

Ministry of The Holy Spirit
Paul's Journey to Rome: Before King Agrippa
Acts 26

Last time...there was a change of Roman Administration in Judea but Paul, more than 2 years after being arrested in Jerusalem, was still imprisoned
The new governor, Festus, has a dilemma – what to do with Paul, who appealed to Caesar?

This time...in Acts 26, Paul stands before King Agrippa II and the assembled Roman nobles.

This is a Tale of Two Hearts

1. the zealous hard heart of a raging antichrist
2. the zealous soft heart of a pleading servant of Christ

and Two Tragedies

1. “That’s just crazy talk!”
2. “You almost persuaded me to be a Christian.”

Many if not all of us can relate to what happens in this chapter

v1-3 Festus concluded his introductory remarks (Acts 25:24-27) and turned the proceedings over to King Agrippa II

Now King Agrippa II gives the floor to Paul

Paul, extending his hand to the one whom he is addressing, Agrippa, has his own introductory remarks

I consider myself very fortunate to defend myself before you, King Agrippa.

Because you are

- well versed in Hebrew Scriptures (per Josephus)
- very knowledgeable of
 - Jewish culture
 - Jewish religious debates
 - the different sects of Judaism

For the past two years Paul has defended himself before only Romans

- the chief captain in Jerusalem
- Felix in Caesarea
- Festus in Caesarea

who are heathens ignorant of the inseparable issues in this case:

- the resurrection of the dead (heart and power of the Gospel)
- Jesus of Nazareth

Agrippa is more informed...”So please hear me out.”

Why else might Paul consider himself fortunate to stand before this king?
Because the Word of God is alive, and he is excited to be “living” it...
the promises of God are absolutely trustworthy

Acts 9:15 **he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the
Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:**

Ps 119:46 I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be
ashamed.

- v4-5 Paul starts his defense with who he was: a Pharisee, the most conservative and strictest
sect of Judaism
In fact, he is the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6)

Born in Tarsus, he was sent as a boy to Jerusalem to be among his people (Jews)
and to sit under the esteemed teacher of the Law, Gamaliel

His “story” was common knowledge among the Jews, his accusers;
they knew him and how he was

- v6-7 That was “then”, this is “now”

Now, Paul stands accused and condemned by those Jews for believing “the hope of the
promise made of God unto our fathers” in the Law and Prophets, the oracles of
God given to the Jews

Hope in the inseparable promises of

1. the Messiah

- Seed of the Woman (thru the righteous line of ASNSAIJJD)
- Star out of Jacob
- Shiloh
- Lion of Judah
- Son of David
- the Ruler in Israel from everlasting
- Immanuel, born of a virgin, named Wonderful, Counsellor,
the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace

2. the resurrection of the dead...the heart and power of the Gospel

Job 19:25-27 For I know *that* my redeemer liveth, and *that* he
shall stand at the latter *day* upon the earth: And
though after my skin *worms* destroy this *body*, yet
in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for
myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not
another; *though* my reins be consumed within me.

Dan 12:1-2 And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation *even* to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame *and* everlasting contempt.

Paul is accused and condemned for believing the very hope that is the hope of Israel, including his accusers

So what gives?

Paul believes the hope has come...in Jesus Christ and His resurrection
The Jews believe the hope will come ("to come")...has not come yet
i.e. NOT in Jesus Christ and His resurrection which they deny

v8 Speaking directly and personally to Agrippa, Paul pointedly asks him why he (familiar with Hebrew Scriptures) would think it incredible (untrustworthy, not believable) that God should raise the dead

It is a rhetorical question

Paul was not looking for nor waiting for an answer from Agrippa
It goes without saying that the Almighty God can raise the dead, right?!

Paul's "story" (v4-5) was common knowledge among the Jews, his accusers; they knew him and how he was

The Jews loved "Saul of Tarsus"...they hate "Paul the Apostle" and accuse and condemn him for believing what God has said and done

This is the very same issue I have with quite a few of my loved ones
They knew me pre-Jesus...they had decades of history with me,
how I thought, how I spoke, how I lived

Now they stand in judgment of my hope in the promise of God, my believing what God has said and done

- nailed my "old man" to the cross of Christ
- forgiven me of all my sins
- made me dead to sin and alive to God...by His work in spite of mine

Because they do not believe the testimony of God, they think that it is incredible, untrustworthy, unbelievable that

1. God

atheists, agnostics, without faith in the Creator God
rejecting the revelation of God He has given them

un-Heb 11:6 But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

2. God should raise the dead

after death there is nothing, this life is all there is

I do believe God is and come to Him by faith, believing His
testimony

John 5:21 For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth *them*; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.

John 5:29 shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

John 11:25-26 I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

Yes = good...resurrection of life

No = evil...resurrection of damnation

My unbelieving loved ones think that is absurd, simple-minded

v9-11 Paul segways into his personal testimony

He was a zealous, hard-hearted, raging anti-Christ!

As he testified to and reminded the churches in Galatia

Gal 1:13-14 For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

As testified to all the Jews in the Temple trying to kill him

Acts 22:3b-4

Which the Jews, his accusers, knew full well...and loved him for it

As foretold by Jesus, he thought he was doing God service

John 16:2 **They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.**

He voted for the execution of Stephen and others unnamed

He hunted Christians far and wide, even in Gentile cities outside of Judea

One such city was Damascus

v12-14 The “licensed” hunter, the raging anti-Christ became the target of

- a “spotlight” from heaven brighter than the noon sun
- a voice speaking personally and exclusively to him in Hebrew
 - asking a piercing question
 - making a convicting statement about his life

The piercing question:

Saul’s zealous persecution of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth was taken
Personally by this Voice in heaven – Why are you persecuting Me?

The convicting statement about his life:

Saul’s heart and mind had been “rattled”/unsettled by Stephen,
his wisdom, his teaching, and his testimony

Acts 6:10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

Acts 7:56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

Acts 7:60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

The Voice knew and testified that Saul had been shaken by Stephen, yet hard-heartedly fought against what he heard and saw that day in Jerusalem

Saul had been opposing himself, rebelling against the goads of the Master pricking his heart with truth and conviction of sin

Now he had been called out on it, his heart revealed by the Voice from heaven

I have loved ones kicking against the goads of the Master who is longsuffering with them, not wanting them to perish but to come to repentance

v15 The natural question was to ask the name of the Voice, Who could only be the Lord God *kurios*, Supreme Authority
Adoni, how the God of Israel was addressed Personally (Acts 22)

“I am Jesus”

- (of Whom Stephen testified)
- Who you are persecuting...I and Mine are one

v16 After the Lord revealed Paul’s heart and His Identity, He revealed His plan Paul’s life

What

- to make him a minister/servant...the “fruit” of a big piece of humble pie
 - to make him a witness
 - of the things seen on the road to Damascus (to Agrippa right now)
 - of the things to be revealed to him in the future
- 2 Cor 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

v17 To whom

“tearing you out of”

- the people...the Jews \ both will try to
- the Gentiles / kill him

sending you to the Gentiles...the Apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 11:13)

Which has most certainly come to pass in his ministry! (2 Cor 11:23-27)

Of which Paul will bear witness at the end of his ministry

2 Tim 4:17-18 Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve *me* unto his heavenly kingdom

v18 Why

1. to open their eyes...heal them of spiritual blindness

Is 35:4-6 Say to them *that are* of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come *with* vengeance (against the spiritual enemy), *even* God *with* a recompence; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame *man* leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.

2 Cor 4:3-4 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

Eph 4:17-18 ...Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:

2. to turn them from darkness to light
from lies and unbelief that kill the spirit
to Truth and faith that quicken/enliven the spirit
from hate that darkens the soul
to Love that enlightens the soul

Col 1:13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son:
(John 1:4)

1 John 2:10-11 He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

3. to turn them from the power of Satan unto God
from eternal death
to eternal Life

Heb 2:14-15 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

1 Thes 1:9-10 how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

4. that they may receive forgiveness of sins...grace

Acts 3:26 God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

Eph 2:8-9

5. that they may receive inheritance (eternal life) among them which are sanctified (set apart for God's purpose, made holy) by faith (trust) which is in Me (the faith of Christ)

Rom 1:16-17 the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Rom 3:22 the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe

v19-20 Hearing Jesus speak to him Personally

- asking a piercing question
- revealing the contents of his heart...his struggle
- re-commissioning his life...to a very different what, to a mind-blowing whom, and for a glorious why

what did Paul tell King Agrippa that he did?

He believed!

He obeyed...without argument or negotiation or hesitation

Jesus offered Saul of Tarsus the gift of repentance and Saul accepted it!

In this encounter with Jesus, Saul of Tarsus was radically and forever changed

No longer a zealous, hard-hearted, raging anti-Christ
but now a zealous, soft-hearted, servant of Christ

No longer a persecutor and a hunter
but a preacher and the hunted

Starting right where he was...in Damascus

Then back to Jerusalem and beyond...Acts 1:8-ish

Everywhere preaching

1. repentance toward God...think differently, be of a sound/right mind
2. turn to God..."turn to face the Sun"
3. be doers of the Word and not hearers only...works as proof of the change within accomplished by God, not to earn God's approval

v21-23 For

- the “intervention” of Jesus Christ in his life
- the calling of God upon his life
- his obedience to the calling of God

Paul was shanghai-ed in the Temple and almost killed

a “John 16:2 boomerang”!

But God...

God helped Paul...protection, escape, the best spiritual gift, His words

God made good on His promise of v17

Rom 8:31

And by God’s help, Paul continues to be faithful to his calling, in spite of all the trouble and suffering

He witnesses to everyone...for God loves them all and desires v18 for them all

1 Tim 2:4

And what Paul speaks of and lives before God and man is

not his personal opinion or any philosophy or tradition of man

but only what the Word of God...the Law and the Prophets...had foretold

- the Christ must suffer...1 Cor 15:3-4, Gen 22, Ps 22, Is 53, Dan 9
- the Christ must be the firstfruits of the resurrection unto eternal life
- the Christ must declare the Light of God’s Truth to both the Jews and the Gentiles

Our lost loved ones do not need to hear our opinions, they need to hear what God has said and done...and what He is going to do.

v24 At which point Festus,

listening but not understanding and not being spiritually discerning,
erupts

“Paul, you are a raving maniac!

All that ‘holy book’ learning has made you crazy!”

A tragic response to Jesus Christ and the resurrection:

That is just crazy talk!

You want crazy talk?

[Slay article from Amir Tsarfati post on Telegram]

How about that for a strong delusion and maybe a One World Religion?!

v25-26 Paul had been a raving maniac, but now he is in his right mind!
He respectfully informs Festus that his words are not those of a mad man but words of God...truth and right-mindedness, clear-mindedness, of a sound mind

Then referring to King Agrippa who has a knowledge of the Law and Prophets,
he tells Festus that Agrippa knows these things
After all, God did not do anything in a corner...in secret...but in plain sight before
whosoever would see, whoever had eyes to see

Ps 98:2 The LORD hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath
he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen.

Is 45:19 I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not
unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the LORD speak
righteousness, I declare things that are right.

Is 48:16 Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret
from the beginning; from the time that it was, there *am* I: and now
the Lord GOD, and his Spirit, hath sent me.

Then Paul turns to King Agrippa

v27 Asking for the order to close the deal: Do you believe the prophets of God?
Assumptive close: I know you believe

v28 Agrippa's response is a painfully tragic one!
"Paul, you **almost** persuaded me to be a Christian."

That was a very good presentation, a very convincing "speech."
But I'm not buying what you are selling.
Which is what? v18!

Agrippa chose his sin over God's salvation from sin
He chose eternal death over eternal life
He chose darkness over light

Personal tragedy:

- my son during Thanksgiving 2017
To Matthew:
Dad is a very smart guy
He answered all my questions
He answered all my objections
And it makes me mad

- my sister 5/7/23

As a child, her faith was shipwrecked by RCC “witness” of God and Jesus
 She told me that she knows the world is all messed up and that mankind
 cannot fix it...but she refuses to talk with me about the hope that
 lies in me

Choosing sin over God’s salvation from sin

Choosing eternal death over eternal life

Choosing darkness over light

This is the tragedy of every unbeliever, particularly the ones who say “Almost”

I have, you have, we all have loved ones who have rejected God’s love because they love
 their sin and the darkness more than the salvation of God

Nothing could be more tragic!

v29 Paul, a zealous soft-hearted servant of God ministering to people **pleads** with Agrippa
 and all those present

“I pray to God that all of you not only almost but completely and whole-heartedly
 surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ and follow Him as have I!”

Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind!!

Ye must be born again of the Spirit of God!!

Be ye reconciled to God!!

The Two Tragedies

1. “That’s just crazy talk!”

2. “You almost persuaded me to be a Christian.”

grieve God; now is not the time of His wrath

The Two Tragedies grieved Paul, who ministered everywhere with many tears

They grieve me and you.

But God...is still working as long as they have breath

My witness to my dying father

“Dad, what happens when you die?”

“Oh, you just float around in the air like everybody else.”

his parents were disciples of Edgar Cayce

Related spirit and flesh to computer software and computer hardware

Software: no mass so does not decay/die...like the spirit

Hardware: needs constant repairs and gets outdated and then useless...like flesh

He wrote software, seeing hardware models come and go

God’s software is the Gospel and for those who believe, they get new and
 never-out-of-date hardware

He was in pain, he did not feel well.
He simply sat there, thinking
Then nodding, he said, "That was very good, Doug"

I felt like it was a King Agrippa response, a tragic "You almost persuaded me."

Then weeks later, a call from my older sister
My father was unresponsive to the voices of his family, he stopped eating,
he did not open his eyes
His body was shutting down
"Dad is dying. If you have anything to say to him, this is your last chance."
I have no remembrance of what I said, I was completely numb.

The next day, my older sister called back
"I don't know what you said to Dad but when he heard your voice, he opened his
eyes and sat up in bed. And then he wanted to eat."

Did Dad encounter Jesus after I witnessed to him?
I have a hope...a confident expectation

God is still working as long as our loved ones have breath

So we continue to share our personal testimony with them and others the Lord puts in our
path

Phil 3:13-14 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended (arrived):
but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind,
and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press
toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ
Jesus.

2 Tim 2:24-26 the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*,
apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose
themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the
acknowledging of the truth; And *that* they may recover themselves
out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his
will.

1 John 4:4b because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

Our personal testimony might not be liked and be mocked but it cannot be denied
And as Paul was not responsible for the choices of Agrippa and Festus, we are not
responsible for the choices of our loved ones

We are responsible to make Jesus known and the hope that is in Him alone and to issue
an invitation to accept God's gift of eternal life...with many tears

Every person is responsible before God for the revelation of God given to him/her
There are no excuses

Rom 1:16-22

v30-32 The conclusion of Paul's testimony before Agrippa, enlisted by Festus to help document a legal case against Paul for Nero to consider:

No help for Festus from Agrippa

Festus is on a hook, having no crimes against Rome by Paul for Nero to weigh

What can Festus write to Nero?

- the resurrection of the dead...the heart and power of the Gospel
- Jesus Christ

But that won't happen

And Paul?

- under protection of the Roman Empire against his enemies
- going to Rome...as Rome's prisoner
- God's will be done, His ways and thoughts so much higher than ours!

The Tale of Two Hearts...every regenerated follower of Jesus Christ
a hard hearted anti-Christ

supernaturally converted into

a soft-hearted servant of Christ

and the Tale of Two Tragedies

1. "That's just crazy talk!"
2. "You almost persuaded me to be a Christian."

Many tears

- tears of joy
- tears of agony

Matt 7:13-14 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

John 3:16-19 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

But God...

Father, our lost loved ones, whom You love more than we ever could...

our heart breaks

our hearts cry out to You

Will they come to the Truth before they take their last breath on earth?

Will they stop kicking against the goads and bend their knee and confess Jesus

Christ after the Rapture during Israel's witness of Jesus on earth, a time of
great harvest of souls of all nations, as you have foretold us?

Father, we plead with you to

- soften their hearts!
- embolden our hearts!

May they encounter Jesus!

As You so graciously accomplished v18 in our lives, please accomplish it in theirs!