

- ***READ Acts 25:23-27*** What we see taking place here in **Acts 25:23-27** can actually find its beginnings all the way back in **Acts 21:17**. It is at this point in the narrative that Paul returns to Jerusalem and details to James and the elders of the church all of the amazing things that God had been accomplishing through him among the Gentiles. The elders rejoice with the good news, but they then present Paul with a question as to what the believing Jews ought to do in regards to the Law. They had already addressed the Gentiles and the Law, but they needed to know whether or not Paul had been telling the Jews to forsake the customs of the Law.
- **(Acts 21:23-30)** Their test for Paul was for him to join four other men in a vow they were undertaking. If Paul would join in with this vow then they would feel confident that the things being said about him were not true. As Paul is undergoing the days of purification, there were some Jews from Asia who came and caused a massive fuss over Paul. They themselves brought the accusations against Paul concerning Him preaching against the Law, and they even try to make things worse by accusing Paul of bringing a Gentile into the temple. These men along with the whole city rose up so quickly against Paul that they were able to drag him out of the temple and preceded to try to kill him.
- **(Acts 21:31ff)** Thankfully, the Roman officials caught wind of what was going on and they unknowingly came to Paul's rescue while he was being beaten. The soldiers didn't know what was going on because of the big ruckus, so they put Paul in the barracks until things could get settled down. Paul ends up being able to talk the commander into letting him address the people, and **Acts 22:1-21** records Paul's speech to the Jewish people. The people again freak out over Paul's speech, and the commander is forced to take Paul again, but on the next day he tries to determine what is going on with this man and the Jews.
- **Acts 23:1-6** details Paul's words to the council, but his words caused a great division between the Pharisees and Sadducees over the resurrection. This disagreement was such that the commander feared for Paul's life, and he was right to fear for such since the Jews made a vow together that they would kill Paul before much longer. Thankfully this plot was found out and the commander was able to move Paul under the cloak of night and take him safely to Felix the governor in Caesarea. **(Acts 23:7ff)**
- **Acts 24** contains the charges brought against Paul by the high priest Ananias and an attorney named Tertullus. This man tries to paint Paul out to be a trouble maker, and of course the Jews had to jump in and give their two cents about how much they hated Paul. Paul is then allowed his time to respond, and he calmly tells of the things that have actually taken place up to this point. He freely admits to his faith, but denies that he had been doing anything worthy of punishment. Felix is familiar with the Christian faith, and ends up keeping Paul with him for two years under custody while enjoying their conversations, all the while hoping Paul would give him some money so he could set him free.
- **Acts 24** ends with Festus replacing Felix as the governor over Caesarea, but Paul remains in prison because Felix wanted to gain favor with the Jews. Paul once again gives his defense to Festus, and eventually appeals to being heard by Caesar. This prompts Festus to use Agrippa's visit as an opportunity to pick his brain over the situation. This finally brings us to **Acts 26** where Paul, again, stands before a governmental official and shares what is his testimony of his life and why he is where he is today.
- What we are seeing all throughout the narrative of these chapters is Paul having repeated opportunities to share with whoever he stands in front of what we might refer to as his testimony. The word testimony itself does not have religious connotations. In fact, it is most often used in the legal realm when a person sits on the witness stand and shares what he or she has seen or experienced. However, in the religious world a person's testimony is often given as a means of evangelism and edification through the telling to others their life's story and how God has had an impact on it.

- This is essentially what Paul does in these chapters, and we are going to look at this last testimony that he gives to Agrippa here in **Acts 26** so that we might come to see the benefit of being able to share our testimony with others as to how God has had such an impact in our lives through the work of the Gospel. This isn't something that I have seen as a common practice within our fellowship, but I have sat in the audience a small handful of times as a man shared his testimony and I have sat down face to face with a few individuals who have been willing to share their life's story with me. Those occasions have always been powerful sources of encouragement, and I hope that our considerations of Paul's testimony before Agrippa will encourage us to be willing to share what God has done in our lives with those who might need encouragement to go to God in faith and allow Him to work upon them.

I. Paul Stands Before Agrippa

A. Acknowledges Agrippa as being familiar with the Jewish people and their customs. (**Acts 26:1-3**)

1. This king of Galilee would've been Herod Agrippa II, the son of Agrippa I. History tells us that he would eventually rule Galilee for 42 years. Though he was educated in Rome, Agrippa was a Hellenistic Jew which was why Paul was able to speak to him in the plain manner in which he did.
2. Being so familiar with the Jewish people, their history, and their religion...it should make perfect sense to us that of all of the people that Paul has the opportunity to share his testimony with, it was Agrippa who seems to have been the closest to being truly receptive to what Paul was saying. The end of the chapter really hints at Agrippa's grasp of the Jewish faith.
3. **Acts 26:24-28** further shows us that Paul was well aware of Agrippa's knowledge, understanding, and even belief and acceptance of what was written in the prophets. Which seems to be why Agrippa was so close to being persuaded to becoming a Christian.

B. Acknowledges his past involvement in persecuting Christians. (**Acts 26:4-11**)

1. With a knowledge of the Jewish faith, Paul is then able to explain to Agrippa and those others who were gathered just how drastic of a change he had made in his life. Paul begins by freely admitting that from his youth he had been groomed to be a Pharisee of the strictest sect of Judaism. (**Acts 26:4,5**) When it came to Jesus, the Pharisees were not in agreement at all because they saw Him as a threat to their way of living as the leaders of the Jews.
2. Of course at that time, Paul would've been majorly invested in the efforts of the Pharisees, so he sought to be "*hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.*" (**Acts 26:9**) This led Paul to lock up many of the saints in Jerusalem by the authority of the chief priests, and when he had opportunity he would cast his vote against Christians so that they might be put to death. He would even angrily enter the synagogues and try to force them to blaspheme God through threats of violence, no doubt. Yet, his zeal in persecuting the Christians wasn't contained only to Jerusalem for he sought to go outside David's city to persecute those belonging to the Way.

C. Recounts Jesus's appearing to him and his new life in Him. (**Acts 26:12-18**)

1. It was during one of these persecution trips outside of Jerusalem that Paul then recounts how there was a light brighter than the sun that came down from heaven and blinded all of the men with him so that they all fell to the ground. It was at this point that Paul says he heard a voice speaking in the Hebrew dialect saying to him, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.*" (**Acts 26:14**) Paul then asks who it is that is speaking to him, and the voice responds with, "*I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you.*" (**Acts 26:15,16**)
2. It is at this point that Jesus becomes very clear with His intentions for Paul. He states that Paul would be responsible with going to the Jews and the Gentiles and proclaiming the Gospel to them so that they might turn from darkness and come to the light away from Satan. He would be the one carrying a message of forgiveness through faith in Christ Jesus as Lord. (**Acts 26:17,18**)

D. Continuously ties in his new way of living as being in line with the Law.

1. It is also important to point out that through the giving of this testimony, Paul seeks to support what he is now doing in Christ by showing that it was in line with God's will. Notice in **Acts 26:6,7** that Paul seeks to establish that he was only there where he was because of the hope he now possessed in the fulfillment of the promise made by God to the forefathers of the Jews. The promise being referred to was of course the promise of the Messiah that is first made to Abraham by God in **Genesis 12:3**. It is the promise that so many Jews were looking for during the days of Jesus's childhood. (**Luke 2:36-38**)
2. It was this hope and faith in the Messiah that Paul argues is actually confirmed by the Law and the Prophets. (**Acts 26:22**) Paul was well aware of the fact that God had been with him to help him get to this point, and he was convinced that God had been with him to this point so that he could simply share what was the fulfillment of the teachings of the Prophets and even Moses himself. This only seems to confirm the words of Jesus that He spoke back during His ministry in **Matthew 5:16,18** when He spoke of Himself as being that which would fulfill the Law and the Prophets. If anyone was being honest, they would clearly be able to see that Paul was only working in line with what the Jewish faith had led to...the coming and accomplished mission of the Messiah who was Jesus of Nazareth.

It is at this point that Festus interjects that Paul was surely out of his mind, but Paul rejects that notion and simply explains that he was speaking the truth...the truth that king Agrippa himself surely had some confidence in being true. Unfortunately, Agrippa doesn't seem willing to surrender to Jesus at this moment, but through the testimony of Paul...the decision was now his to make because he had been delivered the message of the Gospel through what Paul had experienced in his life.

II. What We Learn

A. It is important to speak in terms that others can understand.

1. Paul was able to speak so plainly and bluntly with Agrippa concerning Jesus's relationship as the Messiah with the Law and Prophets because Agrippa, being a naturalized Jew, was already aware of such things. This approach by Paul would not have worked everywhere and we see him recognizing this for he took a much different approach when speaking with the Athenians in **Acts 17:16ff**.
2. In Athens, we find Paul take the different approach of coming to the Athenians from an angle that would have made much more sense to them. Instead of coming at it from the standpoint of Judaism, Paul seeks to speak to them from the angle of their own poets and philosophers who themselves understood that there must be a God of whom we must be. (**Acts 17:28**) Coming from this angle allowed for Paul to connect well with this audience just as he was able to connect with Agrippa and others from their common Jewish background.
3. What this shows us is that we need to put some thought and judgment into how we approach those with whom we'd like to share the Gospel of Jesus. While speaking about our past life and our new life in Jesus might be good for someone who is searching for the place that God ought to have in our lives, it wouldn't necessarily be useful for someone who is at the point where they question whether or not there actually is a God. Additionally, speaking to someone who has no familiarity with the Bible or Christianity and using terms only those familiar with such things would understand could be unprofitable. Sharing our testimony of the grace of God in our lives is a powerful tool, but it only works when we are on the same page as those we're talking to.

B. Our past is a reality and can show the power of the Gospel.

1. That grace of God can clearly be seen throughout the life of Paul, and I really appreciate about Paul that he wasn't afraid to be transparent about who he had been and what he had done in his past life. I can't imagine that it was a badge of honor by any means, but I am convinced that Paul was willing to consider himself the foremost of sinners (**I Timothy 1:12-16**) so that others might

recognize the true power of the Gospel and how it could even change him in his life. Paul's testimony about how incredibly the Gospel had changed him is certainly a powerful tool to help touch the hearts of those who might feel as if they have no hope.

2. The same thing might very well be true about some of us. While some of us might have grown up in homes where Christ was taught and faith was instilled, the reality is that not all people grow up in such circumstances. Some present day disciples might have grown up in anything but an environment where Christ was encouraged. You've heard me speak about my preaching brother who spent time in gangs and eventually was incarcerated for his crimes associated with gang activity. His testimony of the influence of God's grace upon his life is powerful in a way that gives me people true hope to know that they too can be changed by God through faith. However, there are others of us as I mentioned that might not have the ability to show such drastic change within our own lives. At last that is what we tell ourselves and it might hinder us from being willing to share how we have been changed by God's grace through the Gospel.
3. Yet, the reality is that each and everyone one of us who are disciples came from a place where we were kept under bondage by Satan in our sins. No we might not have been persecutors of the church, gangbangers, or incarcerated felons. But each of us were instruments of unrighteousness kept under the power of Satan and destined for hell because of our sins. **(Romans 6:12-14,23)** And yet, just as Paul wrote in **Romans 6:17**, thanks be to God that thought we were slaves of sin, we have now been set free from that bondage and were are now kept under care by the grace of God! No matter who we might have been or what we might have done...this is true of each disciple of Jesus who has put their lives in His hands.

C. Our testimony only matters if it is founded upon the truth of God.

1. However, though the story of Paul tugs upon our heartstrings, we must recognize that his testimony only had real teeth because it was founded upon the truth of God. A testimony that is powerful in the emotions it produces is only truly worthwhile if it actually points someone to the truth of God. There are plenty of people who have great stories, but if those stories don't contain a soul truly being saved by the grace of God then what good does it do?
2. This means that we must be sure that our turning to God has been done only according to His will. All of the feelings and experiences in the world might sound good and they might pull on heartstrings, but if it is not supported by the true message of what God's grace demands then it is simply doesn't accomplish what it ought to accomplish. We must be sure that any testimony we give of God's work within our lives is supported by truth whether it be the truth concerning how sins are forgiven and one is joined to Christ or God's expectations for us following the fact. A testimony is only as good as the truth that is detailed within it.

There are certainly many different ways in which we can go about sharing the Gospel with other individuals. Sometimes a person might want to sit down and simply sit down and consider what is found within the text. However, there are others who might desire to see the Gospel in action instead of just reading about it. In Paul's life we are able to see both things being true. He was able to reason with the best of them, and then he was able to simply share how the Gospel had greatly changed him and his life's trajectory. May we take Paul's example and be ready to share how God has worked in our lives so that we might be able to teach and influence others to seek the better way that belongs to Christ Jesus as our Lord, Savior, and King.