

## EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #53

Acts 25:23-26:32

In 1887, a baby boy was born to a wealthy Chicago family named William Borden. After high school he traveled the world for a while and then went to Yale University and Princeton Theological Seminary. He became a Christian and he decided to become a missionary to the Muslims. He gave away \$500,000 to churches and mission work and went to Egypt to study the Arabic language at the age of twenty-six. While in Egypt, he became sick with cerebral meningitis and six months later “amidst the flies and heat of a Cairo hospital” he died. Some of the sophisticated people of Chicago thought William Borden was insane. In fact, they concluded he had been mentally unbalanced. But the truth is, William Borden did the will of God and he died doing the will of God.

That is the story of the Apostle Paul. The will of God for his life was to preach the grace of God Gospel to the world and in the process of doing that, people thought he was insane.

**IF YOU PROCLAIM THE GRACE MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST TO OTHERS, YOU ARE DOING THE WILL OF GOD; BUT MANY WILL NOT BELIEVE AND SOME WILL THINK YOU ARE OUT OF YOUR MIND.**

In this text the Apostle Paul presents powerful grace truth to some of the most powerful people in the world. None of them believe and some think Paul is out of his mind. There are five action events that tell this story:

**ACTION EVENT #1** – Paul is brought in to appear before Herod Agrippa. **25:23-27**

Of all of the court appearances of Paul, this was undoubtedly the most spectacular. If this were to be done today, all major news agencies would be there to cover it because here are some of the most powerful people in the world gathering together to hear Paul address them.

According to **verse 23**, Herod Agrippa and Bernice arrived with great pomp and splendor and they were accompanied by leading commanders and prominent men and Festus. As one writer said “flags were waving, swords were gleaming and horses were prancing.” Some of the most powerful dignitaries in the world were brought together to hear Paul. This would be equivalent to being invited to speak to the Clintons and Nancy Pelosi and Joe Biden.

Now when most people appear before dignitaries, they put on their best clothing. As Paul came in, he wasn't wearing beautiful clothing. He had been locked up in jail for two years. So here stands a rugged looking apostle in front of the politically elite. But here is the amazing thing. **As you look at this scene with all of its glitz and glamour and fanfare, it is clear that the one who is really in charge is Paul. The one thing Paul has that they do not have is the power of God.**

At the beginning of this hearing, Festus delivered his opening remarks, which are almost humorous. He began by saying this is the man that all Jews want dead (**verse 24**). He then told everyone that he had not found that he had done anything worthy of death but that Paul appealed his case to the Emperor (**verse 25**). Festus then said **I don't even know what charges to write to the Emperor, so I am having Paul appear before you all, especially Agrippa, so that I may have something to write (verses 26-27).**

Here is the real problem; **Paul is so innocent that they don't know why they are even sending him to Rome for a trial.** If you don't have any legitimate charges, they will end up looking like imbeciles and the one man in the world you do not want to upset is Nero.

**ACTION EVENT #2** – Paul is permitted to speak in his own defense. **26:1-23**

Agrippa addressed Paul and asked him to speak on his own behalf. It is very interesting that Paul does not address the fact that Agrippa and Bernice are in sin; he calmly and politely and simply tells the story of how he met Jesus Christ and how Jesus Christ changed his life.

Paul takes a different approach before Herod and Bernice than John the Baptist, who actually was killed by their great-uncle, Herod Antipas, because he specifically pointed out their sin of him taking his brother's wife (Luke 3:19-20). This becomes even more intriguing because John was the forerunner of Jesus Christ and was the last O.T. prophet. So John's job was to expose sin and point to the one who could take away sin. When Paul addresses Herod II and Bernice, who are immoral, he simply moves into the grace message—if you believe in Jesus Christ you may receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 26:18). Paul's defense is comprised of nine key parts:

**Part #1** - Paul considers himself fortunate to make his defense before Agrippa. **26:2-3**

The reason is that Paul had been accused by the Jews and he knew that Agrippa was an expert in Jewish matters. **This shows us something important; just because one is high up in the religious world and knows a lot about religious and denominational things doesn't mean he is right with God or even moral.** There are many religious leaders who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul was standing before one, but he viewed it a privilege to present Jesus Christ to any sinner, and especially those who hold high positions in the religious and political world.

**Part #2** - Paul testifies that all Jews know about his former manner of life. **26:4-5**

These Jews knew that Paul was a Jew who had grown up in Jerusalem and was a strict Pharisee. They had known him for years. He had been one of them.

**Part #3** - Paul testifies that he is on trial for the very hope of God's promises to the Jews. **26:6-7**

All Jews have a hope that a Messiah will save them. All twelve tribes hope that the Messiah will come and give Israel her land. That was the hope in Paul's day and that is Israel's hope in our day.

**Part #4-** Paul testifies that he is on trial for believing that God does raise the dead. **26:8**

Festus had already told Herod that Paul's message was focused on a resurrected Jesus (25:19). Everyone knew that Jesus had died and Paul was claiming that Jesus had been raised from the dead and was alive. **This critical fact of Christ's resurrection is what sets Christianity apart from all false religions of the world.**

**Part #5** - Paul testifies that he originally was against Jesus Christ and Christians. **26:9-11**

Paul says you all know that I did everything I could to stamp out everything connected to Jesus Christ. Paul says I was hostile to even the name of Jesus of Nazareth (**26:9**). He said, not only did I persecute them in Jerusalem, but I tracked them down in foreign cities. I arrested people and voted to kill them (**26:10-11**).

**Part #6** - Paul testifies to King Agrippa what happened on the road to Damascus. **26:12-20**

Paul said he was traveling to Damascus by authority of the chief priests and religious leaders (**verse 12**). Some of these very men were there and they knew this was true. Notice that he carefully points out that all those with him saw this bright light that was brighter than the noon day sun (**verse 13**). **It was like a bright strobe light flashing.** Paul said they all fell to the ground but He heard a voice speaking in Hebrew (**verse 14**). **All saw the light and all fell to the ground. These were undeniable facts.**

Paul said the voice identified Himself as Jesus (**verse 15**) and Jesus told him that He had made him and appointed him to be a witness and minister of things (**verse 16**). Jesus told him that He would appear to him and reveal many things to him that would actually end up saving many Jewish and Gentile people (**verse 17**). **The job of the minister is to carefully present grace truth about Jesus Christ so God may open the eyes of people in darkness that they may come to the light of God.**

Now notice the Gospel Jesus revealed to Paul on that road to Damascus. In **verse 18** Jesus revealed a gospel that saves people: **One may be saved from Satan's world and from all their sin by faith in Jesus Christ.** All of your sins may be forgiven and you will be given an eternal inheritance and you will be set apart forever as a child of God, "by faith in Me." This is exactly what Jesus taught Paul on His first appearance when Paul was on the road to Damascus.

Paul is presenting this Gospel of pure grace to the most powerful people in the world and some of the most immoral sinners in the world. He is telling them that Jesus told him that if any would believe on Him they would have all their sins forgiven.

Paul says in **verses 19-20**, that he immediately started declaring this message to people in Damascus, Jerusalem, Judea, and to the Gentile world. He told them they needed to "repent," that is change their thinking about what saves them in that they may be saved by believing on Jesus Christ. He said I taught them that after they have believed on Jesus Christ they should do things that are appropriate to grace salvation.

One of the biggest arguments I have heard from unbelievers is that there are many hypocrites in the church. Pay close attention to what this text says: **You are not asked to believe in Christians for salvation, you are asked to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation.** Some of us Christians have some faults and deficiencies about us, but you are not saved by believing in us, you are saved by believing in Jesus Christ.

**Part #7** - Paul testifies that this is the reason Jews want to kill him. **26:21**

This grace message went completely against the Jews and their works system. This grace message was totally foreign to people who loved ritual and law and legal days. Here was Paul traveling all over the world telling Jews and Gentiles that they could be saved from all of their sins by faith in the resurrected Christ and instead of people rejoicing, they want to kill Paul.

**Part #8** - Paul testifies that the reason they have not succeeded is because of God. **26:22a**

Notice the theology of Paul here. He believes the reason why he is still alive preaching grace is because of the sovereignty of God. God has helped him and protected him.

**Part #9** - Paul testifies of the Gospel he is preaching to the world—Jesus Christ. **26:22b-23**

Paul gets to the very heart of the issue. The reason he is on trial is because he believes and testifies of exactly what the Prophets and Moses predicted; specifically that the Messiah and Savior would suffer and die for sins and be raised from the dead. Paul says I have taught that to the Jewish world and the Gentile world.

**ACTION EVENT #3** – Festus interrupts Paul and says he is out of his mind. **26:24-25**

In the middle of Paul’s testimony Festus blurts out that Paul is out of his mind. This is interesting to read in Greek because Festus starts screaming that Paul is “raving mad” (Smith, p. 275). He uses a Greek word from which we get our English word “maniac.” Then he goes on to scream, “your great learning of written things has made you raving mad.” Festus, who is supposedly this dignified political leader, bursts out in the middle of Paul’s testimony and starts screaming that Paul is a raving lunatic who is completely out of his mind.

This is what conviction does. This is what truth can do. When you present truth to someone, they sense it is truth and some respond by trying to make you out to be insane. They take the position you are foolish in your belief. That is what Festus did.

Festus attributed it to all of Paul’s great learning and study. It is interesting that Paul does concede that Festus is “most excellent,” which he never says of Felix or Agrippa. Paul did respect the character of Festus and he simply says Paul says my words are “sober truth.” That word “sober” (σωφροσύνη) means that Paul’s words are sane, sound of mind, sober words that present truth (*Ibid.*, p. 438).

All better think very carefully about the grace message Paul preaches, because the message is sober truth—if you will believe on Jesus Christ all of your sins will be forgiven, but if you reject Jesus Christ you will experience the wrath of God. If you believe that and teach that, people will think you are mad.

Back in the mid-1800's, in the United States, a woman named Emily Chubbock, who went by the pen name Fanny Forester, became the toast of the land because of her literary writing of fiction. She was a young, twenty-year old woman writer the world applauded. As one writer said she could “sit as a queen in the highest circles of American society.” She became wealthy and admired. She met an older man who loved Jesus Christ and who was widowed and when he asked her to marry him, she agreed. Then she decided to go with him to his mission field in Burma. Her husband's name was Adoniram Judson and when she married him the world said “she has lost her mind.” In fact, one of the fashionable trade magazines said “the woman is mad.” Why? Simply because she believed Jesus Christ and wanted tell others about Him (To read more on this story, check out from our library, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, by Ruth A. Tucker, pp. 130-139).

#### **ACTION EVENT #4 – Paul addresses King Agrippa . 26:26-29**

Paul says that King Agrippa knows these are the facts because this had not been hidden (**verse 26**). Biblical Christianity did not start like some secret hidden cult religion like Mormonism or Islam. Joseph Smith claimed he received some secret special revelation on golden tablets that have been hidden from everyone. Mohammed claimed he received secret special visions and revelations.

Biblical Christianity began in the open. Jesus Christ was publicly crucified and was seen alive publicly after His crucifixion. Paul's vision had eyewitnesses, some of whom were present when Paul gave this testimony. All events pertaining to Jesus Christ and Paul were fully known by Agrippa. They were all out in the open.

Paul then appealed to the fact that King Agrippa believed in the O.T. prophets (**verse 27**). Agrippa knew that the O.T. prophets predicted one would come who would be wounded for our transgressions and would be raised from the dead.

**Herod Agrippa was thinking about all of this and said if Paul kept talking he would likely become a Christian (verse 28),** and Paul said I wish before God that all would become a believer like me, except for the chains (**verse 29**).

**It has been well observed that there is nothing more difficult than for a person to stop trusting in themselves and trusting in his religion and start trusting only in Jesus Christ. This is what grace asks one to do and because people are so proud, they would much rather trust in their own self and in something they do.**

Paul never wanted other believers to have to go through what he did, but he did want all people to believe in Christ and have their sins forgiven.

**ACTION EVENT #5** – Agrippa decides Paul is innocent of death or imprisonment.  
**26:30-32**

With that, King Agrippa, Bernice and Festus and all the dignitaries stood up and they all concluded he had not done anything worthy of death or imprisonment (**verse 31**). Agrippa then said if he had not appealed to Caesar, he would have been released today (**verse 32**). Now of course we might ask why did Paul appeal to Caesar. Why didn't he just keep quiet? The answer to this is that God's will for Paul's life was that he got to Rome.

The grace message that Paul preaches is this—if you will stop trusting in yourself, your works, your religion and start trusting totally and only in Jesus Christ, you will be saved from all of your sins. The proof that He and He alone can save you is that He was raised from the dead as proof.