

Acts

Part 60 – The Comprehensive Gospel

Acts 25:13-26:23

Paul's address before Agrippa is the grand finale of his defense speeches. This speech is also the last major message from Paul in the Book of Acts. The setting is a legal hearing before both Festus and Agrippa. Paul's words go well beyond a mere defense against the false charges leveled against him. Rather Paul seizes the opportunity to make a passionate defense of the gospel. In so doing he demonstrates how Christianity, far from a sect, is actually the fulfillment of all that was promised through Abraham, Moses, and the prophets.



Main Idea: The gospel is the message of salvation through the dying and rising of Jesus for all who will believe.

Chapter 25:

Vs. 13 – Agrippa was the grandson of Herod the Great and son of Herod Agrippa I whose death was described in chapter 12. The Romans had granted him territories in the north-east of Palestine where he ruled as a King. Bernice was his sister, not his wife. She would later have an affair with Titus before he became emperor.

Vs. 22 – Agrippa probably has heard about this case already and it would have been very interesting to him.

Vs. 23 – In Luke 21:12 we read that the Lord had prophesied that his servants would be hauled before governors and kings on account of him.

Vs. 27 – The specific reason for this public investigation was to provide material for the governor's report to Rome. He could not use the information he had so far gathered, as he himself recognized (v. 25) that the charges were either unproved or relatively minor and he did not want to send a report which invited the obvious official inquiry: why didn't you set the man free?

Chapter 26:

Vs. 8 – That is, the Christian faith is continuous with Judaism. Indeed, his point is the Christian claim, that Christianity alone is the true continuation of the faith of the OT and historic Israel as revealed to Moses and the Prophets. The Jews had largely rejected the hope that was theirs; the largely Gentile Christians had embraced it.

Vv. 9-12 – Paul recounts his former life as a Pharisee and persecutor of the church. He sought to force Christians to "blaspheme" – renounce their faith in Jesus Christ. Paul's reputation was well known in those days. In reminding the King of his story Paul seeks to force the question: What could have produced such radical change?

Vs. 18 – This is the third recital of the conversion of Paul in Acts. It is remarkable given Luke's care about what to include in his narrative. Indeed, the conversion of Paul is given more space in the NT than any other event except the passion of the Lord. More space is devoted to telling that history than even that devoted to the resurrection of Christ.

* This is the New Testament example of conversion *par excellence*. In some things Christ cannot be our example. He cannot be our example in the confession of sin, for example, or in conversion. Paul serves as our example in conversion, a larger than life example so that the features of true conversion can be clearly seen and understood (divine sovereignty, the change of heart/nature, the consequences that follow from it, etc.).

Vs. 23 – It was widely held in American dispensationalism early in the 20th century that the Gentile mission was foreign to OT prophecy and that what was called the "church-age" had not been predicted by the prophets. This was not Paul's view, nor that of the early church, as we already saw in Acts 15:15-18.

Vs. 24 – No one doubted Paul's learning!

Vs. 26 – Paul is happy to rest his case on the evidence.

Vs. 28 – Agrippa doesn't want to answer Paul's question, there is trouble for him either way. If "yes" then why doesn't he believe in Jesus as the Messiah; if "no" he is admitting ignorance of what he ought to know about and is inviting Paul's effort to instruct him. So he evades with what was, perhaps, a light-hearted reply.

Vs. 32 – It is not entirely clear what the procedures were and it is possible that Paul may have wanted to proceed with the appeal in hopes that his case would win a general toleration for Christians in cases brought against them by Jews or a new standing for Christianity in the empire. Whatever the case, Paul's journey to Rome is being directed by God's providence (23:11).

1. The gospel is comprehensive in its benefits.

a) It sets people free from spiritual confusion.

The gospel sets us free from spiritual darkness by turning us to the true light. In John's gospel Jesus is described as "the light."

* 2 Corinthians 4:4-6

b) It sets people free from the tyranny of the enemy.

The gospel turns us from the power of Satan to the power of God. While we continue to battle sin and temptation Jesus sets us free from sin's control.

* Colossians 1:13-14

c) It sets people free from guilt, condemnation, and eternal punishment.

In Christ we receive forgiveness from sin. The gospel proclaims a salvation from actual guilt and condemnation and the subjective experience of shame. This salvation also proclaims that Christ took our punishment upon himself on the cross. That is, Jesus died, quite literally, in our place.

* Romans 4:25ff

d) It sets people free from alienation.

Jesus gives us a place among those who are sanctified. Whereas once were alienated from God and man because of our sin, now, in Christ, God has made us his sons and daughters and brought us into the full fellowship of his people.

* 1 Peter 2:10 / Colossians 1:12

2. The gospel is comprehensive in its beneficiaries.

God's provision in Christ knows no bounds of ethnicity, nationality, or social class. Paul's ministry of proclamation was scattered across all peoples. In Caesarea Paul addressed Israel's King and a Roman governor. In Rome he will proclaim the gospel to the palace guard. In Jerusalem he testified to impoverished Jews. In Asia Minor he testified to Gentiles and diaspora Jews both rich and poor. In Corinth Paul ministered to former pagans, homosexuals, harlots, and swindlers. He presents himself as the ultimate prodigal; one whose salvation was extraordinary considering the depth of his sin and moral blindness.