

Introduction

1. Paul has been persecuted and almost killed by the Jews in Jerusalem (including two assassination attempts), arrested, and nearly tortured by the Romans, shipped off to Caesarea to be tried by the corrupt Governor Felix, was held in custody unlawfully for two years, and finally tried before Governor Festus, who was seemingly more interested in appeasing the Jews than providing justice for Paul
2. Recognizing this, and the fact that he is unlikely to get a fair trial, Paul exercises his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar
3. Festus agrees, but before he sends Paul to Empower Nero, he seeks the advice of the King of Judea, King Agrippa

A. Festus establishes a hearing before King Agrippa (READ Acts 25:23-27)

1. I'm going to be like Luke and use some understatement, this wasn't some small deal:
 - a. It was held in a big auditorium or hall where the governor or king could accommodate large audiences
 - b. King Agrippa and Bernice arrive "**amid great pomp**":
 - 1) You're familiar with the phrase "pomp and circumstance" because we often use it when referring to graduation ceremonies; it's actually the name of the song that's played when graduates walk in
 - 2) Pomp has two primary definitions, one good and one bad:
 - a) It can refer to a dignified or magnificent display; splendor
 - b) It can also refer to a vain or ostentatious display
 - c) Since the Greek word Luke uses here is only used once in the NT, it's hard to know whether he was referring to pomp in a positive or negative way, but either way it was a grand display of pageantry
 - 3) All of the important people were there:
 - a) The King and queen
 - b) The top military commanders (the word describes those who command at least 1000 men)
 - c) And, the prominent men of the city
2. After bringing Paul into the auditorium, Festus addresses the group to elicit their help:
 - a. The Jews had appealed to him demanding Paul's death: they had "**loudly declared**" that Paul "**ought not to live any longer**" (24)
 - b. However, he determined that Paul had done nothing deserving of death
 - c. This brings us to the crux of this grandiose event:
 - 1) He now had a dilemma
 - 2) Paul had appealed to the emperor, and he had agreed to send him
 - 3) However, he had no idea what charges to include against Paul when he sends him to Nero—in his own words, to send Paul to Nero without charges would be "**absurd**" (27)
 - 4) So, he was hoping that after they "**investigated**" Paul they could advise him on what to write

3. It seems obvious to ask as this point why Festus didn't just declare Paul not guilty and release him:
 - a. Some suggest that since Paul appealed to the Emperor, the governor couldn't release him according to Roman law; however, it's not really known if that was the case
 - b. A more reasonable explanation might be tied to something Luke wrote back in 25:9:
 - 1) Festus was **"wishing to do the Jews a favor"**
 - 2) The same statement was made of his predecessor, Felix, back in 24:27
 - 3) One of the main responsibilities of the governor was to keep the peace between Jews and Romans, and that was often a delicate dance—there had already been a number of Jewish rebellions against Rome that both Felix and Festus had to deal with
 - 4) Festus may have been concerned that releasing Paul would have enraged the Jews and caused another uprising

B. Paul presents his personal testimony (Acts 26:1-23)

1. He begins with the expected honor and formality due a dignitary, and maybe even a little flattery (READ 26:1-3):
 - a. He considered it fortunate that he had been allowed to defend himself before King Agrippa because Agrippa was indeed considered an expert in both the **"customs and questions (lit. controversies) among the Jews"**
 - b. Unlike the Roman governors Felix and Festus, King Agrippa had a knowledge and familiarity with Jewish matters that they did not
 - c. Paul's hope was that Agrippa would be patient with him as he spoke
2. Rather than a defense, what Paul presents is an explanation of his life and ministry, and he essentially makes four declarations:
 - a. The first declaration is that he lived his entire life as a faithful Jew (READ 26:4-5):
 - 1) **"All Jews"** knew how he had lived his entire life among his own nation and in Jerusalem (4)
 - 2) They could have all testified that he lived as a Pharisee, the strictest sect of the Jews (5)
 - b. His second declaration is that he was on trial for one thing: his hope in God's promise (READ 26:6-8):
 - 1) It was a hope that God promised to their forefathers (6b)
 - 2) It was a hope to which Israel itself, the twelve tribes, sought to attain (7a)
 - 3) It was a hope for which they **"earnestly serve God night and day"** (7b)
 - 4) He reveals this hope in a rhetorical question in v. 8: **"Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?"**
 - a) This is a precursor/foreshadowing of what Paul is going to say later in vs. 22-23
 - b) It's an interesting question considering that much (maybe most) of the audience was Greek (military commanders and prominent citizens) who didn't believe in life after death or resurrection
 - c) However, Paul was primarily making his defense before King Agrippa (half-Jewish) and his sister, Bernice (a full Jew), and the promise of resurrection was built upon the foundation of Jewish faith and the promise God made to the world through that faith

- c. His third declaration is that his life changed when he was confronted by the resurrected Jesus (26:9-15):
 - 1) He was convinced that he needed to do whatever he could to oppose the name of Jesus (READ 26:9-11):
 - a) I like the way the NIV translates v. 9 because it captures Paul's intent: **"I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth"**:
 - b) So, he imprisoned the saints under the authority of the chief priests
 - c) He voted to put them to death
 - d) He punished them in the synagogues
 - e) He tried to force them to blaspheme
 - f) And he did this not just in Jerusalem, but in foreign lands
 - 2) But then, something unexpected happened: he was confronted by the resurrected Jesus and given a new mission (READ 26:12-15):
 - a) The encounter was unexpected (**"while thus engaged"**) and supernatural (light from heaven that outshone the midday sun)
 - b) The encounter was a direct confrontation over his persecution of not just the Church but Jesus Himself (RE-READ 26:14b):
 - A goad was an iron poker or pointed wooden stick used to encourage oxen or cattle to move along, so an animal kicking against the goads became a Greek idiom referring to stubborn resistance
 - Some interpret Jesus' use of the idiom here to mean that it was futile for Paul to resist God, and that's possible
 - However, the word for **"hard"** is also used to refer to things that are harsh or unpleasant; interpreted this way, Jesus could be saying Paul's continued resistance to God's plan would be unpleasant or have harsh consequences (thus the NET: **"You are hurting yourself by kicking against the goads."**)
 - c) Finally, and most importantly, the encounter began a new mission for Paul (READ 26:15-18):
 - Jesus declared to Paul that the purpose of this encounter was to appoint Paul as His **"minister and witness"** of not just what Paul had seen but what Jesus would reveal to him
 - Jesus was sending Paul out to **"open"** the eyes of Jews and Gentiles so that they might turn from darkness and Satan and receive two things: forgiveness of their sins and an inheritance that comes by faith in Jesus
- d. His fourth declaration is that he was simply living in obedience to the call of Jesus to preach what the Prophets and Moses had already declared! (READ 26:19-23):
 - 1) Paul responded immediately by beginning in Damascus, right there where he was saved
 - 2) By God's help, he testified to both **"small and great"**, Jew and Gentile, **"nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place"** regarding the Messiah
 - 3) Their message was that the Christ (22) **"was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He should be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."**

3. Takeaway: what defines your life?

- a. Is it, like Paul, a desire to be faithful to God?
- b. Would you say that your life is characterized by hope in God's promises, especially that of resurrection?
- c. Would you say your life has been shaped—rather changed—by your encounter with Jesus?
- d. Can you confidently say you've been obedient to the call Jesus has placed on your life?

C. Paul's interaction with Festus and Agrippa (Acts 26:24-32)

1. Festus interrupts Paul and calls him crazy (READ 26:24):
 - a. This isn't an observation but an incredulous declaration—he doesn't just object, but does so loudly and declares that Paul's learning has driven him mad
 - b. This isn't surprising because most Romans didn't believe in resurrection or life after death
 - c. Once you died you were just dead; the thought that anyone, including Jesus, would rise from the dead was ludicrous!
2. Paul's response is obviously that he's not crazy (READ 26:25-26):
 - a. He was speaking "**words of sober truth**" (lit. "**I am declaring words of truth and sound judgment**")
 - b. He then does something brilliant—he tries to draw King Agrippa into his defense:
 - 1) Unlike Festus, King Agrippa was not only Jewish but well educated in the Scriptures so he would have (should have?) known what Moses and the Prophets wrote about the Messiah
 - 2) He was also well informed about "**these matters**"—which likely refers Paul's influence among Jews and Gentiles, as well as the growth of the Church; as King, Paul was confident that "**none of these things escape his notice for this has not been done in a corner**" (e.g. in secret)
3. Paul then turns his attention directly to King Agrippa (READ 26:27-29):
 - a. This is about as bold as you can get!
 - b. Paul has made his case for Jesus being the One promised by Moses and the Prophets, and then asks Agrippa directly whether he believed what they wrote: "**Do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.**" (27)—talk about backing someone into a corner!
 - c. Agrippa refuses to answer and instead poses a question of his own to Paul:
 - 1) With the exception of the NASB, KJV, & NKJV, most English translations render Agrippa's words as a question, and they probably were based on the context and Paul's response
 - 2) NIV: "**Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?**"
 - d. I love Paul's response because it reveals his passion for preaching the Gospel and for people to know Jesus (29): "**I would to God that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.**"
4. King Agrippa agrees that Paul has done nothing to violate Roman law and could have been released (READ 26:30-32)
5. Takeaways: Paul's testimony before Festus and King Agrippa was built upon two things:
 - a. One was his personal encounter with Jesus and how it changed his life:
 - 1) We shouldn't underestimate how powerful a witness our own encounter and personal relationship with Jesus can be

- 2) People look for something they can relate to, and revealing how the Gospel impacted/impacts our lives is often what first attracts
- b. The second was what the Scriptures teach about Jesus:
- 1) Paul didn't ask or expect King Agrippa to simply believe him; he appealed to the Word of God (e.g. Moses and the Prophets)
 - 2) We're often told that relying too heavily on the Word when witnessing is a mistake because not everyone accepts the Bible, or they find it offensive (e.g. being told by a pastor that you "can't lead with the Word")
 - 3) But the Word of God is the most powerful witness we have because it's God-breathed and as King David wrote in Psalm 19, it can restore the soul, make wise the simple, rejoice the heart, enlighten the eyes, discern one's, acquit one of hidden faults, prevent presumptuous sin, and ultimately lead to forgiveness of sins