

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

Let's pray...

I want to set the scene where we are at –

Paul is still under arrest and in the custody of the Romans at Caesarea

He has been in house arrest for over two years now.

Felix was replaced as governor by a man named Festus –

And upon taking over as governor, Festus wanted to do a huge favor for the religious rulers in Jerusalem – we saw this in our study last week.

Festus asked Paul if he would go to Jerusalem to answer to the charges there

But Paul knew that there were men in Jerusalem who had vowed to assassinate him and a trip there was certain death, so he refused

And instead, appealed to Caesar himself, which was the right of every Roman citizen

This was a big problem for Festus

Because, he knew that the charges against Paul were of no concern to Caesar and if he sent Paul to Rome without a worthwhile charge he could be jeopardizing his own position.

So rather than sending Paul to Rome, he kept him there in Caesarea, trying to figure out some justification for sending him and in walked King Agrippa (who had extensive knowledge of dealing with the Jews)

So Festus is hoping that Agrippa will bail him out and give him something to charge Paul with when he sends him to Rome.

So this is where we left off last week.

[Act 26:1-32 NKJV] 1 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself:

As we saw in our study last week, everyone in the audience had come in with pomp and pageantry.

All very impressed with themselves.

Here, Agrippa says he's giving Paul "permission" to "speak for himself."

He still thinks he is in control –

But what we are going to see church – is that Paul – was the one who had the authority and he was not interested in seeking anything for himself, he was speaking for their benefit.

As we look at verse 1 church, this scene should remind us that we have been given the authority of heaven.

We don't need to seek the permission of man to do what our King has sent us to do. And, we're reminded that our speech, our whole life, is not to be lived for ourselves, but in service to our King.

I had you make a note where Agrippa said, "Speak for yourself." But what we'll see is Paul talks all about Jesus.

Yes, he will share his personal testimony, but Paul's 'self' was completely wrapped up in the Person and work of Christ, his Savior.

2 "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, 3 "especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently.

Apostle Paul is standing before Agrippa –

And his opening statement is, "I think myself happy"

He has been under house arrest for over two years.

Later on, we are going to find out that as he is speaking to Agrippa, he is chained.

Yet he opens up by saying I think myself happy.

The word that is used here for happy – is the word for blessed.

It is the same word that Jesus uses in the beatitudes. Matt 5, Luke 6

Blessed are the meek, the poor in spirit, those who mourn, merciful.

So how could Paul consider himself blessed at this point?

1. He is no longer speaking to Roman pagans like Felix or Festus who knew nothing about Judaism. He is speaking directly to King Agrippa who was considered a king of the Jews. He knew all their customs. His role as king was entangled with Judaism – one of his duties was to appoint the High Priest.
2. He considered himself blessed to have the opportunity to share the gospel with a crowd of nonbelievers.

So Paul asks Agrippa to hear him out.

He begins by asking for patience –

Not all questions can be answered quickly.

Sometimes the truth cannot be rushed.

Not everything we can know about God can fit on a post-it note.

4 "My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. 5 "They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

Paul wants to establish who he was before he surrendered his life to Jesus.

And who he was - was the best of the best that human religion could offer.

There was nobody who had a greater focus, dedication and sincerity than Paul toward keeping the Jewish law.

He was a Pharisee -

In fact, he was so committed to defending it and to observing it, he had become famous for it.

So what happened to Paul –

How did he go from being the poster child for the Jews to public enemy number one?

6 "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. 7 "To this [promise] our twelve tribes, earnestly serving [God] night and day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews.

That is what changed Paul

The “hope” was the resurrection from the dead.

Specifically, that the Messiah had come, He had been killed, and now He was alive again and therefore all who follow Him will be raised to life again.

So Paul tells Agrippa – “The charge against me is that I believe in the same hope that was promised to our ancestors”

This wasn't a new promise.

The Jews knew about the promise -

God spoke to David about a future king from his descendants:

(2 Samuel 7:13 NKJV) He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

There would also be a future resurrection for everyone:

(Daniel 12:2 NKJV) And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.

The problem is that the Jews had refused the idea of a suffering Savior.

Paul also tells us here in verse 7 that the resurrection should not only be considered our great hope, but that it should also motivate us in our daily service to the Lord and that focusing on it will sustain us through the difficulties we face in this life.

It was this hope that sustained Paul during his troubles.

8 "Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?"

This is a question directed to Agrippa.

You see, the Romans found the idea of resurrection absurd.

"Why should the idea of God raising the dead be incredible to you Agrippa?"

You see church, the Resurrection is a stumbling block for many sceptics.

And the reason it is a stumbling block is because they have a very limited concept of God.

They truly haven't grasped the vastness of God -

**[Isa 40:12 NKJV] 12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand,
Measured heaven with a span And calculated the dust of the earth in a measure?
Weighed the mountains in scales And the hills in a balance?**

He is our Creator and when we truly have the right concept of God, then the resurrection will not seem so incredible or impossible.

9 "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 "This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against [them]. 11 "And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled [them] to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted [them] even to foreign cities.

So here once again, Paul gives us a glimpse to what he did before he was transformed by God's amazing grace.

Not only did he persecute Christians by arresting them, he had some killed and compelled some to blaspheme.

But I had you make a note of where he stated that he cast his vote against them.

This is why many theologians believe that he was a member of the Sanhedrin.

But I want to focus on the word that is used here for vote –

Because we only find this word one other time in scripture

Rev 2:17

[Rev 2:17 NKJV] 17 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives [it]."

In the ancient world, in the courts of justice the accused were condemned by smooth black stones and the acquitted by white stones.

Paul (Saul) voted “against” the saints, using a black stone.

Jesus votes “for” the saints – for those that have overcome, using a white stone.

12 "While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

Paul is being prosecuted by the chief priests, yet he used to work for them.

They are the ones who sent him out, with the authority and power to bring harm to the early church.

However, as we will see, that power and authority was short lived.

Because God is the One who is really in charge.

He sent Paul and He has sent us out with His own commission, not to destroy but to make disciples. And we go out in the Lord's authority – not man's.

13 "at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. 14 "And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? [It is] hard for you to kick against the goads.'

Now, a goad was a long wooden pole that farmers would use to on their ox to correct them.

They would poke them

And sometimes if the ox was stubborn, the ox would kick against the stick that was correcting it.

God had been poking Saul towards Jesus, but Saul had been resisting God.

Church, it is important to truly understand the following.

God does not force Himself on us, either in salvation or to follow His leading.

To the unsaved, we would say, “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”

To the saved, we would say the same and, additionally, “Don’t quench the Holy Spirit.”

We are not to kick against God’s leading, His correction or His commands.

15 "So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 16 'But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. 17 'I will deliver you from the [Jewish] people, as well as [from] the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 18 'to open their eyes, [in order] to turn [them] from darkness to light, and [from] the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

Here we have a recap of Paul’s mission and our mission as well

This is what we are hoping to do when we share our faith.

We want to open peoples’ eyes to the truth.

Why do we want to open their eyes, because without Jesus, we are in darkness.

Jesus said,

(John 3:19–21 NKJV) —19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

The scriptures tell us that before Jesus came into our lives, we were under the authority of Satan.

Jesus sets us free from Satan’s power.

Paul would write to Timothy:

(2 Timothy 2:24–26 NKJV) —24 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, 25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, 26 and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

Church, as offensive as it is to many people, it is still true; if a man or woman is not serving God, they are serving the devil

Like it or not, we were created to serve

Our only choice is who we will serve

the devil or God

The good news is that Jesus broke the dominion of Satan at the cross

And as a result of His grace, we have forgiveness

God's forgiveness includes not only your past sins, but your present and future ones as well

Not only are we forgiven but we have obtained an inheritance

God doesn't just pardon us, He does more

He makes us part of His family and writes us into His will

The inheritance we receive from God is eternal life with Him.

The inheritance of God is for those who have been "sanctified", those who have been made holy, those who have been set apart for God's use.

To be sanctified, one needs to have faith.

Sanctification is also a process we will go through for the rest of our lives, becoming more and more pure, more and more like Jesus, more and more holy.

But it starts by faith. It starts by believing in Jesus.

Salvation comes by faith.

19 "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 "but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and [then] to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. 21 "For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill [me]. 22 "Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come-- 23 "that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the [Jewish] people and to the Gentiles."

Here we have Paul tying everything up.

“King Agrippa, the reason I preach what I preach and live the way I live is in response to how God revealed Himself to me.

It is in response to the grace and mercy that He bestowed upon me.

I shared this Good News to the Jews and the Gentiles

That is why the Jews are after me because I shared it with the Gentiles.

And Paul then tied together the hope of the resurrection in the Old Testament by Moses and the Prophets to the person of Jesus Christ and the gospel, as the fulfillment.

24 Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!"

So as Paul is speaking – Festus interrupts the proceedings.

It could be that Festus didn't comprehend anything that Paul was saying – so it all seemed gibberish to him.

Which is exactly what Paul had written to the Corinthians -

(1 Corinthians 1:23 NKJV) but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,

Or it could have been that he interrupted because he was convicted by the Holy Spirit but instead of surrendering – he decided to kick against the goads

His tactic? Dismiss the messenger and then you can ignore the message.

25 But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. 26 "For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. 27 "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe."

There were a lot of people in the room, but the Spirit focused Paul's attention on one guy: Agrippa.

Festus clearly was reacting very negatively, but Agrippa seemed to be more receptive and so Paul brought him to a moment of decision. Do you believe?

This is important –

Paul did not say: “Will you be baptized?” Or, “Will you clean up your life and prove you’re worthy of being saved?” No, it was, “Do you believe?”

Jesus said, “He who believes has eternal life.” We are not justified by works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. Now, when a person believes and God begins that transforming process, they will do the work of righteousness.

But we are saved by grace through faith.

28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."

29 And Paul said, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains."

We really don't know exactly how Agrippa responded.

Some think he was being sarcastic, some think he was right on the brink of repentance.

We simply can't know.

What's clear is that he would not take that step into faith.

I want you to notice that Paul didn't wish imprisonment or martyrdom on any of them.

But he did wish that they would become like him in being led by Christ, motivated by the resurrection, free from the burdens of sin, full of love toward others, surrendered to the goodness of God's charge over their lives.

That they would each become people with a true and vibrant relationship with the Living Christ and become part of the long work of redemption.

Paul wanted that for them and God wants that for us.

30 When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them; 31 and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, "This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains." 32 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

So after delivering presentation of the Gospel, We have no idea if anyone in the room joined him in the family of God.

But the urgency of the situation demanded the message be shared, even if no one would believe.

Church, if we are a believer, we have been brought into the work of God, just as Paul was.

God has scattered us into a time and place so that we can continue this work.

He's supplied the power to stand strong in every circumstance.

He's provided the special revelation of Scripture so that we can, with authority, proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ, and He has invited us to be a living proof of the resurrection, as we live out a life transformed by the Gospel, inviting whoever will listen to join us in this life of grace and fulfillment and certain hope.

Just like Paul

Amen

Let's pray...

To Receive Christ do the following:

Admit, "I am a sinner."

Confess and be willing to turn from your sin.

Believe, by faith that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.

Receive, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and receive eternal life.

Dear Lord Jesus,

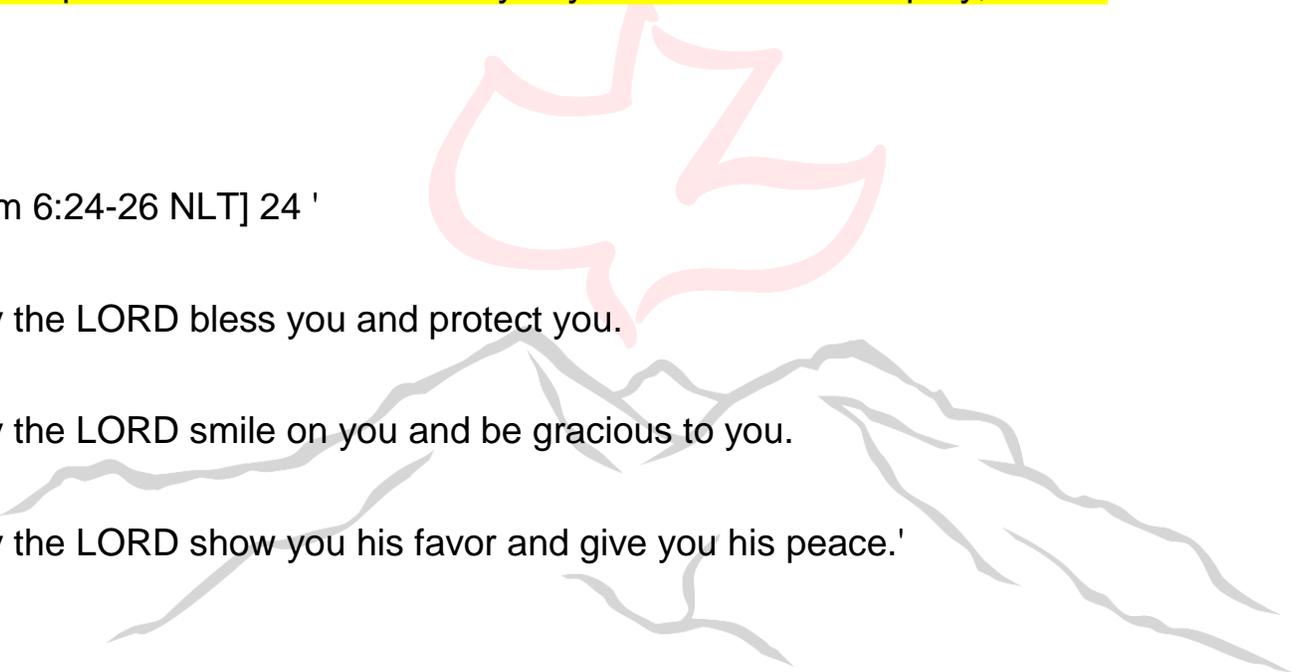
I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me for my sins and cleanse me by Your blood. I accept You by faith as my personal Lord and Savior. Give me a thirst for Your Word and Help me to follow You all of my days. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

[Num 6:24-26 NLT] 24 '

May the LORD bless you and protect you.

May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you.

May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace.'



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