

## **Part 59 Paul Before Agrippa**

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney Wednesday, Nov. 23, 2016

### **+ Acts 26:1-32**

Last week we covered all of Chapter 25 which introduced us to King Agrippa. We stated the fact that he was the son of Herod Agrippa, the King that had the Apostle James beheaded and later on he himself was smote by an angel of the Lord and eaten up by worms. We also were introduced to his sister, Queen Bernice. These two are a very sinful couple yet are considered to be Jewish royalty at this time, even though they really had no real power but were just puppets of the Roman government. Regardless, Festus, the Roman Governor of Judea, fills Agrippa in on the Apostle Paul's predicament so Agrippa decides he wants to hear from Paul himself and they set up yet another meeting with Paul to give his side of the story, and that is where we pick things up from tonight starting in Chapter 26 verse 1.

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

Well, how gracious of the king to let Paul speak for himself... Now this is not a trial like the ones before. Paul has already appealed unto Caesar so he will be going to Rome. Paul is probably willing to give his testimony yet again so that he can be heard and someone like this king could hear the truth. Paul is glad to be able to tell his story to another Jew, someone who would understand the Jewish ways. His Roman captors did not understand the Jewish ways but King Agrippa would. So Paul is glad to be able to speak to him.

I firmly believe that Paul's true motive is because it is another opportunity to share the Gospel.

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

Paul starts out by giving Agrippa his Jewish credentials. He said that from his youth in his own nation at Jerusalem. We know Paul was born in Tarsus, however, at around the age of 13 he would have went off to Jerusalem to Rabbi School and there would spend the better part of his youth learning.

It probably shocked Agrippa to hear that Paul himself was once a Pharisee. So he knows what kind of man he is dealing with now. He has been through Rabbi School and he knows Jewish laws and traditions. He's not dummy.

6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: 7 Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

"the promise made of God unto our fathers." We know that the promise to the twelve tribes is the promise of the Messiah, the Savior. All Jews agreed on that. But we also know that Paul is being questioned on his teaching and preaching concerning the resurrection of the dead. So, it appears to me that since Paul believes that Jesus was the Messiah sent by God and Jesus resurrected from the dead, then he is including that along with the promise of God. And it is this part of his theology that they are in

disagreement about and why he is being questioned and accused of false teaching by the Sadducees.

Paul certainly did teach the resurrection of the dead and that Jesus was the one sent by God. In fact, if you want to turn to 1 Corinthians we can read what he was teaching to the Church at Corinth: **1 Corinthians 15:12-23**

12 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?

13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:

14 And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

15 Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.

16 For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:

17 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.

18 Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.

19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, **and become the firstfruits of them that slept.**

21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

So by Christ becoming the "firstfruits" of them that slept, it meant that man has existence beyond the grave which of course would require a resurrection and that Jesus Christ was the first one. The "first-fruits" was the first sheaf of grain to be harvested and given as a sacrifice to the Priest. Jesus represented that sacrifice and the first to be resurrected into new life.

**8 Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?**

Paul just asks him a simple question; why should it be so unbelievable that God would raise the dead? It makes perfect sense. Notice that Paul does not mention Jesus or Christ right here at this point. He knows that Agrippa does not believe in Jesus but he sure does believe in God and therefore he should not find it strange that God would resurrect the dead. The Pharisees didn't believe in Jesus but they did believe in the resurrection, however, the Sadducees did not believe in it. But, look at what Jesus said the unbelieving Sadducees over in the Gospel of **Matthew 22:23-33**

23 The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, 24 Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. 25 Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: 26 Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. 27 And last of all the woman died also. 28 Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. 29 Jesus answered and said unto them, **Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.** 30 For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. 31 But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, 32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. 33 And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine.

So, Jesus tells the Sadducees that they **err not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God**. You talk about a slap in the face at these so-called religious leaders!

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

Paul then explains how he too was leery of the teaching of Christ in the beginning and fought against him and persecuted those that believed in Him. In other words, he used to be just like these Jews that are accusing him.

We have no way of knowing how many Christians Paul is responsible for their deaths, but according to his own testimony it was “many.” That is one reason Paul’s testimony is so powerful. A man that was once so determined to fight against Jesus but after being saved so determined to preach Jesus. He truly is an example of a new creature in Christ.

Paul was a lot like those awful ISIS soldiers making Christians deny Jesus or die. That is what Paul did when it says that he “**compelled them to blaspheme**.” Oliver B. Green in his Book, “The Acts of the Apostles<sup>1</sup>,” writing about this section says; *“Perhaps we think we would never deny our Lord, but who knows what we would do if we were subjected to the excruciating pain and inhuman treatment which was heaped upon the early Christians? Many of them died for the faith, died without one word of blasphemy but others who were weaker in the faith did recant, and by renouncing their faith and denying that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah they escaped further torture.”*

Let’s hope it never comes to that while we are still living but you never know what the future holds. There may come a day when we as U.S. citizens will be persecuted for our belief in Jesus.

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

Then Paul begins giving his personal testimony of how he had a changed mind, a changed heart, and a changed life. It all started on that road to Damascus. My friend, we all ought to have our own Damascus road testimony. No, I wasn’t struck down by a bright light and I was not blinded and I did not hear an audible voice speaking to me, but I want you to know that my experience was just as real and just as saving as the Apostle Paul’s was.

15 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 hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; 17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, 18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are

**sanctified by faith that is in me.**

Paul isn’t holding anything back from Agrippa. He is telling him the entire story of how the Lord made him an Apostle and an Ambassador of the Gospel unto the Gentiles. This may not set too well with the Jewish listening audience. We know how much they despised the Gentiles.

19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: 20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

Then Paul tells Agrippa how he then set out being a missionary telling the Gentiles all over the world about Jesus and how they needed to repent of their sins. It is the same old Gospel story. The one that we are still to tell today. It began with Jesus and his disciples and it continued with the Apostles and the Church and on down to us. The times might have changed, people’s methods might have changed, but the truth of the Gospel never changes.

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

Paul is telling Agrippa that it is because of his teaching and witnessing that the Jews want to kill him.

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

Having therefore obtained help of God – notice that Paul credits God with saving him from the hands of the Jews that wanted to kill him. We know it was Claudius Lysias and the Roman soldiers that pulled Paul away from the angry Jews, but Paul knows that the Romans were just the instrument that God used to deliver him. Just like God used an earthquake to deliver him from Prison. God used a basket being lowered over a wall to deliver him from danger in Damascus. Paul knew what we should all know, there is no such thing as “luck” in the life of a Christian. Our lives are guided by God’s providence.

I know we get in a habit of saying, “well that was lucky,” but it really is not luck, it is God. I was driving home from work yesterday down Middlebrook Pike going about 50-mph and a truck all of a sudden just pulled out in front of me. I stood on my brake pedal and my car slid sideways and the brakes sounded like they were grinding through the medal but I stopped before I hit that truck. You may think, “wow, that sure was lucky,” but luck had nothing to do with it. Just before that had happened I was praying for the Lord to keep me safe while driving.

24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

Well, finally, Festus can’t take it anymore. He’s never heard anything such as these wild stories that Paul is telling. Being struck blind by a bright light, hearing voices out of Heaven, talking to men who had been killed and then claiming they came back to life! Wow, Paul you must be insane! So he cries out in the middle of Paul’s testimony and declares him to be a mad man. “**much learning doth make thee mad.**” I tell you friends, with all of the college and Seminary courses that I have taken and am still taking, sometimes I feel like I’m going mad, but Paul is obviously very well educated

and Festus is attributing it to his madness. You've spent so much time in the books Paul that you can't tell reality from fantasy. You are beside yourself!

25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

Paul declares that he most certainly is not mad. He is not losing his mind. Every single thing that he has said is the truth. Notice that Paul speaks calmly to Festus and is not rude to him like Festus was to him. He knows Festus has no spiritual discernment. He doesn't have Jesus in his heart and therefore cannot understand these things. He also is not a Jew and is not familiar with the promises of the Messiah or the teaching of the prophets, but Agrippa sure is.

26 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

Paul says that Agrippa knows about the things he's talking about. He knows about Jewish history and he certainly has heard about Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. In fact, Agrippa's own father was responsible for killing one of Jesus' closest friends. So, Agrippa the 2<sup>nd</sup> certainly is familiar with what Paul is saying and none of it was a secret.

27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

I like how Paul has the boldness to ask Agrippa if he believes the prophets and then he even says, "I know that thou believest." He can tell that Agrippa believes the Prophets of old. If Agrippa will just let himself, he too can believe that Jesus is in fact the promised Messiah that has been prophesied about for hundreds of years.

28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

And then one of the saddest testimonies in all of human history. "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." There is nothing more sad and heartbreaking than to know that someone has heard the Gospel and it has been proven to them without a shadow of a doubt and yet they still will not trust Jesus as their Savior. Agrippa has the opportunity of a lifetime and he is going to pass it by.

There is an old song on page 392 in the Red Back Church Hymnal, called "Almost Persuaded.

**"Almost persuaded now to believe.  
Almost persuaded, Christ to receive.  
Seems now some soul to say, go Spirit go Thy way.  
Some more convenient day on Thee I'll call."**

Almost thou persuadest me. I wonder how many people are in hell right now that were almost persuaded.

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.

It was Paul's desire to see everyone saved. He is speaking from his heart when he says that he wishes that Agrippa would believe and everyone else that is listening too. He wanted them to have what he had except for being imprisoned.

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

They finished listening to Paul then put their heads together and agreed that Paul had done absolutely nothing worthy of death or imprisonment. This is the 4<sup>th</sup> time that Paul has been declared innocent.

Claudius Lysias the Roman Captain found no wrong in him.  
Felix the Roman Governor found no wrong in him.  
Festus the Roman Governor found no wrong in him.  
Agrippa the Jewish King found no wrong in him.

If he hadn't have appealed to Caesar they could have just let him go right then and there. But once you appeal to Caesar you cannot go back. Paul would have to go to Rome and stand before the court. And that is what we will be studying next week Lord willing as Paul begins his journey to Rome.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version of the Bible

<sup>i</sup> Oliver B. Green, The Acts of the Apostles, pg. 190 paragraph 1.