

CP – 8/25/24

Acts 26: Paul's Defense before Agrippa, Part 1

Characters:

Festus – Roman Procurator of Judea, ruling from 59/60–62 AD

Agrippa II – Great-grandson of Herod the Great; son of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12); brother of Drusilla, Felix's wife; ruled 47 years (53– c. 100 AD).

Bernice – Agrippa II's younger sister, whom she lived with (strange, sinful relationship)

Paul – Zealous Jew; former persecutor of Christians; now apostle and prisoner

***Paul makes his defense before Agrippa, Bernice, and Festus.

- “made his defense” - *apologeomai*, “to defend one's self against a charge, “to make a defense,” connected to the noun *apologia*, meaning “a verbal defense,” where we get our English word “apologetics”
- Paul's 5th defense is recorded here
 - Before the Jews (Acts 22); before the Council (23); before Felix (24); before Festus (25); before Agrippa and Bernice (26)
- **This defense is not centered on Paul's conversion but his commission.**
- “The unsuspecting congregation assembles, believing they hold the power and authority. Soon, a man in chains will appear before them. Ironically, it is only that man who is truly free, and he possesses the key which could set the entire room free: not from Roman law but from the wrath of God. (Al Mohler)

1. **Paul knew his witness for Christ was a blessing & privilege. (26:1–3)**

- “makarios,” meaning “blessed” or “happy” (Matt 5:3–12; 11:6; 24:46; Luke 6:22; 11:28; Rom 4:7–8; 14:22; James 1:12, 25; 1 Pet 3:14; 4:14)
- The Lord fulfilled His word to Paul. (Acts 9:15–16; 23:11)
- The Lord granted others to hear His Word and keep hearing His Word.
 - Agrippa and Bernice hear for the first time, but another Herod hears.
 - Festus hears for the first time, but another Roman governor hears.
 - Roman tribunes and soldiers heard for the first time.
 - Prominent men of the city heard for the first time.
 - The Jewish leaders had heard again and again and again.

2. Paul described his mission before he was a witness for Christ. (26:4–11)

- He dedicated himself to live as a faithful Jew. (26:4–5; Phil 3:3–11)
- He dedicated himself to believing God's promises in the OT.
(Acts 13:32; Ps 2:7; Isa 55:3; Ps 16:10) - Paul believes in resurrection!
- He dedicated himself to opposing Jesus. (Council's goon man)
 - Opposed ("opposite to," "over against") Jesus' name
 - Put many Christians in prison
 - Cast his vote against them for the death penalty
 - Punished and persecuted them often and everywhere
 - He lived as the Jewish leaders are living now, rejecting Messiah and fighting against the God they claim to serve!

3. Jesus intervened into Paul's rebellion and blindness. (26:12–15)

- "In this connection" - even God can use our sin and rebellion to put us in the place where he accomplishes his purposes! Oh the wisdom and grace of God!

- When we come to 26, we say: "oh we've heard this before ... let's move on." And our attitude can be, we know this. And this attitude reflects often how we are with the Scriptures and the gospel. We say, oh we've heard this before, and we know the story, but have we been changed by it? We know the facts of the gospel, but we truly believe it? We know all about Jesus, but do we actually know him? our brain knows the story, but has our heart and life been changed by the story? Do we lock away the knowledge of the story and bring it out when it's convenient, or have our hearts and wheels submitted to the Lord of the story? Is Jesus a historical figure or is he the one that we purpose our life and existence after to serve, love, and worship the rest of our life & into all eternity?

- Jesus, with all authority, confronted Paul and his sin.
- Jesus, in all grace, revealed to Paul that his mission was futile.
- Jesus, in all power, saved Paul to serve Him.

Small Group Discussion:

1. How did the Holy Spirit speak to you through the Scripture and sermon on Sunday morning? What stood out to you? What questions do you have?
2. Why did Paul consider his defense a blessing? (See other uses of the term in Matt 5:3–12; 11:6; 24:46; Luke 6:22; 11:28; Rom 4:7–8; 14:22; James 1:12, 25; 1 Pet 3:14; 4:14). Do we view serving as Christ's witnesses as a blessing? How does viewing our opportunities as a blessing change the way we think about witnessing?
3. What was Paul's mission before Christ saved him? What were the positives and negatives of his life's mission? Discuss any parts of Paul's mission that stood out to you and how people's perception of their life mission (or lack thereof) drives how live their lives.
4. Discuss how Christ intervened into Paul's life. Discuss how God even providentially used Paul's circumstances to persecute the church to make him part of the church. Do you believe that God can use our mistakes and sin to still accomplish His purposes? Discuss as a group.
5. Why is it hard to make a defense? Why do we struggle with witnessing? Discuss as a group and pray for each other to embrace our identity as Christ's witnesses.