

Gospel Triumph: Can You Really Believe This Stuff? – Acts 25-26

I've only been considered for jury duty one time. We lived in Los Angeles and I had to report to the courtroom in Burbank for a major trial that was going to last multiple weeks. You may have heard of OJ Simpson? Just kidding.

I didn't end up having to serve on that jury, but I must admit there's something fascinating about the courtroom. There's a reason so many television shows and movies have courtroom scenes as the highest point of drama. To be honest, the last few chapters of Acts have felt like nothing but Paul on trial. He gave a defense of himself before a Jewish mob, before the Sanhedrin, before a Roman governor, and in Acts 25-26 we find Paul giving another defense, this time before the new Roman governor and the Jewish King.

We have to stop and ask ourselves why so much emphasis on Paul's legal defense near the end of the book of Acts? If you are a new Christian living anywhere in the Roman Empire, it's probably a challenging life for you. You have come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and this belief has moved you to the margins of the culture. You don't worship the old gods. You don't participate in the same immoral practices. God is working humility and grace into your heart and life and this makes you different from those around you. If anyone finds out about your faith, you are an oddity.

What is the most important thing for you during this time? You need certainty regarding what you believe. You need to know that Jesus Christ lived and died and was the Promised One and that you can bank on the resurrection in your future. You need to know that the OT finds its consummation in Jesus of Nazareth. He's the one.

That gift of confidence, faith, and certainty is exactly what the author of Acts, Luke, was trying to give to believers then and to us now. Of course, Acts is volume 2 of Luke's writing about Jesus. Listen to Acts 1:1-2. Well, why did he write these two works? Listen to Luke 1:1-4.

Luke recounts all these trials and Paul's defenses in order to give certainty and confidence to believers that all of this is true and the most important events in the

history of the world took place in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. When we gather on Sundays and discuss this ancient book, we are not filling our minds with strange and aloof stories that make little impact on daily life. These are not fables, myths, or spiritual tales that don't really matter to how you live and work this week. We are staring the most essential truths in the universe full in the face.

So, because this is Luke's goal, I want it to be our goal this morning as we look at this last defense of Paul in Acts. I want to give you **5 Truths You Can Bank On**.

1. Jesus Rose from the Dead
2. God Saves Sinners
3. God Keeps His Promises
4. Christianity Makes Sense
5. Christianity Can Be Known

Now, here's what I want to do this morning, and it will be a bit different from what we normally do. Acts 25-26 go together and tell one story of Paul's defense before King Agrippa. Acts 25 sets the table and circumstances for Paul's defense and then 26 recounts what Paul said and how Agrippa responded. I want to walk you through the story with these 5 truths in mind and on the screen and when we finish, we will circle back and explain them a bit more.

In Acts 24 we saw Paul's defense before the Roman governor Felix and it ended this way. Look at verse 26-27. Two years of custody and then a new Roman governor is appointed named Festus. Perhaps things will change with the new governor? Let's see. 25:1. While the Romans certainly ruled this area, including Jerusalem, they also tried to maintain a decent working relationship with local leaders such as the Jewish Sanhedrin. So, any governor of Israel had to touch base with the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem.

Notice what immediately comes up in their meeting with Festus. Verse 2-3. They haven't let their anger toward Paul go and still want to see him murdered. But this time the members of the council are plotting against him themselves. Festus, as governor, must work with them but also maintain some level of justice. Verses 4-5.

Eventually Festus and the members of the council make their way to Caesarea where Paul is held, and the formal trial commences. Verse 6. But it is more of the same and so this time we simply get a summary. Verses 7-8. Of course, verse 8 would have been helpful for any early Christians to read. Nothing about Paul or Christianity was overtly trying to destroy the OT Scriptures, the temple or the Roman Empire. Christianity works in a much slower and more subtle way than that.

Since they aren't getting anywhere Festus tries to play to the Jews. Verse 9. This brings about a major turning point that leads to the rest of the book. Look how Paul responds to this attempt at trickery by Festus. Verses 10-11. As a Roman citizen being tried in a Roman court, Paul had the right to appeal to Caesar. Is Paul doing this because even if he's freed in Caesarea he will be in danger from the Jews? Or is he attempting to use the Roman Empire to get to Rome because that's been his goal since chapter 19? Either way, this catches Festus by surprise and probably gives him a sense of relief. Verse 12.

But at this point Festus would have to write up a report for Caesar as to why this person was being sent to Rome to be tried in the highest court. If Festus doesn't give a clear explanation, he will look like he's incompetent and can't do his job. This is where King Agrippa comes into the picture. Look at verse 13. Agrippa was a Jewish aristocrat who had some measure of authority in Israel because he was the Jewish King. He was the grandson of Herod the Great and could appoint the high priest. He and his sister Bernice arrive to meet the new Roman Governor, which was an important political move for them. Since Agrippa knows Judaism better than Festus, Festus seeks his help with the Paul situation. Look at verses 14-22.

This "trial" of Paul becomes an event in Caesarea and many of the most important people are there. Agrippa and Bernice enter in high style. Verse 23. Festus explains that the real reason for this is to determine what exactly to write to Caesar about Paul.

All of this has led to Paul's defense before Agrippa and is meant to highlight the importance of Paul's speech here. This speech will recount Paul's life and ministry and highlight the major themes of the book of Acts. Keep in mind these 5 truths

on the screen as we work through chapter 26. Look at verse 1. Paul begins in a very typical Roman way, but he is genuinely glad to be speaking to Agrippa since he would have been more familiar with the issues at hand because of his familiarity with the OT. Verses 2-3.

We can divide Paul's speech up into 3 parts. First, he gives his life before he met Christ in verses 4-11. Then he describes how he met Christ in verses 12-18 and then what life has been like since Christ in verses 19-23 as Paul has sought to fulfill the mission God has given him. Let's start with Paul's life before Christ. Verses 4-11. Next, he recounts the story of his conversion on the road to Damascus yet again. This is the third time this has been told in Acts. This time is a bit different because of the different audience listening. He also tells them of the direct commission from the risen Christ to him. Look at verses 12-18.

Finally, Paul tells Agrippa of his obedience to God's commission to him and what has happened in the years since Damascus. Look at verses 19-23.

Paul's speeches in Acts often get interrupted and this one is no different. Festus breaks in. Verse 24. Paul responds and turns the focus away from the Roman governor to Agrippa. Perhaps he knows Agrippa has been listening closely and with his background may be open to what Paul is saying. Verses 25-27.

After being directly addressed by Paul Agrippa finally speaks. Verse 28. Perhaps this is a little bit of humor to deflect what has become an uncomfortable situation for Agrippa. Look at verse 29. How perfect that Paul's final speech in Acts ends with his desire for all people to come to faith in Christ.

So, what will Festus and Agrippa do? Look at verses 30-32. Paul will be shipped to Caesar.

Alright, now let's return to the 5 truths I gave you before. 5 Truths You Can Bank On. Where do we see these in Acts 25-26 and how would these have mattered to the early Christians and why do they matter to us?

1. Jesus Rose from the Dead

Every time Paul has made a defense his central point has been that Jesus rose from the dead. Even Festus picked this up in his limited interaction with Paul. 25:19. Paul returns to the resurrection in his speech before Agrippa and points out that if you believe the OT, you ought to believe that God can and would raise someone from the dead. 25:6-8.

Paul returns to this because it is a historical fact. Jesus of Nazareth walked out of that grave and the entire world changed in that minute and this fact changes the course of your life. You can be certain of it.

2. God Saves Sinners

This is the third time we have Paul's conversion story in Acts. This is the very thing that Jesus came to earth to do. Luke 19:10. Paul describes this salvation to Agrippa in this way. 26:18. Salvation is to have your eyes opened, to be transferred from darkness into light and to receive the forgiveness of sins. God saved Paul and sent Paul to proclaim the gospel so many more could have their sins forgiven. This is work God did in Acts and work He continues to do. You can be certain of it.

3. God Keeps His Promises

Listen to Acts 25:6 and 22-23. When you open the Bible and read a promise from God, you can bank on that promise to come to pass. God is faithful and that hasn't changed.

4. Christianity Makes Sense

I love the part of this where Festus interrupts Paul and says he's gone mad! The story Paul just told of God becoming man and dying for sins and rising from the dead seemed crazy to Festus and it seems crazy to many in the world today. But Paul's reply is measured and clear. 26:25. The story of Christ's life, death, and resurrection is reasonable and true. You are not following a cleverly devised myth this morning. This story makes sense of reality.

5. Christianity Matters

Notice what Paul says to Agrippa in verse 26. The events of the life and death took place in time and space, and people were aware of them. You don't have to hide

from what the Bible teaches. You don't have to be shy about it. It's knowable and those who act like it's a backward faith don't grasp the reality of the situation. Christianity continues to have an impact around the world today and at root this is because it is true.

So, be encouraged this morning and grow in certainty and confidence this morning. What you believe is real, it's true, and it matters. Lean into the way Scripture unfolds God's purposes and plans. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 11/9/25

- Have you ever had to serve on a jury? Explain
- Why does Luke give so much emphasis to Paul's defenses before different groups and leaders at the end of Acts?
- What is the purpose of Luke's two volume work in Scripture?
- Why does Paul appeal to Caesar?
- How would you summarize Paul's speech before Agrippa?
- Why has the resurrection of Jesus been so central to the defenses of Paul in these chapters?
- How is our salvation described in Acts 25-26?
- What promises of God are mentioned in these chapters?
- What are some ways that the "reasonableness" of Christianity can be helpful in our current cultural confusion?
- How does Christianity continue to play a role in people's lives in our culture, even if they aren't Christians?

- What are some practical ways for you to grow in confidence and certainty in the truths mentioned in these chapters?