The Christian Arsenal

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ACTS 25:13-26:32

Before we get into today's Scripture, I want us to remember exactly what has happened to Paul.

We saw last week how Paul has been imprisoned on false charges brought by the Jewish religious establishment. These men wanted Paul dead and they tried every means to accomplish this.

> Paul appeared before Felix, the governor of Judea. Felix wanted to please the Jews, so he refused to allow Paul to go free. By this time, Paul had been moved to Caesarea. and Felix kept Paul in custody there. Paul had some freedom and his friends were allowed to come visit and minister to him.
>
> **But, did they? Dr. Luke doesn't tell us, does he?**

Don't you wonder if James, the brother of the Lord Jesus and also the leader of the Jerusalem church…don't you wonder if he called the Jerusalem believers together and traveled to Caesarea with **books** and food and other **necessary items** for Paul? **Don't you wonder if they rallied around Paul and prayed for him and encouraged him and fellowshipped with him?**

I hope so…**Surely Dr. Luke was there**. Perhaps Timothy and the others who had originally accompanied Paul to Jerusalem were also there. Surely they didn't abandon Paul during these two years he was held in custody.

Well, Felix was succeeded by a man named Festus. And one of the first things Festus had to deal with was the case against Paul. You would think by now the Jews in Jerusalem would have forgotten all about Paul, wouldn't you? But, their hatred for Paul didn't die. **I believe this tells us that Paul must have still been making an impact for Jesus…even in prison!!**

The Jews still planned to kill Paul. So, they requested that Paul be brought back to Jerusalem, and at first Festus denied their request.
Festus wasn't going to be high-pressured or manipulated. He was new on the job and he didn't want to allow a case that had already been referred to the Roman court in Caesarea to be taken back to the Jewish court in Jerusalem.

So, he invited the Jews who wanted to bring charges against Paul to come town to Caesarea to do so. Doesn't this sound like "de ja vu" all over again? This is exactly what had happened when Felix was governor, isn't it?

Well, once again Paul defended himself in court…this time before Governor Festus.

> It was obvious to Festus that Paul hadn't broken any Roman Laws, so he decided to do what the Jews had requested in the first place. Festus decided to take Paul **back** to Jerusalem and try him there in the Jewish court. Festus thought maybe they could get this matter settled once and for all.

Since Festus was new on the job, and he knew he was going to have to work with these Jewish leaders for a long time to come, and he probably thought this would be a way he could get on good terms with them.

But when Festus presented this to Paul and Paul said, **"No, thanks!!"**

For Paul to return to Jerusalem meant returning to "square one." Paul had been in captivity in Caesarea for two years, patiently waiting for the slow wheels of justice to turn in his direction and now Festus wanted him to go back to Jerusalem where the religious Jewish fanatics wanted to assassinate him? *"No, I don't believe so,"* Paul said. *"I'd rather take my chances before Caesar."*

Now, that's where we pick up today. Paul is still in custody in Caesarea. Festus is still governor. Paul has appealed to Caesar. Paul had every right to appeal to Caesar by virtue of the fact that he was a Roman citizen.

By the way…who was Caesar?

Remember Caesar was not a name, but a title. Nero was Caesar at that time. Nero hadn't yet shown himself to be a maniacal Christian hater. Historians tell us the first five years of Nero's reign were years of moderation and justice.

Nobody, least of all Paul, could have anticipated the terrible persecution Nero would bring upon the Christians. Nobody could know Nero would use the burning Christian bodies to provide light for his garden parties. No one could see the future and know that Nero would burn Rome and blame it on the Christians.

Having said that…
Why did Paul appeal to Caesar? Was he wrong to have done this? Should Paul have taken his chances and gone back to Jerusalem? Did Paul act hastily? Did Paul make a rash decision to go to Rome?

Or, was this God's will and the Holy Spirit's means of taking him to Rome? Remember the Lord had come to Paul and told him he would eventually go to Rome to bear witness for Jesus there.

We don't know…We don't know if perhaps Paul had been praying for clear and divine direction from God in this for the past two years, do we? But I believe he had.

One thing we **do** know…Paul is about to prove ***Romans 8:28***, isn't he? Right or wrong…God is able to work all things for good for those who love Him and are the called according to His purpose.

Acts 13:25 *tells us that King Agrippa arrived at Caesarea to pay his respects to the new governor. King Agrippa was actually a "puppet king" put in place by the Roman governor. Agrippa was an Idumean, a descendant of Esau…kin to the Jews…but not a real Jew from the lineage of Jacob.*

Agrippa was everything that Paul wasn't. Paul was a saved man, seeking to do God's will, seeking to live a pure and holy life.

Agrippa was a man who apparently knew a lot about Judaism, but Agrippa was so taken with his own position and power and his family legacy that he certainly had no time for the things of God.

Agrippa's **great grandfather** was the Herod who ruled at the time of Jesus' birth and murdered all the little babies because he was trying to kill the newborn King of the Jews.

Agrippa's **great uncle** executed John the Baptist.

Agrippa's **father** had arrested Peter and had murdered the Apostle James.

Agrippa's own private life was scandalous. He was living in an incestuous relationship with his own sister.

So, this is the man before whom Festus brings his problem. Festus tells Agrippa that there is a certain man against whom charges have been brought. He tells Agrippa that the charges have been brought by the Jewish religious leaders. He tells Agrippa that the charges have to do with their own religion and a certain dead man, Jesus, whom Paul said is alive. Festus also tells Agrippa that Paul had requested to appear before Caesar.

Basically, Festus tells Agrippa that he doesn't know how to handle this situation…

Well, this got Agrippa's attention and Agrippa said that
he'd like to hear this man, too…
And Festus said, **"Tomorrow, you shall hear him."**

Acts 25:23-27…
Do you see what's really happening here? This hearing was actually held only to find out a way to write a letter to Rome…a letter that would state the charges against Paul. It's hard to write a letter charging someone who is innocent with a crime!!

Acts 26 gives us yet another glimpse of Paul's salvation testimony. As we look at ***Acts 26***, I want us to see

1) **PAUL'S LIFE IN JUDAISM**

Verses 1-11…Paul says "I was raised a Jew. Inasmuch as
I knew and understood the Law, I lived by it."

Paul was a Pharisee…**binding heavy burdens on men's backs…burdens they couldn't bear.**

Paul was a Pharisee…**doing all his works to be seen by men.**

Paul was a Pharisee…**wearing his phylactery every day, and loving the chief seats in the synagogues, and legalistically tithing of his mint and cumin and anise while allowing those around him to be in need.**

Paul was a Pharisee who was **outwardly righteous but was inwardly full of hypocrisy.**

Paul was one of the men of whom Jesus spoke when He said, **"You are white washed sepulchers, beautiful on the outside, but full of dead men's bones on the inside."**

Paul's righteousness was as filthy rags before God.

In the middle of telling the king of his religious background, Paul pauses to tell him why he is being charged…
"Long ago, God gave our fathers the promise of hope.

> **And now the Jews are bringing charges against me for that hope. Why should it seem incredible to anybody that God can raise the dead?"**

By the way, why is Paul emphasizing the resurrection? It's believed that Agrippa was allied with the Sadducees. He even appointed the High Priests. Well, the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection, or did Agrippa.

> Folks, the resurrection is what makes Christianity different from all other "religions", isn't it? If the resurrection isn't true, then the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is without power to save men from their sins.

I believe we see here how the beliefs of those in government can influence their decisions. If they don't believe a certain way…then they don't accept anyone who disagrees with them. We saw this in the confirmation hearings of John Ashcroft, didn't we?

Then, Paul goes on to tell King Agrippa,

> **"I locked up the saints in prison. I punished them often in all the synagogues. I tried to get them to blaspheme. I even chased them to foreign cities. I cast my vote for many to die."**

I believe Paul is doing his best to let the king know what kind of a sinner he was. Paul was using this opportunity to give an account of the hope that was within him, because Paul's life was dramatically changed and that's the second thing I want us to see in Paul's testimony.

2) PAUL'S CONVERSION

Verses 12-15…
In a matter of a few seconds the Pharisee who had sought all his life to please God by his works was brought face to face with the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ.
(When were **you** brought face to face with **your** need for a Savior?)

> As Paul lay in the dust on the road to Damascus, he realized he was without God, without Christ, without hope. It dawned on him for the first time ever that Christ loved him and died for him. For the first time Paul realized he had been kicking against the goads.

What goads? This is a picture of a long rod used to prod oxen in a certain direction. What had been bothering Paul? What "long rod" had been prodding him?

> Dr. Luke doesn't tell us, but I believe Paul had been kicking against the conviction of the dear Holy Spirit. And I believe this conviction began at the stoning of Stephen.

This conviction may have **begun** when he heard Stephen's defense before the Sanhedrin. This conviction more than likely **continued** as he held the cloaks of those who stoned Stephen. I believe this conviction was really **driven home** to Paul when he heard Stephen's statement as he was being stoned to death. Remember, Stephen said he saw the risen Christ standing at the throne of God.

There comes a time in the life of every person when he or she must decide what they will do with the conviction that the Holy Spirit brings on them. Will they kick against the goads of conviction? Will they ignore it? Will they harden their hearts? Will they procrastinate? What did you do when the goads of the Holy Spirit's conviction prodded you? Did you kick against them? How long?

Paul stopped kicking against the goads of conviction that day on the road to Damascus. He was knocked to the ground and he saw and heard the risen Christ, and **he just stopped kicking!!**

That was his conversion, but there was also

3) PAUL'S COMMISSION

Verses 16-18…
The Lord told Paul that he would bear His name before the Gentiles, and kings and the sons of Israel. The Lord told Paul that he would suffer much for the sake of the Gospel.

(See, other men had come along and claimed to be their Messiah. Jesus wasn't the first. And the Pharisees and the Sadducees had always gone out and investigated these men. The false messiahs and their followers had always faded from the scene…but not the Lord Jesus Christ. His followers didn't fade away, even though He was crucified.)

I believe the thing that stuck in the craw of the Jewish religious leaders the most is the fact that Saul of Tarsus…the man who was one of their own…this man who had been their great champion…should become a follower of this One who claimed to be the Messiah. I believe it galled them that Paul would become a Christian.

And to make matters worse, Paul didn't become a "nominal Christian." Paul wasn't any "ordinary Christian." Paul became even more zealous for Christ than he had ever been for Judaism…and Paul did this, not in his own strength, but in the strength of the dear Holy Spirit.

The religious Jews couldn't stand to see Paul being successful at winning Jews or Gentiles to the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, the Jews had been called by God to be a light to the Gentiles and they had failed miserably. Instead of showing the love of God to the Gentiles…they held Gentiles in contempt. They had no respect or regard for the Gentiles…and here is Saul of Tarsus, being successful in winning them to faith in Jesus!! It was more than they could bear!!

By the way…Did you read in the paper this past week about the Christian Jew by the name of Marvin Rosenthal who has opened a theme park based on the land of Israel? The rabbis are up in arms…afraid this them park is going to be used to win Jews to the Lord Jesus! Things haven't changed much, have they?

Well, not only do we see here the testimony of Paul's life in Judaism, and Paul's conversion and Paul's commission…but we also see

4) PAUL'S LIFE IN MINISTRY

Verses 19-23…

a) the obedience of Paul's ministry…

One of the first marks of our conversion is that we obey Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

Paul was obedient to do what God had called him to do. Was Paul a special case? No, God has called each of us to be obedient to Him. What about us? Is there anything God has impressed **you** to do that you haven't done?

Each of us has a ministry. I don't know what God has called you to do. But, He has a circle of influence He's placed you in and a job for you to do, **a ministry within that circle of influence.** Are you being obedient in that which you know to do for the Lord Jesus?

b) the scope of Paul's ministry…

Paul says, "I preached in Damascus and Jerusalem and all the regions of Judea and even to the Gentiles to the small and the great."

c) the message of Paul's ministry…

Paul's message was the Gospel of Jesus Christ…
that Christ suffered,
that Christ died,
that Christ was raised from the dead.

That's exactly what the Gospel is…the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He died for our sins, He was buried and He was raised from the dead.

Paul preached repentance…a turning **from** sin and a turning **to** God!!

Repentance is a turning around…and that's exactly what had happened to Paul. Paul was traveling down a road to persecute Christians and he repented and began traveling down a road to win folks to Christ and to encourage and exhort and edify them, didn't he?

Well, after all this, what was the response of Festus and what was the response of Agrippa?

Festus…*verses 24-26…*
Festus couldn't understand the resurrection, so if he couldn't understand it, he couldn't believe it!!

Festus said, "Paul you must be crazy! You certainly have more sense
than that, Paul. The idea that a man could be nailed to a cross,
have a spear driven through his side, be buried in a tomb, and
then come back to life is ridiculous!

See, the response of Festus was one of **unbelief.** There are so many folks today…especially intelligent and highly educated folks who cannot believe because it takes more than intelligence. **It takes faith.** ***Without faith it is impossible to please God.***

How did Paul know Jesus had died and had risen from the grave? Paul had seen Him with his eyes and he had heard Him with his ears and Jesus lived in his heart. How do you and I know Jesus has died and has risen from the grave? We know by the Word of God and we know by the presence of the dear Holy Spirit. We haven't seen the physical Jesus…but we have heard Him and we know if He lives in our heart or not!!

By the way, we don't see Paul responding rudely to Festus. We don't see Paul calling Festus "mad"…even though Paul was the sanest man in the room that day.

So, the response of Festus was one of unbelief…let's look at the response of

Agrippa…*Verses 27-28…*
Verse 28 is what the hymn **"Almost Persuaded"** is based on. We touched on this last week in connection with Felix. How sad it is when men are almost persuaded. How said it is when men keep putting off the decision to follow the Lord Jesus. **God's Word tells us that His Spirit will not always strive with man. God's Word also tells us that a man will harden his heart once too often and then he will be cut off without remedy.** This verse has been interpreted to mean that Felix was almost persuaded to become a Christian.

But, let me tell you what many Greek scholars say this verse is literally saying…
"With but little persuasion you attempting to make me
a Christian."

In other words… "Paul, with that little argument you expect me
to be a Christian?"

"Do you expect with this little story of your changed life, that you'll get me to be a Christian? I'm a king, Paul. I've got all the 'pomp' I need. I've got all the servants I need. I've got all the money I need. I've got all the position and power and prestige I need. I have all the religion I want…I don't need anything else."

Which interpretation of this verse is the right one? I don't know…but we do know that either way…Agrippa's response was one of pride. He wasn't ready to make a decision to follow the Lord Jesus…because quite simply, he didn't need the Lord Jesus.

The bottom line is that there's no different eternity waiting for the man who doesn't see his need for Jesus and the one who does see his need for Jesus but keeps putting off coming to Him…

He was going to be all that a mortal should be Tomorrow…
No one would be better than he Tomorrow…
Each day he stacked up the letters he would write Tomorrow…
It was too bad indeed he was too busy to see his friend,
but he promised to do it Tomorrow…
The greatest of workers this man would have been Tomorrow…
The world would have known him had he ever seen Tomorrow…

But the fact is he died and faded from view, and all that was left
when the living was through was a mountain of things
he intended to do Tomorrow…

Verses 30-32…
See, Festus and Agrippa saw nothing in Paul that was worthy of death or imprisonment, but they weren't willing to repent and turn to Jesus, either. They weren't willing to buck the Jewish religious establishment.

We saw last week that Felix had the same view of Paul. We saw last week that the response Felix had for the Gospel was one of simply loving his sin so much that he wasn't willing to give it up.

Paul would be sent to Rome where he would make his case before Caesar. But, he would go in chains…

The world would look at these four men we've looked at today…Felix, Festus, Agrippa and Paul…and the world would say Paul was the fool and Felix and Festus and Agrippa were the wise men.

But two thousand years later, men are being changed by the example of Paul's life.

Two thousand years later, hearts are drawn closer to God by the writings from Paul's pen.

Two thousand years later, Christians are growing and being sanctified following the principles Paul gave.

Two thousand years later, no one remembers Felix and Festus and Agrippa fondly. If we could open the curtains of hell, we'd see and hear these men say, **"Oh, I wish I'd laid my sin aside and asked Jesus to save me.**

Oh, I wish I'd put aside my unbelief and asked Jesus to save me.

Oh, I wish I'd laid aside my procrastination, and asked Jesus to save me.

Oh, I wish I'd said 'now is the day of my salvation.'"

And one day when we get to heaven, we'll see a little old Jewish man in his glorified body…singing and praising the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and saying,

"Oh, the things I suffered on earth aren't worthy to be compared to the glories of this place"*…and we'll agree!!!*

There really is a heaven and there really is a hell. And the only thing that makes the difference is the Lord Jesus Christ. My prayer is that He has made that difference for everyone in this room.