

Sermon No. 427

CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH

The book of Acts

CHAPTER 26

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-9

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Ch.24-25 Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea

GOVERNOR FELIX

- Religious leaders accused Paul of sedition . . . disease
- Court case . . . lack of evidence . . . found innocent
- Incarcerated two years!

GOVERNOR FESTUS

- His trial re-opened . . . same result . . . two-year long vendetta
- Paul requested his case be heard by Caesar . . . King Agrippa
- What to write to Caesar?

Ch.26: Paul gives his defense before Agrippa

- King Herod Agrippa II, ruler of a Roman province to the northeast
 - His great-grandfather tried to kill baby Jesus
 - His grandfather beheaded John the Baptist
 - His father martyred James

(1-3) Paul's introductory words

¹ 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.

- Paul was happy
 - (a) Because the evidence will be examined by the highest official
 - (b) Because he has another opportunity to share Christ
 - (c) Because this was a fulfillment of what the Lord promised Paul at his conversion

Acts 9:15 Saul is My chosen instrument to take My message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel

(d) Because it was a matter of obedience

(4-8) Paul explains his early life as a faithful Jew and Pharisee

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.

- Faithful Jew . . . faithful to the Law of Moses
- Faithful to GOD . . . to the Jewish religion
- Trained by the most religious group of Jews

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?

Why should it be thought incredible by you that GOD raises the dead?

- Agrippa isn't a Jew . . . but an expert in Jewish customs . . . Acts 26:3
- He would have known that the Jews believed that GOD could raise the dead

Why should it be thought incredible by us? GOD can do anything!

- Jesus said, with GOD all things are possible . . . Matthew 19:26

(9-11) Paul explains his zeal for GOD . . . as a persecutor of the followers of Jesus

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.

- Confessed that before he came to know Christ . . . he was an angry man
- This shows his relationship with GOD was not right
James 1:20 **Human anger does not produce the righteousness GOD desires**

- Had them imprisoned . . . put to death . . . Stephen
- He compelled them to blaspheme . . . he forced them to renounce Christ

(12-15) Paul explains his conversion . . . how Jesus revealed Himself to him

- This is Paul's fullest account yet of his experience on the Damascus Road

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.*'

- It is useless for you to fight against my will

Imagine seeing a light from heaven, brighter than the sun

- Literal and miraculous

Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?

- Personal appeal . . . Saul, Saul

¹⁵ So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

- These words changed Paul's world
- He immediately understood . . .
 - Jesus wasn't dead . . . but alive
 - Jesus wasn't fictitious . . . but reigning in Glory

And in persecuting the followers of Jesus:

- (a) He was persecuting Jesus
- (b) In persecuting Jesus, he was fighting against the GOD of his fathers

Confronted by the TRUTH . . . he only had one thing to do . . . REPENT

- To *repent* is to make a transformation of mind
It is an essential part of our conversion
- Repentance is of GOD . . . C.H. Spurgeon "A sinner can no more repent and believe without the Holy Spirit's aid than he can create a world"

(16-18) Jesus commissions Paul on the road to Damascus

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.

But rise and stand on your feet . . . for I have appeared to you for this purpose

- [1] If you are going to be any use to GOD . . . you are going to have to get up!
- [2] If you think the purpose has anything to do with you . . . you are wrong!

GOD's purpose for Paul . . . to make him a minister!

- To be a minister is to be servant of the Lord
- The message of the Cross doesn't serve us . . . we serve the message

¹⁷ I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, ¹⁸to 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.'

- Jesus describes His followers as sanctified
- Sanctified is to be set apart from sin and self . . . BY FAITH

Not by our works . . . but by our connection of love and trust to Jesus

Sanctification is ours . . . by virtue of GOD's GRACE

We must never overlook the blessing of sanctification

(19-20) Paul explains his post-conversion . . . characterized by obedience!

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 [1] repent, [2] turn to GOD, and [3] do works befitting repentance.

- A believer proves that they have changed by the things they do

(21-23) Paul summarizes his defense

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.”

Message: [1] Christ’s death . . . [2] His resurrection . . . [3] preaching to the world

(24-26) The response from Festus and Agrippa

²⁴ Now as he thus made his defence, 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.

- Good reasons to think Paul was mad!
 - As a prisoner in chains, he tells them he is content and happy!
 - He insists that the dead live again!
 - He insists he had a heavenly vision!
 - He is more interested in proclaiming Jesus than getting free!
 - He believes this message of hope is available to all humanity, not just Jews!

- Some people might think we are crazy too when we share Christ

1 Corinthians 1:18

¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of GOD

Galatians 1:11-12

^{NLT 11} Dear brothers and sisters, I want you to understand that the gospel message I preach is not based on mere human reasoning. ¹² I received my message from no human source, and no one taught me. Instead, I received it by direct revelation from Jesus Christ

(27-29) Agrippa is *almost* persuaded to become a Christian

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

- Note, Paul didn't ask if he believed Jesus . . . did you believe the prophets?
- Trying to get Agrippa to connect what he already believed to what he should believe
- Do you believe there is a GOD? Yes . . . then connect that to Jesus
- Do you believe there is a HEAVEN? Yes . . . then connect that to Jesus

²⁸ Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian"

- Almost being a Christian means that you . . . will almost have eternal life
- Almost being a Christian means that you . . . will almost be delivered from hell

Sadly, Agrippa didn't want:

Turn from darkness to light . . . turn from the power of Satan to the power of GOD . . . to receive forgiveness of sins . . . to find a place among GOD's people . . . to be set apart by faith in Jesus

Why NOT?

- Maybe he was afraid of becoming accountable like Paul?
- Maybe he was afraid he would be ridiculed by the others?

Notice – Paul didn't get angry or sad about this

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 declared his continued trust in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

(30-32) Agrippa admits Paul's innocence, yet forwards him to Caesar.

³⁰ When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them; ³¹ and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, "This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains." ³² Then Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

- Strange? No, a fulfillment of GOD's purpose!

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Paul knew what it was to be . . .

- ON A MISSION OF HATE
- FILLED with PRIDEFUL, SELF-RIGHTEOUS ZEAL
- FILLED with RESENTMENT and ANGER

But Paul had seen the Light . . . Jesus had restored him to GOD . . . now he was truly remorseful for the time he sinned against the GOD he loved

1 Corinthians 15:9

^{NLT 9} For I am the least of all the apostles. In fact, I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted GOD's church.

1 Timothy 1:15

^{NLT 15} This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of them all.

But thankfully, all that was in the past . . . it had been dealt with on the Cross
GOD would have him to live in the present . . . not in the past

Philippians 3:13

NLT ¹³ No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing:
Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead,

GOD has Paul looking ahead, not backwards!

The Good News is that our forgiveness is complete . . . no value dwelling on
the past

The opportunities to Glorify Christ lie ahead

We can all admit we have regrets, but let us be quick to praise GOD that His
grace is greater than our sin . . . and today is a new day to live for Christ

Be free from the burden of sin

Alan Redpath once put it, "You can have a saved soul and a lost life."

Invitation

C.H. Spurgeon "Almost persuaded to be a Christian is like them man who
was almost pardoned, but was then executed; or the man who was almost
rescued, but drowned! A man that is almost saved is damned"