

Scripture Reading:

Acts 26:12 "While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, 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.' 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.'" 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." 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!" 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." 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."

"Paul Constrains the King"

The Apostle Paul has been brought before the civil magistrates of his day at a pivotal time in history. We have looked at the big picture that God had revealed about history and saw that the days were numbered for both the nation of Israel and for the Mighty Empire of Rome.

- Paul had journeyed one last time to Jerusalem, because he had such a heart for his people and wanted them to turn before it was too late.

This is now the fifth time during this final visit that Paul has given the warning in a very public way. We have pondered and meditated on how the Apostle Paul commanded the Saints to pray for and be in submission to the civil magistrates and we continue to see that teaching in action as magistrates from Israel, Rome and even the local city now hear Paul.

- Paul knows that they need to be converted, as he was, and so he stays focused on sharing the Gospel.

Paul started with an honest confession of his sins of pride and legalism as a Pharisee and he then gave his testimony which we studied last week.

- Today we will consider the initial reactions to this powerful speech and see how we must expect the same types of reactions still today.

Paul gave another account of his conversion on the road to Damascus and made the point that it was his change of heart that caused the Jews to hate him just as they did Jesus.

Then the Apostle Paul draws his testimony to a conclusion, still talking directly to King Agrippa:

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."

- Paul calls on them to believe that Jesus has been raised from the dead!

Or, as we have often summarized Luke's orderly account for his friend Theophilus...

- Jesus has come and it has changed everything!

For the benefit of King Agrippa, Paul points out that this is exactly what Moses and the Prophets pointed to, just as Jesus preached the Good News to the disciples on the road to Emmaus from the Old Testament Scriptures! And Paul says this Good News is for small and great alike... For this royal King, for this mighty Roman Governor or for the servants and soldiers who were also present in the room.

Paul has done his duty in presenting the Gospel and now as he told the Saints at Corinth:

- To some it was the aroma of life and to others the stench of death.

There would be differing reactions, but there would be reactions and that is what we want to focus on today. The first comes from the Roman Governor Fetus who I think represents what we often see in the modern men and women we must witness to: Paul has challenged those listening to believe a historical fact that was current to their age...

- The resurrection of Jesus!

As I pointed out a few weeks ago, this governor did not want to be bothered by this reality... He was happy to just continue on as a wicked ruler. He could not be bothered with an investigation into the claims that the Apostle Paul was making. He is being both lazy and ignorant, but that does not look good in public... It does not look good for a Roman Governor nor does it look good for a so-called educated modern person.

- So do they buck up, study the issues and try to have a real debate showing us why the Christian is certainly wrong?
- NOPE!

They simply resort to name calling: This governor, as do many modern people when we share with them, has had enough and goes on the attack:

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!"

- Governor Fetus does not even try to be honest. He could have said, Paul we will investigate this claim and get back to you, or even we do not have time to deal with this now.

This Roman Governor could even have gone with the Pharisees who started the rumor that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus...

Of course this had become a pretty hard sell, with all those resurrected witnesses that Matthew mentions and the more than five hundred other witnesses who saw Jesus alive, most of whom were still alive at that time.

So this is the first category of reaction that I want us to consider:

- The scoffer or skeptic who simply attacks the messenger with unfounded charges and name-calling.
- We should not be surprised when we see such reactions in people we share with today!

It does NOT necessarily mean that we did something wrong... The Gospel is offensive to the lost and some will react to it in such ways [*remembering of course that we can also be offensive in a sinful way and if that is what we have done, then repentance is in order*].

Paul turns to the Governor & proclaims:

25 "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason."

Please notice that Paul does not return name-calling for name-calling...

- He remembers who he is addressing and gives the governor an honoring response:
"Most noble Festus"

- Paul then gives the proper answer by saying that he speaks words of truth and reason!

These are words that our modern world needs to hear over & over again because in the skepticism of our age we have lost the true meaning of both!

- Discussing truth & reason with our modern world is sure to bring a rash of name calling!
[examples: Flat-earthers; arrogant; ignorant; easily led!]

We must proclaim the truth as Paul has done and be ready to stand our ground when we are attacked, as Paul has done here before the Governor.

- The Apostle Paul respectfully and forcefully puts the Governor in his place, but he does not lose sight of the focus he has on King Agrippa.

Notice how Paul not so subtly draws the King back into the discussion...

25 "But [Paul] 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."

- Paul is making a rational appeal and he challenges both magistrates to see it as such.

To the Governor he says that he speaks words of truth and reason and he is now using King Agrippa as his witness!

- The death burial and resurrection of Jesus were not only very recent events, but very public events.

Paul is claiming that these events were not some novel invention of his...

- But rather what Moses and the Prophets had said would happen!

Just as Jesus challenged the Pharisees with the truth that the Scriptures they studied speak only of HIM...

- So Paul challenges King Agrippa to be honest about what he knows that the Scriptures teach!

Thus Paul asks the King a very pointed question and gives the answer that this King would have to give in public IF he wants to remain as King of the Jews!

27 "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe."

To understand King Agrippa's response we must realize what a box Paul has put him in: King Agrippa has to affirm his belief in the Prophets, but he sees that Paul is making a very strong case for those Scriptures leading right where our Lord also said that they must:

- To the resurrected Jesus!

Verse 28 has been translated into English in a variety of ways: The New King James has, 28 "Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."

What is difficult to capture in English is the shortness of time that is implied.

The King is trying to argue they have not had sufficient time to consider such an important topic and hence Luke tells us in verse 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."

Again there is a sense of time in the Greek and thus the English Standard Version says, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am--except for these chains."

- Paul knows that King Agrippa is refusing to respond to the Gospel, but he makes sure that the Gospel appeal is made for the King and for all those present.

I believe that King Agrippa represents a second type of person who refuses God's gracious offer of salvation:

- Those with hardened hearts.

While the Roman Governor refused to be bothered by all this talk of salvation and merely accused those who spoke to him about it of being crazy... King Agrippa knows that Paul is not crazy and that in fact his case is very convincing if considered honestly. *[tell Schaeffer story]*

Thus, in his own mind it is just not the right time for King Agrippa to repent: It would greatly interfere with his lifestyle and power... Thus we must remember that it is not the eloquence with which we share the Good News that changes hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.

- That is something which only God can do!
- IF He has, then any simple explanation of the Good News can bring them to repentance & salvation.

Finally, we must remember there could also have been a third type of response in this auditorium, those who I would call the quiet listeners.

- Perhaps one of Bernice's servants who attended to all of her pomp; or even the Roman soldier who came as Paul's escort and guard.

They too heard the clear presentation of the Gospel and some of them may well have been saved. We saw this at Antioch in Pisidia where we have the longest account of Paul's speaking to the Jews who did not seem interested. But after the Jews had left Luke tells us that, "the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath."

- Paul was preaching to the Jews, but it was Gentiles to whom God gave eyes to see and ears to hear!
- Such may have been the case here this day in the auditorium full of rulers and powerful people.

We certainly see examples of this in other places in the Scriptures... We can think of Joanna who is mentioned briefly by Luke as he talks about the women who served Jesus: "certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities-- Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, 3 and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance." *Luke 8:2,3*

- We are not told how Joana became a disciple of Jesus, but perhaps she was converted by one of John the Baptist's messages for King Herod?

Another group that I like to think of as the quiet listeners comes at the end of Paul's great sermon on Mars Hill. With little impact on the skeptics present that day, we read at verse 34: "However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them."

We should also think of this when we come to all the names that Paul casually mentions in his Epistles and letters, like the sixteenth chapter of Romans: Each has a story to tell!

So the bottom line is that we must remember to be faithful witnesses, sharing the Gospel and our testimony as we studied last week:

As we do, we should not be surprised if we see any or all of these reactions:

- **If they say we are crazy or start calling us other names, we simply pray that God would give them a new heart that is willing to listen.**
- **If they say what we share sounds good for us, and that they are really not interested for themselves...**

We must remember they are really saying they know they should believe but are refusing to repent!

- **Again we must pray that God give them a new heart that is willing to repent and accept the truth of the Gospel.**

We must also be encouraged by thinking of the quiet listeners, some of which may come to Christ without our even knowing! *[discuss witnessing at Longs]*

- **In all of this we must remember that if we are faithful, then God will use His Word going forth to bring many to salvation.**
- **We need not fear that our efforts might mess things up because God is in control!**

Think about the example of the man who now stands giving his testimony and presenting the Gospel before these gathered magistrates from Israel and Rome and the local city...

- **The early Church's greatest enemy has become the Apostle to the Gentiles and writer of more New Testament books than anyone else!**
- **We must remember that God knows ALL those who are His, and He will not lose any of them.**

Jesus gave his disciples and all of us great assurance of this in His debate with the Pharisees in John chapter 10:

"24 Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." 25 Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. 26 But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. 27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. 30 I and My Father are one."

- **The Apostle Paul gives us the same assurance of God's control in his letter to the Church at Ephesus:**

Ephesians 1:11 "In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory."

- **We can look to the Old Testament and see King Nebuchadnezzar confessing the same great truth about God's control:**

Daniel 4: 34 And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation. 35 All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, "What have You done?"

And finally as Paul gives a final warning to the Nation of Israel, we can remember that it was his own Jewish teacher who also understood this concept as we saw early in Acts 5:

“ 34 Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. 35 And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. 36 For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. 37 After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. 38 And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; 39 but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it-- lest you even be found to fight against God."

Jesus preceded the Great Commission with the assurance that ALL authority and power had been given to Him and thus we should not fear to be His witnesses knowing that the reactions AND the results are always in His loving and wise hands.

Communion Meditation: John 3:14

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18 He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ”