can be against us! Amen? I love this picture, and if it hasn’t been painted on a canvas, it needs to be painted—Paul in chains before this pompous group of rulers. I think of Paul in the hands of God and God with Paul. Jesus actually said they’ll bring you before kings and those who are in authority. Don’t worry about what you’re going to say. It’ll be given you in that hour, that you’ll have a mouth speaking great wisdom. Certainly, that

will be true of Paul the Apostle.

Paul begins to preach. "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. 25 But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. 26 Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa," because Agrippa had a knowledge of Jewish things. Festus was lost. He didn't understand anything about the religion of the Jews. "...that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. 27 For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him." Chapter 26, there's no break, "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul," and I love this, "stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself," so I see Paul's chains as he speaks to this Agrippa crowd.

Verse 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." Again, picture the scene as Paul begins to preach.

The Bible tells us that we should, "...be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear," or respect and reverence. We should be ready, and I think that every Christian ought to actually plan ahead and be able to formulate sharing their testimony and telling other people the gospel. Be able to say what happened to you. It's a powerful way to witness for Jesus Christ, weaving your testimony and the gospel together and sharing that with others. If you're somewhere and somebody asks, "Why are you a Christian?" "Uhhhh, I don't know. Come to church on Sunday and hear Pastor John." You ought to be able to answer them, but to, "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you," right? We ought to do it with respect and as with reverence. That's Paul in this case.

Paul is going to actually go after Agrippa. When I say, "go after" Agrippa, I mean he's going to try to convert the dude. He's not just going to try to defend himself and get out of a tight spot. He's actually going to shoot him with the gospel. He's going for the heart. He's going to preach to this wicked king, and I like this because I believe that Paul had faith in the gospel. In Romans he said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power", the dynamis "of God...to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." I think we need to believe the same thing. We might go in there and say, "There ain't no way this wicked guy is going to get saved. He's married to his sister; he's a messed up dude. He's in power. He can't get saved." Sometimes we write people off, "Oh, they're too rich. They're too famous. They're too worldly. God can't save 'em." Sometimes we don't even pray for people because we think they're too far gone. Have you ever had somebody like that? "Lord, I'm...oh, never mind. They're too messed up." I like this, that Paul goes in there and says, "Wow! I've got an opportunity! I'm going to share the gospel with this King Agrippa and his wicked wife, Bernice."

Paul says (verse 2), "I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all these things...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." Paul was not required to speak to this group. He had already appealed to Caesar. Think about that. He already had appealed to Caesar. He could've said, "No. I'm not going to go before them," but he said, "Yeah, I'll talk to them," and used it for an opportunity.

In verses 4-11 we have Paul's pre-converted days. This is one of the most amazing recorded testimonies of Paul and him sharing the gospel in the whole book of Acts. He says, "My manner of life from my youth," that's where he started, and I believe that was about 13 years of age when he came from Tarsus to Jerusalem, "which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews," from the time I was a young man, I came from Tarsus to Jerusalem; and, by the way, he sat at the feet of Gamaliel, the most respected Jewish rabbi at the time. He says (verse 5), "Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion," note this statement, "I lived a Pharisee."

If you're taking notes, there's about five statements where Paul says, "I this, I that, I this, I that." I want to point them out to you, and we'll close with them. Notice he says in verse 5, "I lived a Pharisee," in other words, he was a very religious Jew, totally devoted to keeping the law. This is his pre-converted days. Read Philippians 3. He said, "But what things were gain to me," once I came to a saving knowledge of Christ, "I count them but dung," refuse, "that I may win Christ, and be found in him."

Notice verse 6, Paul says, "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers," so, "My views are just that of the promises God made to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob." Paul's not guilty of any heresy or sacrilege. "I'm just guilty of having 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." Notice as you go through this, too, how many times he actually personally and directly addresses King Agrippa; and that's why I said he's aiming at him.

Verse 8, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" Great question. "Why would you think it's a big deal that if God's in it that God would raise the dead?" That's the proof in the center of Christianity—the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He said, "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," or vote, "against them." We can't be sure, but may Bible students believe that this statement of Paul, "I gave my voice against them," was an official vote casting and that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin. If he were a member of the Sanhedrin, it would indicate that he was married, which is an interesting little insight there. Again, we can't be absolutely sure whether or not this is an official casting of a vote or just Paul giving his consent as he was consenting to the death of Stephen, but he's recounting his pre-converted days.

Verse 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." Stop there. That's Paul's BC or before Christ days. This must've actually bothered Paul, but God had forgiven all of his sins. You know, no matter how sinful you are, no matter how wicked you are, when you come to Jesus Christ and you trust Him as your Savior, all of your sins are forgiven. Amen? They have all been washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, and God has forgiven us. He separates us from our sin. Paul was free, just as we are forgiven for our sinful past. Maybe you were anti-Christian before you were saved and God saved you. By the way, this is a testament to if God can save Saul of Tarsus, God can save anybody. Amen? You never know what God can do. Paul says, "I gave my vote against him. I punished them. I followed them to strange cities. I caused them to blaspheme, and I was mad against them and persecuted them," but God saved him.

Beginning in verses 12-18, Paul describes his conversion, so pre-conversion and now conversion. "Whereupon as I went to Damascus," we read about that in Acts 9, "with authority and commission from the chief priests, 13 At midday," high noon, "O king," again, he's aiming at the king, "I saw in the way a light," the first statement as I pointed out, "I lived a Pharisee" (verse 5), here's his second statement describing his testimony, "I saw a light." I love that! He says, "I was Pharisee," then, "I saw the light." He probably started singing, I saw the light, I saw the light. That's where that song comes from, by the way. So, it's high noon and yet the brightness of the Lord's presence. This is none other than Jesus Christ coming to Saul on the road to Damascus, this famous conversion. "...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," that's the third statement. "I lived a Pharisee. I saw a light," and now he says, "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," goads. "And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. 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 has 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," that's what the Lord had told Paul. "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."

Paul here is describing his pre-conversion. His conversion on the road to Damascus—"I saw a light; I heard a voice." Saul is radically converted to Jesus Christ. I love verse 18. It's such a great description of the gospel and what Christ does in a person's life. It's a picture of all true Christians and their conversion. When you're saved, your eyes are open. Remember that when you got born again? All of the sudden you had new eyes. You actually saw spiritual realities. You saw things that you didn't see before. Before your conversion, you're just a natural man or natural, unregenerated individual sinner. You don't see spiritual realities. Then, you're born of the Spirit and all of the sudden you begin to see things that you never saw before. That's why now, when you read the Bible, it's alive. It's real to you. I grew up in church and heard the Bible all my life, but it wasn't until I was born again that I really began to see the

Lord in His Word and see and understand spiritual things.

Secondly, notice in verse 18, "...turn them from darkness to light," I love that! Again, this is a picture of conversion. You're eyes are open. You're taken out of darkness—the kingdom of satan—you're translated into light, and he describes it (verse 18), "and from the power of Satan unto God," so you are a child of satan, now you're a child of God. He says, fourthly, "that they may receive forgiveness of sins," and fifthly, "and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." There's so much in this one verse. Our eyes are opened. We're turned from darkness to light. We're freed from the power of satan and come into the kingdom of God. We receive the forgiveness of our sins, and we get an inheritance among them which are sanctified or set apart by God.

Now Paul moves (verses 19-23) to after his conversion. So, we have pre-conversion, conversion, and now after his conversion. "Whereupon, O king Agrippa," again, notice he's aiming at Agrippa, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision," here's the fourth statement he makes, "I was not disobedient." "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," right, "for repentance," or fitting of their repentance. So, they turn from their sin. They trust in God, and then their life is changed and they do works worthy of their conversion or their repentance and faith.

Notice verse 21, "For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. 22 Having therefore obtained help of God," and I love that! He saw the hand of God protecting him. You know, the Bible says, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" God was watching out for him. He says, "I continue unto this day," this is his fifth statement, "I continue until this day." What did he do? "...witnessing both to small and great," or the insignificant and the worldly standards of greatness, "saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come." I want you to notice when Paul was preaching to these people, he's saying, "All I've been testifying is what the prophets and Moses had spoken of," so Christianity is a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets and of Moses, and he was talking about the hope that was given to our fathers earlier.

Notice the gospel in verse 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." I can't read this without, "Go, Paul!" If I were standing in the room I would be like, "Whoa! Go for it, Brother!" You've got all these kings sitting on their thrones, all these politicians and Roman authorities, all these people, and Paul is laying it on them. He's given an opportunity to defend himself, but what does he do? He defends the gospel. It's not about him. It's about the gospel. What a great statement. I want you to take note of it in verse 23.

The word "Christ" is the New Testament for Messiah. The word "Christ" in the Old Testament would be Messiah. It's Meshiaak. It means the anointed one. So, Jesus is the Christ or the Messiah is what it's saying. He's saying that Messiah should suffer. This is something that the Jews have always rejected here. They don't understand or see, their eyes are blinded. One of

the most powerful ways to share the gospel with a Jewish person is to turn to Isaiah 53 in the Old Testament. They don't know what to do with it. It's clearly talking about Messiah, and their Messiah is suffering and dying. Of course, one of the arguments that Jesus is not the Messiah for the Jews today is He died, He suffered, and He was crucified by the Romans. Our Messiah is going to be a conquering ruling deliverer. We say, "Yeah! In the Second Coming when He comes back in the Second Coming." They don't really see this suffering picture of Messiah, but Paul made it very clearly that He should suffer, that He should be the first to rise from the dead. So, you have His death by crucifixion, the cross, and then you have the resurrection (verse 23), "he should rise from the dead." That's the gospel. Jesus died for your sins. Jesus was buried, and Jesus rose again from the dead. Paul is preaching the gospel—the death and resurrection of Christ.

Notice verse 24, "And as he thus spake for himself, Festus," he's been sitting here quiet and hasn't said anything. He's wanting Agrippa to get all the information he can, but Festus is listening. Festus is rolling his eyes, freaking out, wondering, "I don't have a clue what Paul's talking about," and Festus blurts out, notice in verse 24, "with a loud voice," some translations have shouting, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." Basically, he's saying, "You're a nut job, Dude! You are out of your mind! The lights are on, but nobody's home!" Notice how he points out that Paul was a scholar, "much learning doth make thee mad," much learning has made you crazy! It's interesting. Paul was a real student. Paul couldn't be supplied with enough books, he was so hungry for knowledge; but, you know, it's not the first time that God's people have been called crazy, right?

Don't be freaked out if the world says you're crazy. "Hey, I believe in Jesus!" "You crazy?! Did you lose your marbles? How stupid could that be?" "I believe in the resurrection." "Oh, the resurrection!" "I believe the Bible is the Word of God." "Awww, you can't believe that!" Do you know they said this about Jesus? They said He was crazy and that He lost His mind. They said this about Paul. So, if they say this about you, you're in good company. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad. I love that Festus just blurts out...and by the way, this is a preacher's worst nightmare. To be in the middle of a sermon, you're winding down. You're giving an invitation and someone stands up and says, "You're crazy! Much learning has made you mad!" The ushers have to carry him out—no ushers to carry Festus out, he's a Roman authority. Interesting though, "...much learning doth make thee mad," Paul, you're crazy.

In verse 25, "But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. 26 For the king knoweth of these things," now he turns it back away from Festus back to the king, "the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things," that is, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, even His life and ministry, "are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner." That points out the historicity of the death, burial, and the ministry of Jesus Christ. This is a fact of history. This is an historic fact. The preaching of the gospel is actually preaching what actually happened in history—Jesus came. Jesus lived. Jesus died. Jesus was buried. Jesus rose, and Jesus lives. You know these facts. Then he says, "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. 30 And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up,” so this is the end of the hearing.

This really wasn't an official hearing. It was just Agrippa listening to Paul so that maybe Festus would have some information of what to write when he sent the charges back to Caesar Nero that he had appealed to, and Paul didn't even have to go to this hearing. So, Agrippa is kind of like, “Whoa! Dude! You're trying to make me a Christian?” After that, he stood up. It was over, and they conferred among themselves saying privately (verse 31), “This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds,” I've highlighted that in my Bible. “Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty,” he could've been freed and let go, “If he had not appealed unto Caesar,” and you're tempted to say, “Oh, man! Paul, you blew it! You could be freed right now if you hadn't appealed to Caesar,” but God is in control. Amen? Man purposes but God has His plan that cannot be thwarted.

I love this interesting statement by Agrippa, go back to it in verse 28, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” Now, if you've studied this and you've gone through it before, you know the interesting insights that commentaries and Bible students have. We don't really know in what sense Agrippa was saying this. Was it sarcasm? “You think you're going to convert me?! Are you trying to convert me? Dude! Lighten up!” I mean was it that kind of sarcastic kind of a, “You think you're going to convert me? No way, Jose!” (That would be a free-modern translation.) Or, maybe he was ticked off, “You trying to make me a Christian?!” Have you ever been witnessing to somebody and they got mad at you? “Hey, God loves you and he could forgive your...” “I don't want to hear that junk!” “But, forgive me.” They actually get mad at you because you're telling them that God can forgive their sins. They don't want to hear that. Or, maybe he was sincere. I don't know. Some feel that he was actually saying it this way, “You almost got me, Paul. You almost got me.” What an interesting thought, but guess what? Almost is not good enough.

I love what Charles Haddon Spurgeon said. He said, “Almost persuaded to be a Christian is like a man who is almost pardoned, but he was hanged; like the man who was almost rescued, but he was burnt in the house. A man that is almost saved is damned.” I like that. How many times have you known people, “They're almost a Christian,” sometimes, “Well, I've got this friend I'm witnessing to. He's just about to get saved.” Well, that's great, but you never know what's going on in someone's heart. Almost isn't saved. Maybe you're here tonight and you're “almost” a Christian. Maybe you're “almost” saved. Almost is lost. Almost is damned for all eternity. Almost is not going to heaven. Jesus told Nicodemus, “You must be born again,” to see the kingdom of heaven. Amen?

So, Agrippa and Bernice, no indication that they ever believed in Jesus Christ. 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,” I don't wish that on anybody. This is kind of a bummer.

Now, Paul made these five statements I want to mention again. In Acts 26:5 he said, "I lived a Pharisee." Paul was religious, but he was lost. It's not enough to just be religious and be sincere, you must have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and that's what happened to him on the road to Damascus in Acts 26:13, "I saw...a light." He saw the Lord Jesus in all of His glory. Thirdly, he said, "I heard a voice." When you're converted, the Spirit of God is speaking to your heart that you need to believe and trust in Jesus Christ, and then you respond and you hear God's voice. Fourthly, he says, "I was not disobedient," verse 19. That's what it means to be saved. You hear God's voice, you turn from your sin, and you trust Jesus as your Savior. Lastly, in verse 22, Paul said, "I continue unto this day." No more hearings, no more trials, Paul's going to be put on a boat and he's going to be shipped to Rome. There he is going to stand trial before Caesar, but what a great man. What an amazing man. What a bold man who preached the gospel.

Maybe you're here tonight, maybe you're religious, but you're not saved. Maybe you haven't seen the light. Maybe you haven't been taken out of darkness. Maybe you haven't been delivered from the power of satan. Maybe you haven't yet heard His voice. Maybe you haven't yet been forgiven of your sins, and that's your great need tonight. Let's bow our heads in a word of prayer.