

TAKING A STAND / Sunday School- November 4, 2012

Unifying Topic: PAUL BEFORE KING AGRIPPA

Lesson Text

I. Paul Pleads His Case (Acts 26:19-23)

II. Agrippa Responds To Paul (Acts 26:24-32)

The Main Thought: But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. (Acts 26:24-32, KJV).

Unifying Principle: It is difficult to stand by our convictions when other people think we are crazy. Where do we find the strength to stand our ground? Confident that he spoke the truth, Paul did not back down from sharing the story of his faith in Christ.

Lesson Aim: To help learners comprehend Paul's conviction and commitment to the Gospel as he stood before King Agrippa.

Life Aim: To help participants hold firm to their convictions against the cost of possibly losing their credibility.

26:19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

26:20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

26:21 For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

26:22 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:

26:23 That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

26:24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

26:25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

26:26 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

26:27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

26:28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

26:29 And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

26:30 And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them:

26:31 And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.

26:32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.

HISTORY:

Paul is accused way back in **Chapter 21** by the Jews of two crimes—they said that he taught against the two most important things in Judaism—the Law and the Temple. They also said that Paul had brought Gentiles into the inner part of the Temple (v28). They dragged Paul into the Court of the Gentiles which was the Outer Court and the chief Roman captain arrested him which really rescued him from being killed by the crowd of Jews. They bound and chained him (v33). He asked the chief captain could he speak because there were many yelling all kinds of things, even "*away with him.*" Paul had replied to the captain, "*I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia...*" and therefore, he was allowed and led to the stairs to speak to the crowd. Paul began to address them in the Hebrew tongue which captured their attention (**vv.1-40**). It now begins in the next chapter.

Chapter 22 This is Paul's **first** defense or plea before a group of people. It is interesting to note that Paul made his defense on the same Roman stairway where Pilate had condemned Christ to death some twenty-six years earlier. The attitude of the Jewish mob also reflects a similar treatment of the Lord's servant. The crowd was listening until a certain point and they began to turn on him by saying, "*Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live*" (v22). When the Roman centurion was about to scourge Paul, he spoke up because they didn't know that they were about to beat a Roman citizen. The rights of Roman citizens were guarded as something sacred by Rome. Evidently, the Roman captain didn't believe him at first and became afraid after hearing again that Paul was a Roman citizen. The soldiers even quickly disappeared. They were ordered to unbind his hands because that was even against the law for a Roman citizen. His hands were loosed and was brought before the Chief Priests and all their Council—The Sanhedrin (**vv.1-30**).

Chapter 23 Paul now stands before the Sanhedrin—the **second** defense or plea before a group of people. He had already

stood before the common people, now he stands before the religious leaders. Paul showed disgust with the High Priest when the High Priest commanded someone to slap him. He retorted, "*You whitewashed wall! God will hit you. You sit there to judge me by the Law of Moses. But you order men to break the Law by hitting me*" (v.3). Paul was fierce with his words and knew what would get them upset—the truth! Now the Sadducees and the Pharisee don't mix, but they were in there listening. They truly began to argue among themselves because Paul brings up the subject of Resurrection. The Sadducees don't believe in the "*Resurrection, neither angel nor spirit*"; while the Pharisees say, they "*find no evil in this man*" (vv.8, 9). The chief captain had to step in again and rescue him. Meanwhile, certain Jews (about 40) had bound themselves by a "*curse*" where "*they neither ate nor drank till they had killed Paul*" (v.12). What the Jews were doing was totally against Roman law. The plan didn't work for the plot was discovered by Paul's sister's son. ¹The chief captain did not want to have to explain to his superior the assassination of a Roman citizen in his charge. Taking no chances, he summoned two hundred foot soldiers, seventy cavalry, and another two hundred artillerymen to see that Paul had a safe exodus from Jerusalem at about 9p.m. at night (v. 23). So, he sends Paul to Caesarea to Felix the governor of Judea, accompanied with a letter concerning the improper treatment to this Roman citizen, and therefore, wanted to make sure that the situation was properly handled. After Paul arrives, Governor Felix finds out what Province Paul is from; he finds out that he could not ignore him and is to be given a hearing. Usually, a prisoner had his trial in the province where the crime had possibly happened. But sometimes the governor could send the prisoner to that prisoner's own province. However, Felix decided to have Paul's trial. And Paul had to wait until the accusers from Jerusalem came to press charges (vv.1-35).

Chapter 24 The chief priest, Ananias, some elders and Tertullus, a lawyer arrived after five days in Caesarea to make accusations and to provide evidence against Paul. This is Paul's **third** defense or plea before a group of people. Tertullus accused Paul of three crimes— **1**) inciting riots, **2**) being the Christian ringleader which was against the Roman law, **3**) and profaning the temple (vv.5-6). Paul was finally able to speak against these alleged allegations when the governor beckoned him. Paul disputed everyone of them; they were not able to prove their accusations. Paul ended his defense by pointing out that he was really called into question in regard to his view of the resurrection of the dead (v.21). But that was not a crime against Roman law. After Paul finished, Felix then had a more accurate understanding of the Christian faith probably because Felix had a Jewish wife. What Paul said was right and Felix knew that it was right. Paul was not guilty, because he had not done any crime. But Felix did not want to offend the Jews. So, he made an excuse. He said that he must wait for Lysias. But he did not need to do this because the letter from Lysias had already accompanied Paul. Felix was not persuaded by the Jews and dismissed the court but continued to hold Paul in custody, frequently conversing with him privately, giving him much freedom as possible as a prisoner, even allowing his friends in the area to visit him (v.23). At one point Felix came with his wife Drusilla and listened to him speak. Drusilla was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa and the sister to Agrippa II. Paul reasoned before them about "*righteous, self-control, and the judgment to come*" (v.25). As it turned out Paul stayed there for two years as a prisoner while his case was in limbo and Felix visiting him many times. Because things didn't go as the Jews wanted it to go, Felix was recalled to Rome by the emperor Nero under their accusation of bad administration. Felix left Paul in prison for his next successor to decide his fate, and Porcius Festus succeeded him as procurator of Judea (vv.1-27).

Chapter 25 Charges again was brought upon Paul as Governor Festus came into office. They wanted him back in Jerusalem. Festus didn't know about their plan to kill Paul, but he would not agree with their request. He invited them to go back to Caesarea with him. They could accuse Paul there. And so, a delegation came back with Festus. He called for Paul to come before him; therefore, this would be Paul's **fourth** defense or plea before a group of people. The Jews "*laid many grievous complaints against Paul*" (v.7). These were the same complaints two years ago that they could not prove. This was as if he had never stood trial before. The charges against Paul were about the Jewish religion. So, Festus suggested that Paul should go to Jerusalem. Festus wanted to hand Paul over to the Sanhedrin again. Festus knew that Paul had not done anything against Roman law. He wanted to please the Jews (v.9). Paul still says that he has done no wrong and he then makes an appeal to see Caesar and Festus says, "*To Caesar you shall go*" (v.12). Festus then has a visit from King Herod Agrippa II and his sister Bernice. Agrippa knew a lot about the Jewish religion; therefore, Festus presented Paul's case to King Agrippa. He too, wanted to hear Paul. So Festus arranged that it would happen on the next day. They came in with all of their glitz and glamour as Paul was brought forth before them. Festus explained the situation to Agrippa and the audience that had gathered around them. Festus reported that the Jews claimed Paul was not "*fit to live any longer*" but he states that he found that Paul had committed nothing deserving death. Festus dilemma was how to write some facts about this man to the Emperor. He brought all of these people and King Agrippa together to examine him that he might have something to write; define the charges a little better. It makes no sense to send a prisoner to the Emperor without stating the charges against him (vv.1-27). In the next chapter, Paul speaks.

¹ <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/gods-timing-is-very-evident-to-paul/>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

26:1-11 ²Paul makes his **fifth** defense or plea before King Agrippa. King Agrippa gave Paul permission to speak for himself. Paul was happy because he could answer for himself and Paul began by acknowledging that King Agrippa was an *"expert"* in the Jewish customs and questions about the Jews. Paul told of his former life as a Jew and Pharisee.

1. He had spent his early life in Jerusalem - all Jews knew this (v.4).
2. He was a member of the strictest sect, the Pharisees (v.5).
3. Paul noted that he was being judged for the *"hope of the promise made by God to our fathers"* (v.6).
4. Paul reiterated that this was the accusation - this *"hope"*(v.7).
5. Paul asked Agrippa, *"Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?"* (v.8).
6. Paul originally thought he should act contrary to Jesus (v.9).
7. Paul cast Christians in prison, voted for their deaths, punished them, compelled them to blaspheme; he even persecuted them to foreign cities (vv.10-11).

26:12-18

8. ³Paul told of the Lord's appearance on the Damascus Road. He had the authority and was commissioned by the chief priests to do so. While Paul was engaged in persecuting Christians, he journeyed on the road to Damascus (v12).
9. At midday a bright light shone on him and his companions (v13).
10. They all fell to the ground. The Lord then spoke to Paul in the Hebrew language (v14).
11. The Lord identified Himself as Jesus (v15).
12. The Lord told Paul of the purpose of His appearing: to make him a minister and witness of the things he had seen and of the things that would be revealed to him (v16).
13. Paul was sent by the Lord to the Gentiles (v17), to open their eyes - that they may receive forgiveness of sins (v18).

LESSON:

Acts 26:19-23 Paul Pleads His Case

26:19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:— Paul declared emphatically that his call was from heaven, a call from the Lord Himself. He was the most unlikely person in the world to receive a call from God, but it came. He was Saul then, on his way to destroy Christian lives. He had asked, on the Road to Damascus, after being knocked to the ground by a blinding light from heaven, *"Lord what would you have me do?"* (Acts 9:6) And the Lord began to tell him. There was no need to confer with friends or family. The Lord had called him and the Lord expected Paul to fulfill his call. And Paul declared emphatically that he had not disobeyed the heavenly call. He was a sinner, yes; but the Lord in mercy saved and called him, therefore, all men, whether ruler or common, a person should heed the call of God. Paul declares that the charges against him were unjust and he was not disobedient to God.

26:20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, Paul witnessed to all men everywhere as soon as he was saved. He proclaimed Christ...

- at Damascus, the very city where he was visiting when he was converted (Acts 9:20)
- at Jerusalem where he had been educated and was so well known as a Pharisee (Acts 9:29).
- throughout all Judea, all the cities, towns, and villages—to everyone whose path he crossed.
- To the Gentiles, those who were at odds with the Jews, but whom God loved as much as the Jews.

26:20b ...that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. Paul preached repentance, the need for every man to turn to God and to do the works of repentance. Note these points:

- Proclaiming repentance to men is the call of God to believers.
- Turning to God implies faith. No man is going to turn to God who doesn't believe in God. Therefore, proclaiming faith and repentance toward God is the call of believers.
- Proclaiming that men must do the works of repentance is also the call of the believer. A man has truly repented when he is living a life of repentance. It does not matter what the man claims: if he is living a sinful life, he is a sinful man and not a repentant man. Repentance concerns...
 - How a man lives
 - what a man does
 - where a man goes
 - how a man talks

A changed life is the very foundation of salvation. There is no salvation apart from a life of righteousness. It is this message that must be proclaimed loudly and clearly, for multitudes are deceived and resting in the false security of religion, ritual, ceremony, church membership, baptism, worship attendance, heritage, good parents, morality, and a host of other ideas.

26:21 For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Well, this is the reason the Jews

² http://executableoutlines.com/acts/acts_26.htm

³ http://executableoutlines.com/acts/acts_26.htm

seized Paul in the temple and wanted to kill him: he was obedient to the Lord's call. He was being persecuted and charged because he proclaimed the simple message that men should repent and turn to God and do good works. He was really saying that the message of the gospel was not harmful to men; it was good for individuals and for society. The gospel changes people's lives.

- Turns them from evil to good
- from immorality to morality
- from defeat to victory
- from enslavement to freedom etc.

26:22 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:— Paul continued to bear witness to both small and great with God's help. Opposition had not stopped him, discouraged him, nor defeated him. Paul's testimony to God's love and care shows that God had always been there to help him, encourage and strengthen him to continue on in his call. His message was not something he manufactured, for it was based solidly on the Old Testament Scriptures.

26:23 That Christ should suffer,— Paul bore witness to Christ's death. The words "*that Christ should suffer*" (*ei pathetos ho Christos*) are spoken from the Jewish point of view. The Messiah was a man who was not only capable of suffering, but he had to suffer. His death was ordained; it was a must in the mind of God and prophesied in the Scripture. It was no other way for God to save man other than by the death of His Son, the Messiah. The point is: the cross was such a stumbling block to the Jews. They could see a Messiah of glory, power, fame, and wealth; but not a Messiah of suffering and death.

26:23b ...and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles. Paul bore witness to Christ's resurrection. The statement that says, "*He should be the first that should rise from the dead.*" This means He was the first-fruits, the preeminent One, the prominent One, the first in importance to arise from the dead. He was the first to arise who never again had to die (Rom.6:9). The few who had arisen before Him had to die again.

Acts 26:24-32 Agrippa Responds To Paul

26:24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. Well the verdict upon Paul from Festus was:

1. The first verdict was madness. This was the view of Festus; tragic but humorous. There was Paul preaching away as earnestly and diligently as he could, and then he came to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.
 - a. He says, '*Paul, you are beside yourself*', mad, insane; there is no such thing as rising from the dead. Festus charged Paul with having conceived the resurrection in his own mind.

To a worldly materialistic mind, it seems insane to risk so much to gain so little. It was obvious that Paul was a man of unusual intelligence but must have gone crazy (to some) from all of these religious investigations. You've got to remember that flesh and blood does not reveal all this to Paul but it's by the Spirit of God that gives him the understanding of the things he's saying and these things are not made up. But to others, he must be a mad religious fanatic.

26:25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. Festus had spoken out with a loud voice to Paul, interrupting him, calling him mad; therefore, Paul had to reply.

- b. Paul's response to Festus was calm and straight-forward. He declared that he preached the truth and did it soberly, that is, rationally, in complete control of his senses.

If he really thought Paul to be mad he would have hurriedly escorted him out and not listened to him.

26:26 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

- c. King Agrippa knew the Scripture. If he would, he could confirm...
 - i. That Scripture predicted the coming of the Messiah.
 - ii. That news of Jesus' claims, His death and resurrection had swept the whole country and surrounding areas.

Nothing was hidden from Festus; nothing was done in a corner. He just reminded King Agrippa that the events of the death and resurrection of Christ were hardly a secret and were openly known to anyone who had any knowledge of Jewish affairs at all.

26:27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

- d. Paul put King Agrippa on the spot by asking, "*Do you believe the Scripture, King Agrippa?*"

This is Paul's final appeal to him. King Agrippa was an expert in Jewish matters. When Paul asked if he believed the prophets, he was forcing him to take a stand. Certainly the king would not repudiate what every Jew believed? But King Agrippa knew that if he affirmed his faith in the prophets, he must then face the question, '*Is Jesus of Nazareth the one about whom the prophets wrote about?*' Well King Agrippa evidently was embarrassed by this face-to-face

examination or conviction and was not about to make such an admission before Governor Festus and the others.

26:28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

2. The second verdict was evangelistic fervor. The words of King Agrippa are known by Christians world-wide, having served as a basic text for preachers of every generation. Some translate King Agrippa as saying, "*You expect to make me a Christian in so short a time?*" Others say, "*You almost persuaded me to be a Christian.*"

Whatever king Agrippa meant, he was familiar with the Scripture and apparently was gripped by Paul's message. His interest was aroused by the possibility that Jesus really was the Jewish Messiah. Apparently, Paul noticed some interest or conviction working in Festus and he was appealing to him to come forth for Christ. Paul's word had found their mark, and Festus was trying to escape. That's why he called Paul "*mad*" and so he attempted to belittle his witness!

26:29 And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds. Paul longed for all who were under the sound of his voice to be saved. He apparently raised his chained hands toward the audience sitting in the great hall and poured out his heart. Festus and Agrippa knew that Paul had a compassionate concern for them. Every believer should bear witness with the same evangelistic fervor that was aflame in Paul.

26:30 And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: They had the opportunity to receive eternal life, but chose to rise up and leave the hall. They could not stand to hear anymore. When they stood up that told everybody that was assembled that this was over.

26:31 And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.

3. The third verdict was that Paul was innocent of the charges. They had gone out to confer among themselves and decided that "*he had done nothing worthy of death or of bonds.*"

Paul's innocence has been declared and verified again mind you by Roman officials.

26:32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar. Well, what do you think about that? He could have been set free but Paul had already appealed his case to Caesar, the emperor. Because of the formality of such an appeal, the legal process had to be carried through. As Paul was always led by the Spirit of God, this was already in the works for him. As Jesus "*must go to Samaria*", Paul must go to Rome!

What they refused to hear was the truth Paul brought; he was not the prisoner but they were because they didn't receive the truth. Paul took a stand on truth while they took a stand on pride that leads to death. They heard truth but would not acknowledge it to say yes to Christ. Paul was still free; but they stayed prisoners. They had been shown the light and the way to freedom but they deliberately chose not to. The trial was over but Agrippa, Festus and the others sentence was still to come!

SUMMARY:

⁴Paul told Agrippa that he had to be obedient to the heavenly vision. He declared the Gospel in Damascus, Jerusalem, Judea, and then to the Gentiles. Paul told the Gentiles to "*repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.*" He said for these things the Jews seized him at the temple and tried to kill him. He recognized that God had helped him to that very time. Paul only preached those things which the prophets and Moses had said would come to pass: that Christ would suffer; that Christ would be the first to rise from the dead; and, that He would proclaim light to the Jews and Gentiles (vv.19-23).

Festus then interrupted Paul. He interjected at Paul's defense with a loud voice. He said, "*Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!*" Paul replied, "*I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak words of truth and reason.*" He pointed out that King Agrippa knew of these things. Paul further noted that none of these things had been "*done in a corner*" (hidden) (vv.24-26).

APPLICATION:

The opportunity will come for us to take a stand and tell the truth of the Word of Jesus and we may be the only one they hear it from. Don't allow fear to overtake you. God's Spirit is always there to provide the way for His words to come forth and a way for that vessel you're speaking to, to have a prepared heart to listen. It is always up to God to do the drawing, so don't be alarmed that their response is not what you would want it to be. Hopefully, God provides another chance for them to say yes to Him!

⁴ http://executableoutlines.com/acts/acts_26.htm
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>