

## Day 7 : Acts 26:12-32 – Before Agrippa II

Prayerfully read: Romans 7

### Understanding

This is the third account of Paul's conversion, together with Acts 9 and 22.

Paul, having explained his violent opposition to Christianity, explained that Jesus Christ had dramatically intervened. But it was not only a conversion – but a commission too. Paul had been sent to the Jews and to the Gentiles as he was now doing. In fact, it was “to kings” that he had been sent (9:15) – a promise that was now being fulfilled. Luke is showing that, as Jesus promised, the gospel was progressing – to the ends of the earth, so that even rulers were hearing it (though in a most unexpected way).

Paul insisted that he was not a prisoner because of anything wicked he had done – but because of his faithfulness to the God of Israel. It was the unbelieving Jews who had acted immorally and illegally, not him. Paul insisted that he was on trial because Jesus Christ was alive (v22-23), whose witness he was.

It is a little hard to know how to interpret verse 28 – is Agrippa sneering, or serious? Sneering seems more likely – but Paul was deadly serious (v29).

Agrippa's testimony in v31-32 shows us again that Christianity was not the cause of trouble – here was another ruler finding no fault in its main ambassador.

### Doctrines (Teachings)

- The Lord does not look to us to perform miracles, or to do things which are beyond our ability – but simply to be faithful, whether that is as an apostle or in the most obscure situation imaginable. If we are faithful, then he will find opportunity for us to serve him: even if we are imprisoned and chained!
- Christians in their witness should seek to persuade and encourage their hearers to turn to Jesus Christ. We are not just presenting facts – we are dealing with people over issues of eternal importance for them.

### Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- What has the Lord given you? Are you being faithful in it?
- Are you like Agrippa - “almost” persuaded? What an awful thing – to “almost” escape eternal damnation, but to fail at last.

## The Acts Of The Apostles

### *Daily Bible Reading Notes*

### *Week 15 (Chapter 23:11-26:32)*

### Grace Church Belper

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<http://www.gracebelper.org.uk/readingnotes.php>)

## Day 1 : Acts 23:11-22 – The Plot To Kill Paul

Prayerfully read (above and): Romans 1

### Understanding

Paul is now a prisoner – for his own safety. In Jerusalem, he has enemies who wished to kill him as quickly as possible, whatever the consequences. But the Lord revealed to him (v11) that he would not die in Jerusalem, but would, as Paul had already understood (19:21), declare the gospel in Rome.

Paul, though from Tarsus, grew up in Jerusalem (22:3), and his sister and her family were still there. Somehow Paul's nephew heard of the plan against his life, and brought news to Paul.

It was the “chief priests and elders” who were brought into this murderous plan – i.e. The Sadducees, not any of the Pharisees who were more sympathetic to Paul's declaration of a resurrection. Ananias, the High Priest, is known from history to have been violent – he was once called to Rome to explain his role in the planning of an ambush against Samaritan pilgrims. In the Bible, it is often those who outwardly express the most zeal and concern for the law (such as Ananias and unconverted Saul) who broke it most flagrantly – even murder.

### Doctrines (Teachings)

- God is completely sovereign over everything – but in general he uses means to carry out his purposes. He promised Paul that he would not die in Jerusalem – but he used a young man overhearing something to bring it about. There are two mistakes for us to avoid here: firstly, “fatalism” - the belief that nothing we do makes any ultimate difference. Not so: God uses people to carry out his own purposes. The second mistake is to think that because God's interventions are often not dramatic, therefore the world is out of control.
- Not all religious zeal is godly – some of it can be the worst kind of ungodliness! (See Romans 10:2). It is not wrong to be zealous – but our zeal must be directed by knowledge and love.

### Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- How does God's sovereignty relate to our daily lives? How does this passage help us? What do we need to change in our thinking about this?
- Am I zealous for the Lord and his work? Has my love grown cold? Is my zeal only for my reputation or comfort, or really for him?

## Day 6 : Acts 25:13-26:11 – Before Agrippa

Prayerfully read: Romans 6

### Understanding

Festus had agreed to send Paul for trial before Caesar. But he had a problem – just what was the charge? He shrewdly persuaded King Agrippa to do this for him. Agrippa was the son of Agrippa I, from Acts 12:1-25. He was accompanied by his sister, Bernice, who he was involved in an immoral relationship with. Paul was brought before Agrippa so that something might be written to up to Rome with him.

Festus, as has been the case before, testified that Paul had done nothing deserving of death (v25). Again, Luke is showing us that it was not because Christians were wicked that they were surrounded by so much trouble.

Paul addressed Agrippa with respect, and proceeded to give his account of his background. Agrippa was familiar with Jewish customs (v3). Paul was making clear that he was not an apostate from Judaism, but rather was the one being faithful to the true teaching of the Scriptures.

Paul then proceeded to the crucial matter – the question of the resurrection. He himself had opposed the teaching about Jesus very much – but the reality of the resurrection had changed it all.

### Doctrines (Teachings)

- The Christian message is not a purely “private” thing. Our secular culture likes to treat anything “religious” as if it was private and personal and had no relevance to public life or debate. However, the resurrection of Jesus Christ cuts right across this way of thinking. If Jesus rose from the dead, then Christianity is truth for everyone and cannot be ignored.
- When we have an opportunity to speak about the Lord, we should move quickly to the main issues – the life and death of the Lord Jesus and his identity as the Saviour. Everything else is of lesser importance!

### Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Do I treat the Bible's teachings as if they were just private “values” to be kept to myself, rather than public facts that have significance for everyone? In what ways are we pressured by our society to do this? How can we resist it?
- What does Paul's testimony show us about what is important? What can we learn from it?

## Day 5 : Acts 25:1-12 – Appeal to Caesar

Prayerfully read: Romans 5

### Understanding

History records that Festus was a shrewd operator, who knew how to manipulate those under him to keep the peace; giving them enough favours to keep them happy, but exercising enough discipline to keep them in their place. He began his reign by visiting Jerusalem and agreeing to have Paul tried at the Jews' request – but refusing their request to have him brought to Jerusalem.

A court was convened against in Caesarea – Festus' sitting down in the judgment seat (v6) was the official signal that the court was in session. Again, as at the previous trial, the result was inconclusive – many serious allegations were made, but Paul pointed out that there was not sufficient evidence to back any of them up.

Festus' proposal of a new trial in Jerusalem had no purpose other than to please the Jews – who had determined to kill Paul (v3). Paul saw that he had little hope of getting justice, so exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar (v11). Festus' words in verse 12 were the required legal formula to indicate acceptance of a citizen's request.

### Doctrines (Teachings)

- God over-rules all the plans, both good and bad, of men and women – to bring about his own plans. Festus wanted to establish his rule and gain the favour of the Jews... the Jews wanted to engineer a situation where Paul could be assassinated... but God was at work so that out of the confused situation his own purpose advanced: that the gospel would come to be preached even in Caesar's circle in Rome.
- Wrong-doing deserves punishment (v11). Contrary to our society's common belief, judicial sentences are not primarily meant to help the offender or protect the public, but they are firstly a matter of justice, in punishing wickedness (Romans 13:1-8).

### Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Am I driven by what helps me, or by what glorifies God? How will that affect my priorities today?

## Day 2 : Acts 23:23-35 – Taken to Caesarea

Prayerfully read: Romans 2

### Understanding

The size of the escort to keep Paul safe was approaching half of the size of the forces at Lysias' command, to protect Jerusalem. To allow a citizen to come to harm whilst under Roman protection was a very serious matter, and Lysias was taking no chances. His name “Claudius Lysias” (v26) indicates that he gained his freedom under the rule of Emperor Claudius (AD41-54).

The “third hour” of the night was 9pm. Overnight they travelled over half-way to the destination (Caesarea – the same place as Philip the evangelist lived, 21:8), before the 400 foot-soldiers returned the next day (the company now being almost beyond reach of Jerusalem's murderous zealots) (v31-32).

Lysias' letter to his superior (Felix) was a mixture of truth and lies – Lysias is obviously trying to build up his own role and hide the fact that he had himself acted illegally in his previous neglect of Paul's rights as a citizen (22:29).

Paul's testimony for Christ would now advance to a higher level in the Roman imperial hierarchy – he is a step closer to Rome.

### Doctrines (Teachings)

- In general, God's preferred way for the gospel to advance is in such a way as it becomes clear that he is behind it. Here, the gospel steps nearer to Rome and Caesar – whilst Paul is a helpless prisoner! Paul explains some of this in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. When we are weak in ourselves, then if God uses us to advance his kingdom, it is more obvious that the power of the gospel is not a human power that comes from its witnesses, but is God's own power working through us. Therefore we should not be discouraged if we feel weak or powerless in ourselves – it is not our power which advances the gospel, but God's. If we feel our own weakness more, we can rely more on God – and then we will receive more of his blessing.

### Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Do you pray? This is the test of how much you rely upon God instead of on yourself. If you do not, then you can begin by praying that God would show you just how weak you really are. But when he shows you, don't despair – rejoice because of the strength which he has for us!

## Day 3 : Acts 24:1-21 – Paul Tried Before Felix

Prayerfully read: Romans 3

### Understanding

The case against Paul would be put by Tertullus, a hired spokesman. He began by flattering Felix – technically, the title “most excellent” (or noble) (v3) was above Felix's station in society. He also emphasised peace, which Romans valued especially highly, subtly implying that Paul was a threat to it.

There were two charges: firstly that Paul was responsible for uproar throughout the empire (v5). Luke has already shown us the reality behind this charge – the uproar was generally caused by the unbelieving Jews that Tertullus represented, not by Christians. The second charge was that Paul had desecrated the temple – based on the Ephesian Jews' mistake. The Romans allowed the Jews to try this charge themselves, so Tertullus implied that they would have happily done so themselves but that Lysias had prevented them. The truth, as we have seen, was that the Sanhedrin had been divided over the question – after (not before) Lysias had intervened only to prevent a murder.

Paul's response was respectful, but avoided flattery. He pointed out that the Ephesians whose evidence was the primary case against him were not present (which Roman law required), and that neither was anyone else present with real evidence that he was a troublemaker. Paul did not flinch to draw attention to the real issue that the Jews had neglected to mention – the question of the resurrection. Christianity was not a “sect”, but the true fulfilment, through the resurrected Messiah, of the Jewish faith.

### Doctrines (Teachings)

- Christians must not be troublemakers – but neither must they avoid it at all costs. Trouble is inevitable; but we must never cause it, except through our insistence on the truth of God's word and gospel. In other things, we must go out of our way for peace (Romans 12:18).

### Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Do you ever resort to manipulation (flattery, deceit, etc.) to try to get your way? Compare the two speeches in this portion – what do they show us on this subject?
- Are you a peace-maker? Are there any particular situations in which this applies for you presently?

## Day 4 : Acts 24:22-27 – Felix's Response

Prayerfully read: Romans 4

### Understanding

History records that Felix was a corrupt man. Tacitus described him as indulging in “every kind of barbarity and lust.” He obtained his wife (Drusilla) by luring her away from the husband she already had. He was married three times in all. He was removed from being procurator in AD59. Here in this passage we see that Felix kept Paul detained for two years without a verdict – apparently because he was unwilling to displease the Jews by releasing him, but had no grounds on which to convict him.

Luke tells us that Felix had some knowledge of Christianity (v22), and that his wife was Jewish (v24). For a reason which Luke doesn't explicitly give us (maybe it was Paul's impressive testimony in the trial), they felt moved to hear more from Paul about the faith. To this self-indulgent couple, Paul preached “righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come”. But Felix's response was the same as with Paul's trial – he put off making a decision; and his decision in both matters was compromised by his desire that he might be given some money for Paul's release (v26).

Paul was kept as a Roman citizen awaiting a (new) trial – not as a condemned prisoner (v23).

### Doctrines (Teachings)

- The love of wealth, possessions and ease leads to all kinds of sins (1 Timothy 6:9-10). It has ruined many souls, and is ruining many today in our money and leisure-obsessed society. It is not a sin to be rich, but it is a sin to love riches more than God instead of thanking him for them and using them for his glory. Self-discipline and self-denial are vital for any kind of effective Christian living – without them, we will accomplish nothing (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

### Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Are you decided? Have you bowed the knee to Jesus Christ, and become one of his followers? If you are delaying – why? It cannot be because he is not powerful enough or willing enough to save you – it can only be because of sin – flee to him whilst you can!
- Am I using my time and resources wisely and carefully? How is Felix a warning to us?