

The Discipline of Disciple-Making: When Christ Explained the Gospel to Paul

Acts 26

Each scene in Acts seems more amazing as we walk through these salvation messages. But of all the presentation of the Gospel, this is by all measures the best, most important, and the deepest impact. Paul shares the story of how Jesus Christ met him on the road to Damascus. In Acts 9, the details are sparse, but here the fullest and clearest account comes to us.

What we are going to read this morning as we open to Acts 26, is Paul sharing the Gospel again, before some of the better know people of the day. Paul is facing the grandson of Herod and his wife, who is also his sister. So the situation is interesting. Agrippa & Bernice are the talk of Roman culture. Even Rome did not often see incestuous public relationship. But Paul not only doesn't alter his witness, he actually enlarges it. Paul shares both his conversion and his commission by Christ.

When Jesus sent Paul into ministry He explains the power of the Gospel and gave Paul a template that we can trace across all of his epistles as the framework of the message that Paul shared in public preaching and teaching, as well as in personal witness and discipleship. These words are deep in their doctrinal truth, and powerful in their application.

Each of this today can ponder how amazing the work that God began in each of us the moment we called upon Christ.

This is what God does, this is what we receive when we reach out in faith to the Hand of God extending to us His free gift of salvation.

When Paul recounted the words that Christ used to lead him into a life long ministry of evangelism, he gave us the greatest Gospel sharing account in the Bible.

The words before us today are from Jesus Christ. No one knows more about salvation than Him. These words are what shaped Paul's entire ministry. No one knows more about ministry for Christ in His Church, and in winning souls, than the Apostle Paul. Combined the words of Christ on sharing the Gospel combined with the most responsive Gospel sharing apostle of all, makes this: a greatly valuable account.

First what are the details of this event; then, what are the elements of the Gospel message Paul was to share. Finally, what is the application to our ministry of evangelism and Gospel presentations?

THE AMAZING DETAILS OF THE SETTING

King Agrippa was Herod Agrippa II, the son of the Herod who killed James and imprisoned Peter. He was the last of the Herods, who play a prominent role in NT history¹.

Bernice. Not Agrippa's wife, but his consort and sister. (Their sister, Drusilla, was married to the former governor, Felix). Agrippa was living in an incestuous² relationship with his own sister, which was the talk of Rome, where Agrippa had grown up. His wicked partner in sin, Bernice, for a while even became the mistress of Emperor Vespasian, then of his son Titus, but always returned to her brother.

*Acts 25:13-23 And after some days King **Agrippa and Bernice** came to Caesarea to greet Festus. 14 When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying: "There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix, 15 about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him. 22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him." 23 So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus' command Paul was brought in.*

Acts 26:1-29 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: 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. 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. 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. 8 Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead? 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. 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

¹ He was the grand-nephew of Herod Antipas, the Herod of the gospels who wanted Jesus to do a trick, and then mocked Jesus at his crucifixion and to whom Jesus would not even utter a word (Mark 6:14–29; Luke 3:1; 13:31–33; 23:7–12), and he was the great-grandson of Herod the Great, who ruled at the time Jesus was born, and murdered the innocents at Bethlehem in cruel, calculated, cold bloodedness (Matt. 2:1–19; Luke 1:5). He was a man who knew so much, but cared so little.

² Drawn from Acts 12, 25 and 26 by John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Dallas: Word Publishing) 1997.

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."

HEROD BIO

You can get as close as Herod and still miss heaven. Few people were as close to salvation as the Herod family was. Few had so many opportunities to meet the Messiah and to hear His teaching.

SO CLOSE YET SO LOST

As you read the New Testament you immediately begin to notice how many encounters the eight named members of the Herod family had--with Jesus and His message. The Legacy of Herod the Great is--that few families in history have come as close to Jesus' message as the Herod's. Many members of this ruling family knew of Jesus and His followers. Yet, one after the other, they killed or tried to kill anyone connected to Him.

Ruler	Notable Deeds	Last Days
Herod the Great (37 BC to 4 BC): ruled the Land when Christ's Birth took place. Matthew 2:1-8, 13-18.	<i>He heard the Magi and Religious leaders announce Christ's Birth!</i>	He died a horrible, painful, sickening death in terror. He was killed by the dual onslaught of gangrene and venereal diseases.
Antipas (son of Herod the Great) ruled 4BC to AD39: ruled Galilee and Perea 40+ years. Mark 6:14-29 Luke 23:8-12.	<i>He beheaded John the Baptist!</i>	New emperor exiled him and claimed his property.
Archelaus (son of Herod the Great) ruled 4BC to AD 6 over Judea, Samaria, and Idumaea for 10 years. Matthew 2:22	<i>He was alive while Joseph, Mary, Simeon, Anna, Zacharias, and Elisabeth all lived and worshipped in his capitol city—Jerusalem!</i> Yet he ruthlessly killed the families of Jewish delegations who had gone to Rome to accuse him. He will always be known for his	Exiled to Gaul, then disappeared from history

	bloodthirstiness and evil qualities	
Philip (4 BC to AD 34): ruled area north and east of the Sea of Galilee 37 years. Matthew 14:3; Mark 8:27	<i>He ruled over the town of Peter, Andrew, James, and John as they fished his Sea of Galilee, and we called by Jesus on his seashore!</i>	Died of natural causes at end of his reign
Agrippa I (grandson of Herod the Great) ruled AD 36-44: ruled area north and east of Sea of Galilee, Judea 8 years. Acts 12:1-5, 18-24	<i>He hunted the Apostles, killing some and imprisoning others!</i>	An angel of God stuck him down, eaten up by worms and died
Drusilla (wife of the governor Felix and daughter of Agrippa I). Acts 24:24-26	<i>She sat and watched the greatest evangelist of all time—Paul, preaching about righteousness and judgment to come</i>	Fades from history after Acts 25 presumably lost forever.
Agrippa II (great-grandson of Herod the Great) ruled AD 50-70: ruled small portion of his father's region, had limited rule in Jerusalem. Acts 25:13,23,26:1-29	<i>He actually sat through one of Paul's greatest messages!</i>	Was wounded fighting for Rome against the Zealots at Gamla, but the specifics of his death are not known.
Bernice (great-granddaughter of Herod the Great). Acts 25:13,23,26:1-29	<i>She also sat through one of Paul's greatest messages!</i>	Fades from history after Acts 25-26 presumably lost forever.

CONCLUSIONS FROM HEROD'S LIFE

Few people were as close to salvation as the Herod family was. Few had so many opportunities to meet the Messiah and to hear His teaching. When we look at the Scriptures, and notice the encounters the Herod family had with Jesus and His message, we are amazed.

The Legacy of Herod the Great is that few families in history have come as close to Jesus' message as the Herod's. Many members of this ruling family knew of Jesus and His followers. Yet, one after the other, they killed or tried to kill anyone connected to Him. So beware of being like Herod.

Now listen as I lay side by side the weak and the strong. Jesus King of Glory contrasted to Herod King of Self.

PROFILES IN CONTRAST:

Paul was Christ's Representative (4BC – 28 AD)
Jesus slept in a manger where farm animals fed. He laid there seemingly weak and powerless and with no earthly status. In reality He had it all. Jesus possessed eternal power, receives eternal glory, and holds unending authority.
Jesus was born in Bethlehem as the Promised One, the Messiah from the royal line of David, and the rightful King because of the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac, and

Agrippa was Herod the Great's Grandson (73BC – 4 BC)
Herod constructed magnificent palaces, he appeared to have great strength, he wielded what seemed to be absolute power, and by every earthly measure had great status. All he lacked was what would outlive his brief life. He completely lacked any eternal status.
Herod was a usurper to David's throne, born not in Israel but in Edom, not an Israelite but an Edomite, not an heir to the throne but one whose reign violated God's rules ([Deuteronomy 17:15](#))--yet he was

Jacob—but He was never accepted as the King of the Jews.

Jesus lived to honor God, serve others, and to fulfill His Father's Will.

Jesus the Son of God was perfect in sinlessness, kind in His service.

Jesus never sought the power the world could give, but His power as God's Son is beyond comprehension.

Jesus gave His life and ministry as a sacrifice on behalf of other people;

Jesus used the living stones of redeemed people to build His Kingdom ([Mt. 16:18](#); [1 Pet 2:4-8](#)). He lived for God's Glory, and to seek and save the lost.

Jesus died on a cross in the agony of His Love, surrounded by sorrowing and loving disciples. He chose to hang there to take away the sin of the world. Everything Christ had He keeps forever.

accepted by the Jews as their king!

Herod lived for Herod, he measured life by his own measure, he sought to satisfy himself and to fulfill his own purposes in life.

Herod, the king of the Jews, was a wicked in his lifestyle and a cruel tyrant of a ruler.

Herod sought and found awesome earthly power, but he never sought nor found the power of God to heal his sin sick soul.

Herod's life revolved around sacrificing others in order to bring glory and honor to himself.

Herod tried to defy nature as he built glorious buildings of marble and massive stone blocks to honor himself and promote his standing with Rome.

Herod died in the agony of a dissipated body, hated by his family, and with the blood of many family members upon his hands that he had murdered. All that Herod had he lost.

Who are you like this morning—Herod or Christ? Which way is your life headed this morning? Are you going Herod's way or Christ's way? Jesus and Herod were opposites morally, culturally, spiritually, and certainly in terms of their worldly status.

King Herod the Great ruled Israel from 37 B.C. until his death in 4 B.C. He was king at the time Jesus was born. Here is a summary of Herod's failed life.

Herod Was One of the World's Greatest Builders. Though in ruins, his buildings are still among the greatest.

- The Temple Mount in Jerusalem is an engineering marvel to this day. Masada still evokes wonder. The ruins of Caesarea inspire images of magnificence and awe. The Herodion, the first fortress-palace along Herod's escape route was built 30 years before Christ's birth. This spectacular complex, just over three miles southeast of Bethlehem, is typical of the great building projects for which Herod is known. Built upon a high hill, the walls of the upper palace stood about ninety feet tall, and steep earthen ramparts built against the lower half of the structure gave it the shape of a volcanic cone.
- The upper palace dominated the landscape for miles around and even could be seen from Jerusalem nearly ten miles to the north. As the sun rose and set, the Herodion literally cast its shadow across the surrounding towns. The Herodion clearly symbolized Herod's visionary genius, power, and splendor. **As t he third largest palace in the ancient world**, its buildings covered about forty-five acres surrounded by about two hundred acres of palace grounds. It included elaborate halls and guest rooms, a terrace more than one thousand feet long, and **a huge swimming**

pool (140 by 200 feet) surrounded by colonnades and a beautiful garden full of exotic plants.

Herod Was One of the World's Most Insecure People. Though Herod controlled more territory than almost any king of the Jews who had ruled before him, yet he saw threats in every corner and cruelly suppressed all resistance real or imagined. .

- He especially feared Cleopatra of Egypt, so he built a series of fortress-palaces along an escape route between his palace in Jerusalem and his home country of Edom. From Jerusalem he could travel fewer than ten miles south to the safety of the Herodion, then about thirty miles to the cliff fortress of Masada, across the Dead Sea ten miles to Machaerus, and finally the thirty plus more miles to his homeland of Edom.

Herod Was One of the World's Greatest Failures. Though he intended to rival the greatest exploits recorded in Biblical history he only managed to become one of the greatest failures of all. Herod and his family got as close to Jesus as anyone could and yet they dies lost, hopeless, and still bearing their own sin.

Herod's Life Was One Of The World's Greatest Lessons. Just as the Herod's building projects towered over the landscape of biblical history, Herod cast his shadow across the history and people of Israel. Although Jesus and Herod were vastly different, God clearly engineered history to bring them together in fulfillment of His purposes.

- Today, the awesome projects that King Herod built lie in ruins, and most people remember him only as the king who had innocent babies killed in an attempt to kill the baby Jesus, the promised Messiah. Herod made his mark in the world and then was gone.
- In contrast, Jesus didn't leave a single building as a legacy. No one is exactly sure of the locations where He was born or died. Yet His passing changed the world forever. And today He lives! His kingdom has no end, we Christians are His temples, and the eternal truths He revealed remain true today. No matter how strong and glorious Herod appeared to be, the baby in Bethlehem's manger was stronger. Jesus the Messiah, the Lord of heaven and earth, triumphed over all evil even death! He will return to conquer all earthly powers.
- **HEROD MISSED HIS CHANCE.** *You can get as close as Herod and still miss heaven.*

SALVATION IS: GOD-OPENED EYES & GOD-TURNED LIVING

MESSAGE TWENTY-ONE (Paul recounting Christ's words): The next Gospel Presentation is in Acts 26:17-20 where we see the Gospel Message directly from Jesus, who is at work doing soul winning on Paul right here in the Book of Acts.

Jesus describes salvation as opened eyes, turning, receiving, and being sanctified. Jesus who saved Paul, explained to him that the same miraculous events of salvation, accomplished by God's power, was what God also wanted to see happen in the lives of lost people everywhere Paul preached:

Acts 26:17-18 (NKJV) 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.**'

So what did that mean to Paul? He explains it in v. 19-20:

"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.**"

What did Paul tell the lost pagans? Did his message differ from one he had for the Jews? No, one Gospel, one salvation, one faith!

Here is the summary after 21 Gospel Presentations: really repent, turn away from iniquity, be saved from sins, by God's forgiveness, by believing with all your heart, and **God opens your eyes, God turns you from darkness to light, God sets you free from the power of Satan, God gives you an eternal inheritance, God begins a never ending, life-long sanctification—all through faith in Christ Jesus.**

SALVATION IS: ENTERING & LIVING IN GOD'S KINGDOM

MESSAGE TWENTY-TWO (PAUL): is the final Gospel Message is in Acts 28:31 where salvation is described as coming into God's Kingdom. The starting message in Acts is: *repent*; and the concluding message is: *enter God's Kingdom*, both rarely if ever used today.

Acts 28:28-31 (NKJV) “Therefore let it be known to you that **the salvation of God** has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves. 30 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 **preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ** with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

Acts 26:18 (NKJV) **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.’

To **open** their eyes, We all were born spiritually blind

Luke 1 REGENERATION we are dead in our trespasses and sins, we are of our father the devil, God reaches down into our hearts, minds, and lives and takes away our spiritual blindness, and gives us eyes to see, love, know, and follow Him

in order to **turn** them from darkness to light, we all love darkness rather than light

John 1 REDEMPTION God lifts us up out of the pit of sin, sets our feet upon the Rock, breaks the shackles of sin, and purchases us as His very own. We are bought at a price and want to glorify God.

and **from** the power of Satan to God, we are born into the devils family John 8, and live in his arms

1 John 5 JUSTIFICATION we are transferred from the kingdom of the devil to God’s kingdom. We become the habitation of God, sealed forever securely by His Spirit. We are energized by His grace, and seated in

that they may **receive forgiveness** of sins: we are laden with deadly sins “die in sins” that are attracting the eternal fiery wrath of God

The FORGIVENESS freely, completely and final remission of all sins; all our stains are removed; and all our guilt is gone. We have a fresh start, and a new beginning

and an **inheritance**: we are impoverished, in rags that are filthy Isaiah 53 RECONCILIATION. God now takes away all the anger and wrath He had towards us in our sins, and makes us family members both by birth and by adoption. It is the end of the war and the start of our eternal family relationship as His children. We have access, we have all the riches of His grace, power, and a future with Him.

among those who are **sanctified** by faith in Me.’: we desperately need what only Christ can give. Paul describes SANCTIFICATION

ONE. to open their eyes, = we are blind, sightless; ach one of us is born spiritually blind, and we grow up living lost, helpless, and hopeless in the darknes of sin. The purpose of Christ's death was to save us from the lost, helpless, hopeless life and to present us with the seven gifts of salvation

Salvation Reaches: Blind Sinners in Darkness

We were each born sitting in the darkness, heading towards the precipice of sin; but we didn't even know it because we were blind. That's how we each were found by Jesus Christ, when He saved us.

So at the moment of salvation, we are given spiritual sight as a gift from God. The Christmas story gives the clearest picture of how all humans appear in their unsaved state, from God's perspective.

The Gospel is when Jesus Christ shines into our sin-darkened night life with a Sunrise of forgiven Life & saving Light. Listen anew to the wonder of what we celebrate this Christmas Season from the last few verses of Luke 1:

Luke 1:76-79 (NKJV) “ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, 77 To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins, 78 Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; 79 To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Matthew 4:16 (NKJV)

The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light,
And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death
Light has dawned.”

TWO. in order to turn them from darkness to light, = we love darkness rather than light

John 3:19 (NKJV) 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.

WE ARE LOST IN DARKNESS

Christmas is the story of the Lord God Almighty, motivated by His great love, sending Jesus to provide the way of salvation to lost humanity sitting in that complete darkness.

Jesus came to Earth as the sunrise [Dayspring] from God, to shine the light of salvation upon all of the lost and sin darkened people of this world.

It is always darkest just before dawn, and that is just how it was. The Roman world of the 1st Century had reached the highest levels of science, literature, culture, engineering, transportation, and medicine known since Adam and Eve stepped from the Garden.

Yet with all that advancement most people were still hopelessly lost, and endlessly troubled by an inability to even control their own fears and desires—let alone know how to come to know the Awesome God of the Universe.

God surveyed His creation and found that the crown of creation, the only creatures made in His image had a soul threatening, terminal illness called sin. In every instance of Christ's coming (Christmas) there are clues describing what we needed as exactly what Jesus came to offer us.

THREE. and from the power of Satan to God, = we are of our father the devil; slaves to his will rm 6, and in the arms of the evil one 1 j 5

John 8:44 (NKJV) You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.

1 John 5:20 (NKJV) And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

2 Tim 2:26

Romans 6:16 (NKJV) Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?

FOUR. that they may receive forgiveness of sins and = our greatest need is to get something done with our sins die in your sins

John 8:24 (NKJV) Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."

FIVE. an inheritance among those = we are poor, paupers, clothed in filthy rags with no standing, no worth

Isaiah 64:6 (NKJV) But we are all like an unclean thing,
And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags;
We all fade as a leaf,
And our iniquities, like the wind,
Have taken us away.

SIX. who are sanctified by faith = we want to be a vessel useful for the Masters use

Rm 12.1-2

2 Timothy 2:20 (NKJV) But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor.

SEVEN. in Me.' = we need to be connected to Christ

jn 14.6

John 17:3 (NKJV) And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

