

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

ANOTHER AUDIENCE (ACTS 26:1-8) FULFILLING PROMISES

In Acts 9:15 Jesus told Ananias that Paul would take His name to “Gentiles, kings, and Israelites.” This promise came to fulfillment as Paul testified in front of King Herod in preparation to see Caesar.

- 2 Peter 3:9 says, “**The Lord does not delay His promise, as some understand delay...**”

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN APOLOGIST

With no angry mobs around and in an informal hearing, Paul could clearly and comfortably tell the King, governor, and all the dignitaries of the region. Paul offers a defense of his faith through his experiences and the history of the prophets.

- Apologetics isn't apologizing for our faith, but clearly defending and explaining it.

CONSIDERATE AND THANKFUL

Paul shows the audience respect and is formal in his address. He also shows genuine appreciation for the opportunity to speak.

- All accusations of rioting and political rebellion had been dismissed at this point and there were no witnesses of temple defilement. The topic left to deal with was the connection to Paul's faith and the OT.

OUR REPUTATION MATTERS

Paul begins with solidifying that he had a great reputation as a Pharisee before following Jesus. Paul was high-profile, a “Pharisee of the Pharisees” who held tightly to the doctrines of the Pharisees, mainly resurrection.

- It is easier to witness and testify if we first establish that we are reputable and trustworthy people.

THE RESURRECTION WAS THE HOPE

Paul wanted to focus on the Pharisee's belief in the resurrection because that is really the central theme of the Old Testament; that a Messiah will resurrect so we too can one day resurrect and be with Him.

- Paul was connecting the dots. If Herod, a scholar in the OT, would carefully look, he would see the OT is pointing to Jesus.

LIGHT (ACTS 26:9-11)

THERE WAS A TIME I WAS LIKE YOU

Paul reminds Herod that he was once a staunch adversary to the Christians. Paul was essentially a hitman for the Pharisees who was given authority to kill by Herod's father, Agrippa I.

- If Herod didn't know this, we can imagine the shock and silence in the room.

KILLING IN THE NAME OF...

Forcing people to convert or recant through cruelty or death threats has been occurring in religions since the beginning of religion. Authorities do it in the name of “God”, but it is from fallen, sinful humanity.

- **We cannot judge a religion by its followers. We judge a religion based on its holy text.**

CRUELTY PUSHES PEOPLE AWAY FROM GOD

It isn't just crusades or inquisitions that have turned people from Christianity, but the “small” offensive and insensitive actions that many of us do in our daily lives.

- **We're not called to be perfect, but we are called to be kind and humble. When we do make mistakes, we should be quick to repent and rectify the situation.**

STANDING STRONG

Paul mentions that he “tried to make them blaspheme”. This means that he failed to make the majority of the Christians recant their faith, even though he punished and threatened them.

- We must continually ask ourselves, “**How dedicated are we to our faith?**” Would we give it all for Jesus?

COLLISION (ACTS 26:12-18)

PAUL GIVES HIS TESTIMONY AGAIN

One of the reasons we read Paul's testimony several times is because it shows us how it is adapted for each audience. This is called contextualization of the Gospel.

- This simply means that we need to explain the Gospel in a way that is understandable to our various audiences.

“...KICK AGAINST THE GOADS.”

This is the first mention of “goads” in Paul's testimony. A goad is a cattle prod. What Jesus was telling Paul is that He was going to “poke” Paul and interrupt his life.

- **This is what conversion is; an interruption from God to align us with His will. It is a wake-up call, a voice, and the light that leads us.**

PAUL SOUNDS LIKE A PROPHET

Paul said that Jesus told him He was “sending you [Paul] to them to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness.” This sounds like the job of the OT prophets.

- **The job of the OT prophets and NT Christians are much the same: to teach the gospel of conversion, forgiveness, and sanctification.**

FROM THE GRAVE (ACTS 26:19-23)

“I WAS NOT DISOBEDIENT TO THE VISION

Paul was called to go to the Jews first and then the Gentiles and teach them to “repent and turn to God, and do works worthy of repentance.”

- This doesn't mean we earn salvation through works, but that **salvation should produce fruit that shows that a clear life change has taken place.**

“TO THIS VERY DAY I HAVE HAD HELP FROM GOD”

God had helped Paul every step of the way. During the beatings, the time in jail, and the false accusations, God was there making sure he got to the exact place he was.

- Paul had a **message that transcended any one person or culture; to proclaim “the Messiah would suffer, rise from the dead, and proclaim light...”**

THE OLD GIVES WAY TO THE NEW

V23 makes a shift from OT and Jewish culture into the simple Gospel of the New Testament. The OT paints the road to Jesus, and **the Messiah came to light a new path to connect with the Father; the belief of Christ and His resurrection.**

TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT (ACTS 26:24-32)

THE ROMAN WAS DONE

Festus had heard the testimony of Paul and was overwhelmed. He interrupted with a shout because the talk of a dead man resurrecting was too much for an intellectual Roman officer to grasp.

- Festus thought that Paul had studied so much theology that he was going crazy.

PAUL WAS FAR FROM CRAZY OR IRRATIONAL

The “problem” with Paul's supernatural story was that he was such an educated and rational man. Paul spoke with “truth and good judgment”.

- **If Christians live in a healthy and rational manner, having a good reputation with others, we would have a greater chance of them accepting Jesus.**

“DO YOU BELIEVE THE PROPHETS?”

The king was a politician, and when Paul put him on the spot about his beliefs, Herod dodges the question with another question, “Are you going to persuade me...so easily?”

- The goal wasn't necessarily a response immediately, but to plant the seed of the Gospel for later consideration, and hopefully, acceptance.

A LONGING FOR EVERYONE TO BE SAVED

Paul's heart became extremely clear when he said, “I wish before God...not only you but all who listen...might become as I am.”

- Paul had been beaten, lied to and about, imprisoned, and almost killed on several occasions. But, even after his enemies had done their best to destroy him, he still longed for their salvation.

AN INNOCENT MAN

The dignitaries that heard Paul and even the king himself acknowledged that “This man is not doing anything to deserve death or imprisonment”. Herod even says, “This man could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

- Did Paul make a mistake? It depends on one's idea of freedom.

WHAT IS FREEDOM?

- Let's say Paul could have gone free. What awaited him outside the tribunal walls?
- We have a very distorted view of freedom in our society. **Our ways have not led to freedom.** Doing only what we want leads us into addiction, selfishness, depravity, and captivity.
- While shackled in chains, Paul was the only free person in the room.
- Freedom is not getting to do whatever we want. **Freedom is being content regardless of our wants because we are in the will of God and His desires. When we live in His will, we find true freedom.**