

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

OCTOBER 10TH-11TH // THE BOOK OF ACTS

BEFORE AGRIPPA (ACTS 26:1-11)

PAUL HAS BEEN IN ROMAN CUSTODY FOR TWO YEARS, FIRST UNDER GOVERNOR FELIX AND THEN UNDER FELIX'S SUCCESSOR, FESTUS.

His case had now been brought before Herod Agrippa, the "King of the Jews"—a client king of Judea put in power by the Romans.

- Paul had originally been arrested in Jerusalem and charged with speaking against the law, defiling the temple, and inciting riots.

It was clear that those who were accusing Paul had no evidence for their charges, and now his trial before Festus and Agrippa was centered around the issue of Jesus (25:19).

- Was Paul's faith in Jesus a threat to the Jewish religion and the Roman government?
- This is a question still being asked today—is Christianity a threat to other faiths, religious "pluralism," and secular society?

Paul's case was brought before Agrippa for two reasons: (1) The Romans considered him to be an expert on Jewish religion, and (2) Agrippa specifically asked to hear Paul's case.

- So, Paul was given an opportunity to give an "apologia," a formal defense for why he believed what he believed.
- Paul began, acknowledging the king and how fortunate he was to have this opportunity.

PAUL SPEAKS, AS HE HAS BEFORE, ON WHO HE WAS BEFORE MEETING CHRIST.

The greatest evidence for the power of Christ's work is not in your words; it's in your life. How have you changed?

- Paul recounted how religious he was growing up as a Pharisee and how the resurrection was something he had always been taught (vs. 4-5).

BUT IF THE RESURRECTION IS A CENTRAL TEACHING OF THE PHARISEES, WHY IS PAUL NOW ON TRIAL FOR BELIEVING THAT GOD ACTUALLY RAISES THE DEAD? (VS. 6-8)

Paul was quick to establish common ground with his accusers, admitting that at one time he also thought the resurrection was incredible.

- Not only that, but at one time he had HATED the message of Jesus and participated in the arrest and persecution of Christians (vs. 9-10).

Forcing people to recant and convert through cruelty and coercion is a practice of totalitarian oppression, and it has NOTHING to do with the message and spirit of Jesus.

- In fact, this is what Jesus saved Paul from (vs. 10-11)!
- Interestingly, Paul said he only "tried" to force Christians to blaspheme (v. 11), meaning that he probably wasn't successful.

IS CHRISTIANITY A THREAT TO OTHER FAITHS, RELIGIOUS "PLURALISM," AND SECULAR SOCIETY?

In one respect, absolutely not. Christ NEVER advocated the use of force or cruelty to convert others.

- But in another respect, absolutely. Jesus' teachings state that He is the only way to eternal life and that all other paths lead to destruction (Matthew 7:13).

Not only that, but Jesus clearly taught that our faith is to be public (Matthew 5:15) and that we are to be constantly telling others about Him (Mark 16:15).

- True, biblical, Christ-centered Christianity is not coercive and forceful, but it's also not privatized, muzzled, or silent.

Tolerance is...

- The ability to recognize and respect others' beliefs and practices without necessarily agreeing or sympathizing.

Tolerance IS NOT...

- The acceptance of all views as equally true and an agreement to never practice or say anything that others might find offensive or disagree with.

THE HEAVENLY VISION (ACTS 26:12-23)

MATCHING YOUR STORY TO YOUR AUDIENCE IS CALLED "CONTEXTUALIZATION."

This is the third account of Paul's conversion recorded in the book of Acts, and each account is just a little bit different.

- In this particular telling, Paul left out some of the details (such as his blindness and encounter with Ananias) which would have confused a largely Roman audience.

WHEN WE TELL AND PRESENT THE STORY OF JESUS TO OTHERS, WE HAVE TO BE ABLE TO PRESENT IT IN A WAY OUR AUDIENCE CAN UNDERSTAND.

Being bold and being obnoxious are two completely different things. We must be wise with *what* things we share with non-believers and *how* we share them.

- Paul recounted how the light he saw at midday shone brighter than the sun (v. 13).

Paul also mentioned something Jesus spoke to him that he'd never shared before: "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (v. 14).

- A goad was a stick with a pointed piece of iron on its tip, used to prod oxen when plowing.
- A farmer would prick the animal to steer it in the right direction, and when the animal rebelled by kicking at the goad, it would result in the goad being driven even further into its flesh.

WHAT WAS JESUS SAYING TO PAUL?

Paul's rebellion against God was a losing battle, and his actions were as senseless as an ox kicking "against the goads."

- Paul had passion and sincerity in his fight against Christianity, but he was not heading in the direction God wanted him to go.
- Jesus was going to goad ("direct" or "steer") Paul in the right direction.

WHEN WE CHOOSE TO DISOBEY GOD, WE BECOME LIKE REBELLIOUS OXEN, DRIVING THE GOADS DEEPER AND DEEPER.

We do well to hear God's voice and listen to our conscience when it directs us away from disobedience and towards obedience.

- By resisting God's authority, we are only punishing ourselves and making life extremely and unnecessarily difficult.

A COMMISSION (VS. 16-18)

The resurrected, living Jesus had a purpose and plan for Paul's life ("...I am sending you to them to open their eyes," vs. 17-18).

- This wasn't the path or plan Paul had for himself. Jesus showed up and completely interrupted everything!

- Paul's response was to simply be obedient to this heavenly vision (v. 19).

PAUL THEN BOLDLY PROCLAIMS THE HEART OF THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL: RESURRECTION LIFE.

Resurrection and the restoration of all things was the hope of the prophets and Moses, and Paul articulated that this was made possible through the suffering Christ (v. 23).

- Most First-Century Jews didn't expect the Messiah to suffer, so Jesus' role as the suffering servant would have been new to them.

THIS IS WHY PAUL HAD BEEN SAVED, CALLED, AND SENT—TO PROCLAIM AND EXPLAIN THE HOPE, RESTORATION, AND POWER OF RESURRECTED LIFE THROUGH THE NAME OF JESUS.

Paul's life only made sense when viewed in light of his conversion.

- The only thing he claimed to really be guilty of is obedience to Jesus.
- Paul was living his life "worthy of the gospel."

A LIFE WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST (PHILIPPIANS 1:27)

If we truly believe that we've been purchased with Christ's blood (Galatians 3:13), buried with Him and raised to life (Romans 6:4), and filled with the very Spirit of God (Ephesians 1:13), our lives should look radically different than the world's.

- We should aspire to live lives that only make sense considering our encounter with Christ.

If we have been called by Christ yet live in disobedience, we're "kicking against the goads," making life painful and harder than it needs to be.

- The only thing you have to give God is your obedience.
- There is no limit to your potential, power, and influence if you're truly obedient.

PERSUASION (ACTS 26:24-32)

PAUL'S LIFE, MISSION, AND WORK MADE PERFECT SENSE TO HIM AND ANYONE ELSE WHO UNDERSTOOD THE GLORY OF JESUS, BUT TO SOMEONE WHO DIDN'T, HE MUST HAVE SEEMED ABSOLUTELY CRAZY.

This is exactly what Festus accused him of in v. 24—specifically that "too much study" had turned him into a religious maniac.

- Sensible people understand that men don't rise from the dead, so Paul must have been nuts.

CALMLY AND KINDLY, PAUL RESPONDS THAT HIS TESTIMONY IS "TRUE" AND OF "GOOD JUDGMENT" AND THAT HE'S NOT OUT OF HIS MIND (V. 25).

There was no point in arguing with the Roman governor, so Paul turned to the Jewish king.

- Paul assumed his familiarity with Jesus' message because it "was not done in a corner."
- This was a common Greek idiom used to refer to that which is obvious and public.

So often we hear people talk about the Christian faith as some kind of secret cult that meets in special places at special times to share esoteric knowledge and experiences.

- This isn't how New Testament Christianity is described—it's out in the open, public, and has no secrets.
- Paul asked Agrippa, "Do you believe the prophets?" This was a rhetorical question.

AS A SUPPOSED "EXPERT" IN JEWISH LAW, OF COURSE AGRIPPA WOULD HAVE BELIEVED THE PROPHETS.

But Agrippa couldn't have responded that he did because it would have led Paul to another dimension of application, which was an embarrassment that Agrippa wanted to avoid.

- So, he made a comment about Paul wanting to persuade him to be a Christian, which was exactly what Paul was trying to do (v. 28).

PAUL RESPONDS BY SAYING, ESSENTIALLY, "NOT ONLY YOU, BUT EVERYONE IN THIS ROOM!" (V. 29)

They had heard the message of Jesus. Now the choice to respond was theirs.

- Picture Paul for a moment. He was beaten and persecuted by the Jews, ridiculed by the Greeks and Romans, and he still wanted them to know and receive His Savior, Jesus.
- Agrippa had heard enough, so he withdrew.

AS BERNICE, AGRIPPA, AND FESTUS TALKED ABOUT PAUL, THEY AGREED THAT HE HAD BROKEN NO ROMAN OR JEWISH LAWS WORTHY OF DEATH OR IMPRISONMENT.

Had he not appealed to Caesar, he could have been set free (v. 32).

- Even though Paul was still imprisoned, he had gotten the opportunity to proclaim the gospel at great length and with more freedom than ever before.

A VISION FOR YOUR LIFE

What is the "good life"?

- If there is no life after this (no resurrection), the "good life" would be to build up money, power, fame, influence, and comfort/ease at all costs.
- But if Jesus really rose from the dead, then the good life is faithfully living the life God has called us to live in light of eternity.
- The question is no longer, "How can I make my life as comfortable and successful as possible?"

OBEDIENCE TO THE HEAVENLY VISION

- The "good life" is a life of joyful obedience to the heavenly vision—using our time, relationships, resources, gifts, and influence for the purposes of God because we believe this life is not the end.
- *Who does God want me to be and what has God called me to do? What would it look like for me to be obedient to that calling?*

KICKING AGAINST THE GOADS

- Our restless hearts often try to go our own ways and seek out our own paths (Isaiah 53:6).
- God, in His mercy, interrupts our plans and often "goads" us back to the path of obedience, to His plan and path for us.
- *What goads has God been sending to get you back on His path? Have you been kicking against them or letting Him lead you?*