

Paul is so great though—verse 2.

v. 2 “In regard to all the things of which I am being accused by the Jews, I have considered myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to be making my defense before you today;

“In regard to all the things of which I am being accused by the Jews, I have considered myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to be making my defense before you today;”

What’s so great about that? There’s no resentment and no bitterness in his heart. He’s been in prison for two years—longer than he’d ever dreamed possible. Felix didn’t make a decision and Festus hasn’t made one yet and he’s still there.

We can tell the quality of a person when they’re going through real rough times if they still have joy. And they are consistent in that joy and they rise above resentment and bitterness.

He says, “I feel fortunate to have the privilege of being here and having a chance to make my defense before you today.”

In verse 3 he gives the reason.

v. 3 because you are especially expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I am begging you to listen to me patiently.

“because you are especially expert in all customs and

questions among the Jews; therefore I am begging you to listen to me patiently.”

The Herods knew all about Judaism and about Jewish traditions and they knew about the Law. He had an advantage over Festus in that Festus is of a Roman background so he doesn't know a lot of this. And he's kind of like a fish out of water representing the Roman government in this territory as a governor.

But Herod has grown up here. He's lived with his great granddaddy seeing to it that little babies were killed and he knows about John the Baptist and about James. He had to be touched by those decisions that were made and the conversations in his household over and over again about this Jesus of Nazareth and these Christians who are constantly coming around and wanting to evangelize.

That's basically the statement that Paul made to Felix though when he spoke to him back in Acts 24. He says:

Acts 24:10

... “I know that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense.”

But here for Herod Agrippa II he says, “You are an expert and I really want you to listen as I tell my story.”

So in the opening statements he sets the stage for what he's

getting ready to say—verse 4.

v. 4 So then, all Jews have known my manner of life from youth up, which was from the beginning among my own nation in Jerusalem;

“So then, all Jews have known my manner of life from youth up, which was from the beginning among my own nation in Jerusalem;”

We have the statement “So then,”—that’s transitional. The preliminaries are taken care of and the introduction of the speech has been given. The focus is no longer on Agrippa, now it’s on the content of his message.

And when we start to give our witness, where do we start? We start with our background. We start with our early years. He says, “You know, everybody knows about my manner of life in the city of Jerusalem where from my youth I grew up there.”

And verse 5 says:

v. 5 since they are knowing about me for a long time previously, if they would be willing to be bearing testimony, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.

“since they are knowing about me for a long time previously, if they would be willing to be bearing testimony, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.”

“It would be alright if a few of these fellas here in the audience who are listening today would like to just bear testimony to my manner of life. I would like for them to share how I lived and how I grew up.”

Want a little bit of an indication of that? In Galatians he talks about it:

Galatians 1:13, 14

You’ve heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

And then in Philippians it comes out too:

Philippians 3:5, 6

I was circumcised the eighth day, of the nation Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness which is in the Law, I was found blameless.

“I mean, I really spent myself in Judaism.”

And so when he comes down to verse 6, he moves from the PAST to the PRESENT.

In verses 4 and 5 he talks about his background and his youth. And at verse 6 he transitions to the present circumstance.

v. 6 And now I am standing here being judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers;

“And now I am standing here being judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers;”

Now that sounds kind of nebulous doesn't it? What is the hope of God promised to our fathers? The hope was the resurrection from the dead. Everybody hopes that they're going to be raised from the dead.

So many have a fear of dying and not being raised from the dead. And we know the evil one can just do a number on us along that line as we get older and think about those things. We forget that Jesus said to Martha after the death of Lazarus: “I am the resurrection and the life. And he who believes in me, even if he dies. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (ref. John 11:25-27)

And so the message is there. And this is “the hope of the fathers” that's being given.

v. 7 [the promise] to which our twelve tribes are hoping to attain, earnestly night and day rendering sacred

service to God. Concerning this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews.

“[the promise] to which our twelve tribes are hoping to attain, earnestly night and day rendering sacred service to God. Concerning this hope, O King, I am being accused by the Jews.”

Now the FOCUS again in his whole message is on the RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD.

v. 8 Why is it being judged by you all as incredible if God is raising the dead?

“Why is it being judged by you all as incredible if God is raising the dead?”

There is the KEY STATEMENT in the sermon. And he lays it on them with a QUESTION. Notice that he is a southerner. That ought to make us feel so good inside to realize that he is because he says, “Why is it being judged by YOU ALL as incredible...”

Why is it such a big deal “if God is raising the dead?”

That’s the message. Now Paul could have stopped right here in his message and he could have said, “You know, when I was in Troaz, there was a young boy sitting up on the third story window and I talked too long and he fell out and was dead. And I went downstairs, fell on him and he rose from the dead!

I've actually seen people who have died and had their lives restored."

But the whole focus here is on Jesus Christ. And he asks him head on: "Why do y'all consider it so incredible? I mean, if God is the author of life, He can be the taker of life and the giver of life. Why can He not raise someone from the dead?"

And of course, he could also sight the illustration of Lazarus if he wanted to—even during the ministry of Christ—and several others who were restored to life from the dead.

v. 9 So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

"So then, I thought to myself I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth."

He moves from the RESURRECTION to his RESPONSE to it.

Initially when he heard that—that Jesus had risen from the dead—he says, "Well, my response to that is I've got to do as many things hostile to the name of"—WHO?—"Jesus of Nazareth."

This is the first time he brings Jesus into his message. He's been skirting around the perimeters in order to get to the place where he has their ear and then he'll mention the name.

And now "Jesus of Nazareth" comes into the picture. He

knows that when he mentions “Jesus of Nazareth” and when he mentions Gentiles, he’s on the verge of losing it in a Jewish audience. And so he’s wise as a serpent, harmless as a dove. He builds this whole thing up to the resurrection and then he brings Jesus into it. And how does he do it? He does it exactly the way they feel and why they’re there.

They don’t like Jesus and they don’t like Christians! And that’s why they don’t like Paul! And so he’s saying: “Hey you guys, listen, I once was like you. When I first heard that, my first response was persecution. Let’s kill them!”

Verse 10—and he gives his record of that.

v. 10 Which also I did in Jerusalem; and many of the saints I locked up in prisons, having received the authority from the chief priests, when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them.

“Which also I did in Jerusalem; and many of the saints I locked up in prisons, having received the authority from the chief priests, when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them.”

Paul says, “Well I can tell you. Listen, when Christians came before me I locked them up. And when it came time to decide whether they were going to die or to live, I cast my vote against them so they’d die.”

When Paul died and went to heaven, there were probably

some Christians up there who couldn't believe he was there? And they were saying, "What in the world happened to you? The last thing I remember is you were putting it to us! And here you are!"

We're really going to be surprised when we get to glory and we see who's there. God is not limited in His amazing grace. And Paul's spending eternity with these people who he voted against earlier in his life.

And then verse 11 says:

v. 11 And often in all the synagogues while punishing them, I was trying to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I was pursuing them even to foreign cities.

"And often in all the synagogues while punishing them, I was trying to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I was pursuing them even to foreign cities."

We can see 3 F's of his persecution:

1. FORCING,
2. FURIOUS and
3. FOLLOWING them.

First, he "forced them." He "forced them to blaspheme" and

forsake the name of Christ. They wouldn't do that so he'd get furious and he'd do something to them as he was "furiously enraged at them." And then he hated them so much that he literally followed them in their tracks "to foreign cities."

He's going to take it around now and he's going to bring this into his testimony. But he set the stage perfectly.

v. 12 Being engaged in these things, while I was proceeding to Damascus with authority and a commission from the chief priests,

"Being engaged in these things,"

"While I was doing all this, just like you fellas."

"while I was proceeding to Damascus with authority and a commission from the chief priests,"

"While I was doing all this, one day I got some letters from the chief priests to go north 108 miles to get some Christians up there. I was going to be a committee of one to see to it that Christianity didn't spread any further than Damascus. We're going to get them! So I went after them. And it was a long trip up there—108 miles."

And on the sixth day that he was traveling, at about noon, verse 13 says:

v. 13 at midday, O King, I saw along the road a light from heaven above the brilliance of the sun, shining all around me and those who were travelling with me.

“at midday, O King, I saw along the road a light from heaven above the brilliance of the sun, shining all around me and those who were travelling with me.”

Isn't that great? What he does is he brings the guy right into his hands and he describes that he's just like him. He believes in the hope of the fathers. He was hateful, furious and he was following these Christians to get them. And now comes the time to weave in a testimony. “This is what happened to me sir, while I was making that trip about noon, I saw this great light.”

It's from PERSECUTION to PERSONAL PRESENCE in his testimony. It all hinges right there at midday in verse 13.

Hasn't that been good? He handled all the preliminaries and spoke of his past heritage. He handled the issue of the resurrection and his own attitude of persecution.

There are so many Christians who are ineffective in their witness because they don't take time to do this. They feel like if they're going to be a real witness for the Lord, they just have to lay it on them. And they feel no responsibility of building a bridge and laying groundwork in order to ensure fruitfulness from their labor.

And God means for us as believers to live in the world of these people—not in the literal sense. But live in their world in the sense that we understand where they’re coming from, what they’re thinking, what their needs are, so that we can take the Word of God and apply it to their situation, having earned the right to speak to them.

And that’s exactly what this man’s doing. He really wants to get Agrippa into God’s family, and so he’s doing a great job. And right here he’s demonstrating the turning point in his life.

v. 14 And when we fell to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to be kicking against the goads.’

“And when we fell to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to be kicking against the goads.””

It’s now from the LIGHT that hit him to the LIP that speaks to him.

And this voice that speaks to him asks a QUESTION and then makes a STATEMENT.

QUESTION: “why are you persecuting me?”

There are some who are hurting and think nobody cares. Well here's the verse to tell us that somebody does care.

Paul was persecuting Christians but the Lord was hurt because He's intimately related with each of us. And when we weep, He weeps. When we hurt, He hurts. He is intimately involved in each of our lives. And He's saying, "you're persecuting Me."

This has been the hardest part of the book of Acts. This testimony is given **THREE TIMES**:

1. We studied it before Felix in a different way.
2. It is also recorded historically in Acts 9.
3. But when we come to Acts 26, there is a statement that occurs here that doesn't occur in the other two witnesses.

And guess what that phrase is?

"It is hard for you to be kicking against the goads."

Now why does he add that statement here in his testimony and it's left out in the testimony before Felix and it's not in the record in Acts 9?

Whenever we give a testimony or a witness, there are certain things that we say because we know our audience. And there are certain things we give on that occasion that we leave out

on other occasions. He is a smart man.

And so to relate to Agrippa—especially Agrippa—he adds the statement that he’s not used before: “It is hard for you to be kicking against the goads.”

Now what is a goad? In order to get the chariot horses to cooperate, they fixed a board with a lot of wooden spikes on it right down at about ankle level for the horses. And these sharp spikes were mounted on the front of the chariot.

When a horse decided it was going to kick up its heels, it got lacerated real badly because it kicked into the spikes. And they didn’t kick into it too many times if they were a smart horse. They were obedient and they cooperated. They didn’t keep kicking and wounding themselves.

Now it’s kind of like an electric fence. We touch it and then we don’t touch it anymore. Or a cattle prod—it hits us once and we don’t want to mess with it anymore.

Now why does Paul add that here? If there was ever a guy that needed it, it was Agrippa. If he is not a man who’s living it his way and “kicking against the goads” in every area of his life, there’s not a man who qualifies more for hearing a statement like this.

Frank Sinatra said: “I did it my way!” And so did Agrippa.

“If I want to marry my sister, I’ll marry my sister and live in

incest. And if I want to do this, I'll do this. I am the Herod. I'll do what I want to do when I want to do it! And nobody's going to tell me anything."

And so he chooses here to add it and to give Agrippa something to really think about because he knows about the spikes on the front of the chariots and what they do to lacerate a horse that's kicking against it. And it's almost like Agrippa's hearing it, "I'm kicking against the spikes and I'm really getting ticked," while he's at this point in the message.

v. 15 And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said: 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.'

"And I said, "Who are you, Lord?" And the Lord said: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."

The question moves from "Why are you persecuting Me?" in response by Paul to "Who."

"Who are you, Lord?"

And now he adds it altogether. "And the Lord said: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."

"You're hurting Jesus when you persecute Christians."

v. 16 But arise and stand upon your feet; for this purpose I appeared to you, to appoint you a

minister and a witness both to the things you saw and to the things in which I will appear to you;

“But arise and stand upon your feet; for this purpose I appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness both to the things you saw and to the things in which I will appear to you;”

The first thing the Lord says is “arise...stand on your feet.”

“You’re going to be a servant and a speaker. You’re going to be ‘a minister’ for Me and you’re going to be ‘a witness’—‘to the things in which I will appear to you.’”

Now notice something else is left out of his testimony here? What? He doesn’t mention his blindness does he? And he doesn’t mention Ananias either. It doesn’t fit here. It’s just not necessary to have that in this particular witness.

It helped him before the Jewish audience when he was making his defense before Felix and the lawyer Tertullus in the earlier deal, so he uses it. But here he drops it out.

But Paul leaves some things out and he adds some things that he needs in order to be a good witness here.

“I’m going to be:”

v. 17 delivering you from the [Jewish] people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you;

“delivering you from the [Jewish] people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you;”

And there comes that word. That threw some red flags in the audience naturally. But he’s going to run the risk.

v. 18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.’

“to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God,”—Oh wow! That’s the Gospel.

To come out of the realm of darkness:

2 Corinthians 4:4

In whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not...

John 3:19-21

This is the condemnation, light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil...

Come out of “darkness to light,” but come out of “the dominion of Satan to [the dominion of] God.” WHY?

“in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified”—HOW?—“by faith in Me.”“

Coming to the light for the purpose of experiencing forgiveness and to be brought into the light and a relationship. And it all happens how? SINGLE CONDITION—“by faith” in Jesus Christ.

M. Scott Peck in his book *People of the Lie* talks about evil people and darkness:

(People of the Lie: The Hope of Healing Human Evil by M. Scott Peck)

I have noted how difficult it is to examine evil people in depth, because it is their nature to avoid the light. Denying their imperfection, the evil flee both self-examination and any situation in which they might be closely examined by others. (source unknown)

Isn't that interesting? He finds in his psychotherapy that evil people just don't want to come and see how it really is. They would rather live in the realm of make-believe and darkness rather than come to the truth and get it right.

And Paul said, “This is my message and it happens by faith in

the Lord Jesus Christ.”

And we can almost hear Paul saying, “Okay Agrippa, what’s holding you back? Why don’t you get on with this thing and be a person who also has been sanctified by faith in Me?”

Understand the word “sanctified?” That means to be made holy. It means to be set apart for God’s usefulness.

And now the apostle has borne his witness. He turns to Agrippa. And it’s like, he picks somebody out in the audience and talks to them. All the other people in the audience are listening. But he focuses on old Agrippa right now because he’s really putting the message home.

v. 19 Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not become disobedient to the heavenly vision,

“Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not become disobedient to the heavenly vision,”

v. 20 but I was declaring both to those in Damascus first and in Jerusalem and in all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles that they should be repenting and turning to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.

“but I was declaring both to those in Damascus first and in Jerusalem and in all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles that they should be repenting and turning to God, performing

deeds appropriate to repentance.”

They are coming out of darkness into light, out of the dominion of Satan to the dominion of God. As a result of their repentance, it is revealed that they are changed people. And their good deeds demonstrate it. The way they live, the way they love and the way they look at life, are the good deeds that are spoken of here.

v. 21 On account of these things the Jews, having seized me in the temple, were attempting to put me to death.

“On account of these things the Jews, having seized me in the temple, were attempting to put me to death.”

Now is that the truth? Remember when they got him in the temple they brought him outside the door? And if C.L. and the 200 soldiers hadn't gotten there, he'd have been wiped out. They were ready to kill him. And he tells the truth.

He said this is what they wanted to do.

v. 22 Therefore, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, saying nothing except the things which the Prophets and Moses said are going to be taking place;

“Therefore, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day

testifying both to the small and the great,”—to the blue collars and the white collars, whoever will listen—“saying nothing except the things which the Prophets and Moses said are going to be taking place;”

v. 23 whether the Christ is subject to suffering, whether He being the first to arise from the dead is about to be proclaiming light to the people and to the Gentiles.”

“whether the Christ is subject to suffering, whether He being the first to arise from the dead is about to be proclaiming light to the people and to the Gentiles.”

That’s exactly what Jesus said in Luke 24 in His resurrected body:

Luke 24:44-47

He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead on the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations—beginning from Jerusalem.

There are THREE THINGS that Paul focuses on in his whole

ministry:

1. The suffering and death of Messiah—he probably used Isaiah 53 for that.
2. And the resurrection from the dead—he used Psalm 16.
3. And the proclamation of this light to the world—he gave the message that Christ came as that light to the Gentiles.

v. 24 And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus in a loud voice is saying: “Paul, you are out of your mind! Your vast learning is turning you mad.”

“And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus in a loud voice is saying: ‘Paul, you are out of your mind! Your vast learning is turning you mad.’”

Would that unnerve us a tad if we were giving our great defense and all of a sudden the governor pipes up and says, “You’ve gone mad! You’re out of your tree man! Your learning has driven you crazy! You’ve gone bananas!”

How would we handle that?

This word “out of your mind” is the very same word in Acts 12. Remember when the Christians are praying that Peter will get out of prison? And Peter gets out of prison and he comes and knocks at the gate and the little maid goes and answers

the door and she comes back and says, “Y’all quit praying! The answer’s outside the gate!” And what did the Christians say? “You’re out of your mind!” (see Acts 12:15)

Do these Christians in the early church go to prayer meetings if God’s going to give the answer? At least they’d recognize it. But they’re not any different than us.

“You’re out of your mind!”

What happens when something like that happens in an audience? It’s the Spirit of God isn’t it? It’s getting to him. That’s exactly what happened to Felix, remember?

Felix and Drusilla had Paul over for dinner that night and they were talking about what? Righteousness, self-control and judgment. And what happened to Felix? He started getting queasy. And he says, “I’ll hear you again another time on this matter.” So he dismisses them.

And here it’s getting to Festus. He’s getting under conviction. And what do we do when we get under conviction? We notice we usually strike out at the PERSON rather than the PROBLEM. And so kill the prophet! Make him look bad! We are the problem! Totally indifferent toward the needs of others—it’s just something wrong with us.

Now listen, can we learn from our past mistakes and do a better job the next time? Now let’s just pretend that this happened in the Sanhedrin. What would Paul say at this

time?

“Listen you white-washed wall, I’m not out of my mind! I’m more sane than you are! Now sit down and let me finish my talk!”

Remember he did that—really lost it? But we can tell the character of a man when he’s teachable and when he learns his lesson and he does it better the next time.

This is the nature of a choleric. To have a problem with the temper. He could have really lost it right here by making this a dialogue between him and Festus and never gotten back to Agrippa. This guy demonstrates caring compassion in this confrontation with him.

He comes back to him in a very soft and gentle way, knowing that everybody in the audience is watching him. How he’s going to respond since the guy just clobbered him.

v. 25 But Paul is saying: “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am declaring boldly words of truth and soundness of mind.

“Paul is saying:”—look at this! Oh it’s great isn’t it?

“I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus,”—every politician loves to be addressed with that title—“but I am declaring boldly words of truth and soundness of mind.”

He doesn't attack Festus by saying, "You're the one that's out of your mind not me."

No, he says, "I'm just declaring boldly the words of truth out of soundness of mind."

In the Bible there are a lot of times people who are really used by God come across with a real firm, good response. And that's exactly what he does here.

For instance, Elijah, when he meets Ahab after the famine has been going on for three and a half years. Remember that? And he comes—in 1 Kings 18—and sees Ahab again for the first time.

1 Kings 18:17, 18

And it came about when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" And he said, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and you have followed the Baals."

He just looks the king in the face and says, "It ain't here boy. The ball's in your court because of what y'all did." And he's not intimidated.

Now to show us the miracle of what we have just witnessed in that verse, let's get behind the curtain of the apostle on another occasion.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

When I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power...

He said, “When I came to y’all I was scared! My knees were knocking and I was trembling! But not now—some things have happened.”

1 Peter 3:15

Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is within you.

He doesn't lose his cool. He's there and he handles it beautifully and has nothing to say of personal attack upon Festus. And that put a lot of points in his column.

v. 26 For the king is knowing about these things, before whom I also am speaking freely, for I am persuaded that none of these things is hidden from him; for this has not been done in a corner.

“And the king is knowing about these things,”

See what happens? He first deals with Festus because Festus has made a remark and he’s interrupted his speech. So he has to deal with that right now because everybody’s watching him to see what kind of a deal he’s going to do with Festus.

He knows that he won it with Festus so we get right back to the king. And in verse 26 he comes back to Agrippa.

“For the king is knowing about these things, before whom I also am speaking freely, I am persuaded that none of these things is hidden from him; for this has not been done in a corner.”

He’s the great grandson of Herod the Great who wanted to kill the babies. And Herod Antipas, his grandfather, was ruling all during the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. And his dad has certainly been involved in the function of the early church.

And this man knows all about these things!

And look at what he does. Talk about putting pressure on a guy. He looks right at Agrippa and he asks him a question.

v. 27 King Agrippa, are you believing the Prophets? I am knowing that you are believing.”

“King Agrippa, are you believing the Prophets?”

He puts it on him! If he says no, it's going to embarrass him to death. And if he says yes, Paul has a victory. So he has the guy on the horns of a dilemma. And he wants him to say it in the right way so he asks it with a real desire.

Sometimes we ask a question in a way that we'll get a yes. Or we say it in such a way so we'll get a no. That's what he's doing.

“King Agrippa, are you believing the Prophets?”

And then right afterwards he says:

“I am knowing that you are believing.”

This passage does not teach that Agrippa is so impressed with Paul's message he says, “Oh I'm under such deep conviction! I'm almost ready to become a Christian!” And so let's sing 16 verses of “Almost Persuaded.”

That's not true. Agrippa is cynical here. He's just as bad as Festus, and just as raunchy as Felix.

v. 28 And Agrippa is saying to Paul: “In a short time you are persuading me in order to make me a Christian.”

“And Agrippa is saying to Paul:”—and he's saying it very cynically—“In a short time you are persuading me in order to make me a Christian.”

What does he do with that statement and question? He fogs the whole thing. He doesn't answer Paul's question. He doesn't say, "No, I don't believe in the prophets" or "Yes, I believe in the prophets." He turns the whole thing on himself personally and he says, "You think you're going to make me a Christian by these few statements?"

He can already see where Paul's heading to press home the truth of the resurrection of Christ. And he doesn't answer it.

We just know he's under deep conviction just as bad as Festus is. And as they sit there, they're just like Felix and his sister Drusilla. They were scared when righteousness, self-control and judgment shook them up.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the same thing happened to that other great official back in Acts 8, the Ethiopian eunuch, who responded to Jesus Christ in Acts 8—if these guys had done the same? Listen to this:

Acts 8:36-39

And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch saw him no more, but went on his way rejoicing.

The sad thing is none of these guys responded. Felix and Drusilla didn't. Festus didn't, and neither did Agrippa and Bernice. They're walking out unchanged.

Now Paul comes back to Agrippa again with another statement in verse 29.

v. 29 And Paul is saying, “I am praying to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who are hearing me today, might become such as I am, except for these chains.”

“Paul is saying, ‘I am praying to God, that whether in a short or long time,’—he understands his cynicism—“not only you, but also all who are hearing me today, might become such as I am, except for these chains.””

That's a great statement of victory, isn't it?

It's been a long haul. It hurts. Everything would be great if it just wasn't for these chains!

Since the riot in Jerusalem, it's been over two years. And Paul hurts as he's in prison. He just wishes that was over with.

Robert Gehring wrote a book *Rx for Addiction*. In it he talks about drugs and the medical profession. He says this:

(Rx for Addiction: A Doctors Story of His Battle with Drugs by

W. Robert Gehring, M.D.)

I reflected on the reasons for my depression. It seemed I was never happy in the present—the here and now. I wanted to go back to the farm. Life was so simple there. No big-city pressures, no traffic, no rat race. But I knew the pressures my father had as a farmer. The low price of wheat—the high price of machinery. Crop failures. Hailstorms that could wipe out a year’s income in seconds. And I wasn’t a farmer.

I lived in the future. I’ll be happy when: I get out of the Army; I finish college; I finish med school, internship, residency. I’ll be happy in private practice; I’ll be happy when I get married; when I have children. I was never happy in the only moment of time over which I had any control—the present.

(source unknown)

And Paul is saying here, “You know it’s great! Except for these chains.”

What are the chains that are binding us from becoming all God wants us to become? What is that chain that we bring to the study that holds us in bondage? What is the chain that has us locked in?

1. Perhaps it’s the chains of CIRCUMSTANCE. We’re in some circumstances that we just cannot cope with.
2. Perhaps it’s the chains of SIN and we’re out of fellowship with the Lord and we know it. And His hand is heavy on us

right now and He's pointing it out—the Spirit of God speaks.

3. Perhaps it's the chains of RESPONSIBILITY. We're tired of having to always be the one who does everything and we just want to throw in the towel.

4. Or maybe it's the chains of PHYSICAL DIFFICULTY. We find ourselves getting older and it's not getting any easier.

Maybe there are those who do not know Christ and are a long way from Him. And the chain of pride or habit or sin or priorities or lifestyle or relationship has gotten you.

The beautiful hymn “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” says:

He breaks the power of canceled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean;
His blood availed for me.
(source unknown)

Now because the pressure is on, Agrippa gets up. And that's to say the audience is over.

v. 30 And the king arose and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them,

“And the king arose and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them,”

They all three were sitting in the box seat together. And when Festus jumped up it got Agrippa going. And they both barked out at the apostle Paul in these statements.

And Agrippa has heard all that he wants to hear and the audience has ended. Everybody went out of the audience silent and subdued.

We've moved from the PRACTICAL to the PERSONAL. And he doesn't want any more of that so he's ready as he comes nose-to-nose with eternity. He walks away and says, "I don't want it." He leaves it.

As far as we know, he never had another chance and he never responded.

v. 31 and when they withdrew, they were talking to one another, saying: "This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment."

"and when they withdrew, they were talking to one another, saying: 'This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment.'"

They're impressed, they're convicted, and they're convinced of his motives.

Agrippa leans over to Festus and he says, "Look, I can't help you with any charges for Caesar. I can't think of a thing that would stand up in court."

v. 32 And Agrippa was saying to Festus: “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

“And Agrippa was saying to Festus: “This man could have”—WHAT?—“been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

What’s left out of his conversation? They never mention Jesus or the resurrection. It is simply that he “could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

Alright, let’s turn that around. “I just happened to hear you Festus and Agrippa saying that he could have been set free if he hadn’t appealed to Caesar. I want to tell you something, John 8:32 says: ‘you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.’ You’re the guys walking out of here in bondage and walking out of here in chains, and in sin. Paul is the man who’s free—really free. You’re the ones that could have been set free if you had responded to Jesus the Messiah and listened to the opportunity I gave you here to respond to the Christ.”

What are the lessons we get out of the chapter?

Lesson #1: Paul is prepared for this great opportunity that presents itself to him.

Are we? Are we ready for the next person that comes and wants to speak to us about our relationship to Christ? And can

we share with them, counsel and give advice?

Lesson #2: Paul uses AFFIRMATION and APPRECIATION in his approach to Agrippa.

We have to use a lot of that to win a hearing. We affirm the individual and his value, and appreciation for what he stands for.

Paul does that before he gets into his message with Agrippa. He appreciates the fact that he has this privilege.

Lesson #3: The focus of Paul's message is upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Lesson #4: Paul was FORCING, FURIOUS and FIGHTING before he became a Christian.

He wanted to wipe out Christianity.

Lesson #5: Do you find yourself tonight kicking against the goads of conviction?

Is there just a prick in the heart? Is there a sense that it isn't right and yet we don't want to do it? We don't want to get it right and so we're kicking against the goads. It only makes it hurt more as we fight God's restraining hand. That is the hardest prick.

Lesson #6: The message preached is to turn men from

darkness to light, and from the dominion of Satan to God.

We are born under the dominion of the god of this world and we must be transformed and taken and transferred into the kingdom of His dear Son, Jesus Christ—God the Father's Son.

Lesson #7: Emotional outbursts sometimes accompany conviction of sin.

It tells us Festus is under conviction by what he says.

Lesson #8: What are the chains that are binding you from coming to Christ, or from walking in fellowship with Him?

Lesson #9: You can be set free if you will just turn to Jesus.

Let's end our message with a statement from Gordon MacDonald's book, *Ordering Your Private World*:

(Ordering Your Private World by Gordon McDonald)

The author Oscar Wilde was one who paid scant attention to his private world. William Barclay quotes Wilde's confession.

The gods had given me almost everything. But I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease...Tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went to the depths in search for new sensation. What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion. I grew careless of the lives of

others. I took pleasure where it pleased me, and passed on. I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and that therefore what one has done in the secret chamber, one has some day to cry aloud from the house-top. I ceased to be lord over myself. I was no longer the captain of my soul, and did not know it. I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace.

(source unknown)

And that's what sin does. It binds us with chains and bondage until we become those who demonstrate a life of horrible disgrace.

Father, You know the hearts of those who have listened to Your Word. Thank You that we've been so encouraged as we've watched Paul meticulously work out a defense before Agrippa. Thank You for his testimony and thank You for how clear and honest that he is and the fact that they could find nothing of which to accuse him. Thank You that he stands like Jesus because they couldn't find a thing against him. We pray that our lives would be those that are becoming increasingly and progressively more holy. We're learning how to walk with You and reflect Your Person to others. Please encourage each heart now as a result of this study. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A Practical Study of ACTS:

Take It To Them!

“Putting the GO Back in the Gospel”

STUDY NUMBER TWENTY-TWO – ACTS 26:1-32 NOTES

v. 1 Now Agrippa was saying to Paul, “You are permitted to be speaking for yourself.” Then Paul, having stretched out his hand, was making his defense.

v. 2 “In regard to all the things of which I am being accused by the Jews, I have considered myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to be making my defense before you today;

v. 3 because you are especially expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I am begging you to listen to me patiently.

v. 4 So then, all Jews have known my manner of life from youth up, which was from the beginning among my own nation in Jerusalem;

v. 5 since they are knowing about me for a long time previously, if they would be willing to be bearing testimony, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.

v. 6 And now I am standing here being judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers;

v. 7 [the promise] to which our twelve tribes are hoping to attain, earnestly night and day rendering sacred service to God.

Concerning this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews.

v. 8 Why is it being judged by you all as incredible if God is raising the dead?

v. 9 So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

v. 10 Which also I did in Jerusalem; and many of the saints I locked up in prisons, having received the authority from the chief priests, when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them.

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v. 11 And often in all the synagogues while punishing them, I was trying to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I was pursuing them even to foreign cities.

v. 12 Being engaged in these things, while I was proceeding to Damascus with authority and a commission from the chief priests, v. 13 at midday, O King, I saw along the road a light from heaven above the brilliance of the sun, shining all around me and those who were travelling with me.

v. 14 And when we fell to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to be kicking against the goads.’

v. 15 And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said: ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.’

v. 16 But arise and stand upon your feet; for this purpose I appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness both to the things you saw and to the things in which I will appear to you; v. 17 delivering you from the [Jewish] people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you;

v. 18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.’

v. 19 Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not become disobedient to the heavenly vision,

v. 20 but I was declaring both to those in Damascus first and in Jerusalem and in all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles that they should be repenting and turning to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.

v. 21 On account of these things the Jews, having seized me in the temple, were attempting to put me to death.

v. 22 Therefore, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, saying nothing except the things which the Prophets and Moses said are going to be taking place;

v. 23 whether the Christ is subject to suffering, whether He being the first to arise from the dead is about to be proclaiming light to the people and to the Gentiles.”

v. 24 And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus in a loud voice is saying: “Paul, you are out of your mind! Your vast learning is turning you mad.”

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v. 25 But Paul is saying: “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am declaring boldly words of truth and soundness of mind.

v. 26 For the king is knowing about these things, before whom I also am speaking freely, for I am persuaded that none of these things is hidden from him; for this has not been done in a corner.

v. 27 King Agrippa, are you believing the Prophets? I am knowing that you are believing.”

v. 28 And Agrippa is saying to Paul: “In a short time you are persuading me in order to make me a Christian.”

v. 29 And Paul is saying, “I am praying to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who are hearing me today, might become such as I am, except for these chains.”

v. 30 And the king arose and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them,

v. 31 and when they withdrew, they were talking to one another, saying: “This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment.”

v. 32 And Agrippa was saying to Festus: “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

QUESTIONS:

1. Read Acts 26:1-32 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. How does Paul open his defense, according to verses 2 & 3?

3. Why is Paul being judged, according to verse 6?

4. What key question is asked in verse 8?

5. What does it mean: “It is hard for you to be kicking against the goads” in verse 14?

6 How does Paul describe his ministry in verse 18?

7. How does Festus respond to his message, according to verse 24?

8. How does Agrippa respond, according to verse 28?

9. What verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: Paul is prepared for this great opportunity that presents itself to him.

LESSON #2: Paul uses affirmation and appreciation in his approach to Agrippa.

LESSON #3: The focus of Paul's message is upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

LESSON #4: Paul was forcing, furious, and fighting before he became a Christian.

LESSON #5: Do you find yourself kicking against the goads of conviction?

LESSON #6: The message preached is to turn men from darkness to light, and from the dominion of Satan to God.

LESSON #7: Emotional outbursts sometimes accompany conviction of sin.

LESSON #8: What are the chains that are binding you from coming to Christ, or from walking in fellowship with Him?

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