

Paul and Agrippa

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[0 : 0 0] Acts chapter 26, Acts 26. Last week we left off with Paul has met Agrippa, and Agrippa is a member of the Herodian family.

He's in the line of kings that started way back with Herod the Great. We read about him in Matthew 2. He's the one that ordered all children under the age of 2 to be put to death in effort to kill Jesus.

Then he would also be related to Herod Antipas. He's responsible for the death of John the Baptist. Him and his brother Philip, remember John the Baptist, confronted them, and he had John the Baptist beheaded.

And then there was Herod Agrippa I. We read about him in Acts chapter 12. He had the apostle James, the brother of John, put to death. And now we are at Herod Agrippa II.

In the Bible he's just referred to as Agrippa. But he was one of the milder of the Herodian dynasty. He wasn't quite as vicious as others, but he still could be one to be feared nonetheless.

[1 : 2 2] And so Paul is now standing before him, and that's where we are when we arrive at chapter 26. Paul has been in custody for about two years. Remember Felix?

He was brought to Felix. Felix didn't really know what to do with him. He just knew that if he let him go, the Jews would revolt and riot. And his primary job was to keep down opposition, to keep down riots, and to keep peace.

And so he would do anything to do that. And the Jews had a right to practice their religion. They had been granted the right by the Romans to practice their religion and carry out their religious beliefs, even to the point of enacting their laws.

And some of their laws called for the death penalty for certain things. And Romans had to give them permission to do that. In fact, we talked about a couple weeks ago that law that said if a Gentile went beyond a certain point in the temple, they could be killed.

And the Romans let them carry that out. Even on Roman citizens, they were allowed to do that. And so they were allowed to practice their religion. They have brought Paul to Felix as a troublemaker and as someone who was leading an uprising against the Roman Empire, so they said.

[2 : 3 5] But Felix didn't find anything wrong with him. So to kind of appease the Jews, he kept him in custody for two years. And then Festus took over. And Festus has heard Paul's account and basically come to the same conclusion.

Like, this man hasn't done anything wrong. This man shouldn't be here. This man shouldn't be in prison. But he knew that he was in communication with Agrippa.

And Agrippa wanted to hear from Paul. And so he said, sure, go ahead. So he's handing him off to his superior. So sometimes if you don't know what to do with somebody, if you have somebody above you that you can hand them off to and kind of be done with them and kind of, you know, wash your hands of the matter.

That's what they did. And all this time, Paul has appealed to Caesar. And as a Roman citizen, that was his right. So eventually he's going to wind up in Rome and he's going to appear before Caesar.

But if you're going to send somebody to a superior, you need to have a written documentation of why you're sending them. What have they been charged with? Why are we taking your time to send this man to you?

[3 : 44] And so that's what all of this is about. At the end of chapter 25, it says, For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send the prisoner, talking about the Caesar, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.

Meaning, you know, it's not reasonable for us to send somebody to the Caesar and not tell him what he's done. What he means by that is it's probably not safe for them to send somebody to Caesar and occupy his time and not have some formal charges laid against him.

So what they're looking at is here's this Roman citizen that's been in custody for two years. At one point he was bound before he was charged with anything. At another point he was threatened to be flogged by the Romans before he was charged or convicted of a crime.

And so they've already mishandled a Roman citizen. They have him in custody. And if they send him to Caesar after all this has transpired and they don't have anything to formally charge him with, they're in big trouble because they have violated the rights of a Roman citizen.

And so they are scrambling to really try to find something to, what can we say he's guilty of? And so that's the point they're at. And here's Agrippa, the king of basically the southern region of Israel, where Jerusalem and the temple would be.

[5 : 00] And so now Paul is going to make his defense before Agrippa. So that's where we find ourselves in chapter 26, verse 1. Then Agrippa said to Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself.

Then Paul stretched forth his hand and answered for himself, I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews, especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews.

Wherefore, I beseech thee to hear me patiently. And so Paul is telling Agrippa he's happy to answer for himself. Because previously someone spoke and laid out the charges against Paul when he was appearing before Felix.

And so now Paul has the opportunity. Nobody is speaking against him. Paul is just saying, I can answer the charges that are laid against me and I'm happy to do so.

And so the Jews have accused him of certain things and come to find out it's all religious. There's nothing political involved. They've tried to convince the Romans that Paul was trying to lead an uprising, trying to lead a rebellion.

[6 : 13] But they've figured out that wasn't true. And so now he's going to address the things that the Jews have accused them of. And notice he says, wherefore, I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

In other words, this is not going to be a short speech. He said, hear me patiently. I got a lot of things to tell you is basically what he's saying there. And so what's basically going to happen is Paul is going to relate his conversion experience and he's going to give a defense of the gospel.

He's going to give a defense of the resurrection of the Lord. And that's ultimately why he's there. So he says in verse 4, my manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews.

And that is true. Remember, Paul grew up in the Jewish faith. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He was well known. He was taught by Gamaliel, the most famous rabbi of that time.

That would be our equivalent today of going to Harvard Law School. It was a big thing. And so they knew who Paul was. And says, which knew me from the beginning.

[7 : 18] If they would testify that after the most straightest sect of our religion I lived, a Pharisee. And so Paul is saying, these people know me. I was one of them. I was a Pharisee.

I lived according to the strictest code of the Pharisees. And that's what he was talking about in Philippians chapter 3 where he said, concerning righteousness that comes from the law, blameless.

He followed the law as best as he could. You couldn't put a finger on Paul's character as a Pharisee. Yet he was still lost. He didn't know the Lord. It says, and now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers.

Under which promise our 12 tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. So what is this hope that he's been accused of?

What's this hope he's gotten in trouble for spreading amongst the Jewish people that hope that was given to the fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the hope of a resurrection. And the Pharisees believed in the resurrection.

[8 : 22] So the Pharisees are charging Paul with starting trouble for preaching something they actually believed in. They believed in a resurrection. The problem was they didn't believe in Jesus being the Messiah and he resurrected from the dead.

That's what got Paul in trouble. The Pharisees believed in a resurrection. Because if you read the Old Testament, there are promises that Jesus refers to in his ministry, but there are promises made to the fathers that would require, in order for them to enjoy those covenant blessings that God had promised Israel, they died long before it had come to pass.

And so in order for them to truly enjoy those covenant blessings and live out that covenant that God made with them, there's got to be a resurrection at some point. And so the Jewish people would have believed that with the exception of the Sadducees.

They didn't believe in the resurrection or anything supernatural. The problem is they're the priest. They're the high priestly class. And so that's where a lot of dissension among the Jews comes in.

That's why when Paul was talking to the Jews a few chapters ago, he started talking about the resurrection because he had a mixed audience of Pharisee and Sadducee, and he knew that that would get them going against each other if he mentions the resurrection.

[9 : 36] Pharisees believed in it, Sadducees didn't. And so Paul was turning his enemies against themselves. That's a good strategy. Sometimes if you're outnumbered, what do you do? If you can get people fighting each other and lose sight of you, then that's a good thing to do.

And that's what Paul did there. And so he's been teaching the resurrection, and that's what got him in trouble. And he says, Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?

I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. So now he's going back to his pre-conversion life. He was a persecutor of the church, remember?

He persecuted Christians. In fact, we're going to find out in just a few minutes, we're going to remember when he met the Lord, he was going to take people into prison and bring them back to Jerusalem.

He says, I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, which thing I also did in Jerusalem. And many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priest.

[10 : 40] And when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. Remember Stephen. He was holding the clothes of the people that were stoning Stephen. And he gave his consent to that.

And I punished them often every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme. And being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even under strange cities. Whereupon, as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priest, at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? That's an interesting question.

Was Paul persecuting Jesus personally? He was persecuting followers of Jesus, those who believed in him. But to persecute them is to persecute Jesus.

To speak out against the church is to speak out against Jesus. To speak out against God's people is to speak out against Jesus. And so Paul is saying, he says to Saul, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

[11 : 53] It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. Now that word pricks there is the idea of like a goad that they would use to kind of prod along a beast of burden. So they wouldn't kind of get out of line or something when they try to go a certain way or when they try to back up.

The back of their legs would hit a goad and it would prod them along to keep them going straight. And so it would be painful after they hit that thing so many times. And so they would learn, you know, don't do that.

They'd learn to do the right thing. And so it says it's hard for thee to kick against the pricks. In other words, something's already been bothering Paul. This is not Paul's first encounter of being convicted over wrongdoing.

Something is already kind of eating at Paul. Maybe it was Stephen's testimony. Think about he's standing there watching as Stephen is being put to death. And Stephen talks about seeing Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father.

And, you know, the testimony that Stephen had in the Bible said he had the face of an angel. And so I imagine Paul never completely lost sight of that. And so something had been kind of gnawing away at Paul already.

[13 : 03] And he says, it's hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise and stand upon thy feet.

For I have appeared unto thee for this purpose. To make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen. And of the things in the which I will appear unto thee.

Delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles unto whom I now send thee. To open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light. And from the power of Satan unto God.

That they may receive forgiveness of sins. And inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. And so Paul's saying his commission was to the Gentiles.

Remember that's what stirred up the Jews a few chapters ago. When he talked about the Gentiles being he was sent to them. That was his ministry. That was his mission. That got the Jews fired up.

[14 : 00] Because remember they had said he had brought a Gentile into the temple. He had defiled the temple with this Gentile that he brought in there with him. And so Gentiles by an Orthodox Jew.

Gentiles were looked upon as people to be avoided. They were looked at as unclean, heathen, pagans. People that you stayed away from. In other words you could be defiled just by going into their house.

If you spent time with them. Or you remember when Peter went and spent time with Cornelius. He faced accusations from the Jews. Because he was giving the gospel to a Gentile.

And so that even in the church. Even among believing Jews. That animosity. That dislike. That hatred for the Gentiles was so deep. That even among believers it took some time to get that worked out.

It took some time to get rid of that. You see that in the early days of the church. But now you're talking about Jewish people who are not converted to Christ. Jewish people who are not believers in Jesus.

[15 : 02] They're still living under that old Orthodox Judaism. That says you know Gentiles are evil. Gentiles are pagans. Gentiles aren't part of God's people. But Paul is saying no.

He said to open their eyes. Talking about the Gentiles. And turn them from darkness to light. And from the power of Satan unto God. That they may receive forgiveness of sins. And inheritance.

Among them which are sanctified by faith. That is in me. So he's saying among the Jews could be part with the Gentiles. By faith.

And he elaborates on this a lot in Ephesians chapter 2. Where he talks about that wall of division between the Jew and the Gentile. Been broken down. And now we're one in Christ. We've got one Lord.

One faith. We're all in Christ together. Be Jew or Gentile. That division has been taken away. And he said whereupon O King Agrippa.

[15 : 58] I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision. But showed first unto them of Damascus. And at Jerusalem. And throughout all the coast of Judea. And then to the Gentiles.

That they should repent. And turn to God. And do works meet for repentance. And so there was the message he gave to the Gentiles. They should repent. In other words have a change of mind.

Have a change of thought. The word repent comes from the word meaning an afterthought. Or a change of mind. You take a sinner. You take a person that's lost.

They're not believing in Jesus. They don't see a need to believe in him. They think they're all right on their own. They've got their own way of doing things. But there comes a point where maybe through the hearing of the gospel.

The Holy Spirit works on their heart. And their mind begins to think. And their will begins to be changed. And they're thinking you know. I'm a sinner. I need what they're talking about. Jesus is my only hope.

[16 : 55] Jesus is the only one that can help me. That's repentance. When you have stopped relying on you and yourself. And you realize that you're a helpless, hopeless sinner.

And you turn your mind and focus on Jesus. And realize he's your only hope. He's your only help. That's repentance. It says turn to God. And do works meet for repentance.

In other words once you've repented. Once you've come to faith in Christ. There should be evidence. There should be works that follow. Not to be saved. But as evidence that you are saved.

We're saved by grace through faith. Not of works. But those works should follow as evidence. That we have been saved. And so that's the message he's been given.

And he's been given it to the Gentiles. Which got the Jews aggravated. It says verse 21. For these causes. The Jews caught me in the temple.

[17 : 50] And went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God. I continue unto this day. Witnessing both the small and great. Saying none other things.

Than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come. So Paul is appealing to his Jewish audience now. Because Jews they think Old Testament.

That's the Bible to them. Even now if you meet an Orthodox Jew. He's going to. If you mention the Bible. The scriptures. He's going to think Old Testament. And so Paul is saying.

You know. I'm just. Teaching them. What was in. What was in the Old Testament. What the. What the scriptures. Have been saying. It says the prophets and Moses.

They said. This day should come. And what did they say should come? That Christ should suffer. And that he should be the first. That should rise from the dead. And should show light unto the people.

[18 : 47] And to the Gentiles. And so Paul is saying. The prophets. Moses. They all saw. That Jesus would. Resurrect from the dead. That he would be the first fruits of the resurrection.

And that this message of hope. Would be taken to the Gentiles. This wasn't something. New. This is something the prophets. This was something Moses. Saw many many years before this.

And Paul said. I'm just repeating what they said. And if you think about. Even in the most famous. Old Testament passage. About the crucifixion. In Isaiah 53. There's a reference to the.

Resurrection in there. Near the end. It said. He shall. Prolong his days. Who's he going to prolong the days of? That one that bore our iniquities. That one that was.

Smitten. Smitten. Stricken of God. And afflicted. That one that was put to death. Our sins were laid upon him. God's going to. Prolong his days. In other words. There's going to be a resurrection.

[19 : 43] So even in Isaiah 53. There's a prophecy made of. Of the. The resurrection. Resurrection. And so Paul is saying. I'm just telling them. What the. Prophets said. I'm just telling them.

What Moses said. In fact. When Jesus talks of a resurrection. From the dead. He quotes Moses. And so. There are. Plenty of. References in the Old Testament. That would point to.

The fact that there needs. To be a resurrection. And that there would be. Someone who was the first fruits. Of the resurrection. And that's the whole. That's the whole picture of. Of the feast.

That the Lord gave. The Jews to keep. You come to the feast. Of first fruits. What's that? That's a sign of. Resurrection. You've got things coming to life. That have been. Dead.

And laying dormant. And now they're coming to life. And you have. Reaped the first gleanings. Of a harvest. A resurrection. Life has happened there. And so that was. That's what's pictured. In the feast of first fruits.

[20 : 37] And it's not a coincidence. That Jesus arose. On the day. The feast of first fruits. Is celebrated. Because he's the first fruits. Of the resurrection. And so.

Paul is saying. You know. This is just. Things that. Moses and the prophets. Would have already said. And the Jews. Would have appealed. To those scriptures. At some point. And he says.

And as he thus. Or verse 23. That Christ. That Christ. Should suffer. And that he should be the first. That should rise. From the dead. And should show light. Unto the people. And to the Gentiles.

So he's just given. Agrippa. The gospel. The death. The resurrection. Of Christ. First Corinthians chapter 15. Remember Paul said. This is the gospel. How that Christ. Died for our sins.

According to the scriptures. That he was buried. And that he rose again. The third day. According to the scriptures. That's the gospel. That's what you got to believe. To be saved. You got to believe the gospel. And so Paul had just given that.

[21 : 32] To. To Agrippa. And notice. He gets interrupted. Verse 24. And as he does speak for himself. Festus said with a loud voice. So basically.

Festus interrupts Paul. Paul talks about. This resurrection. And this light to the Gentiles. And so Festus now. Interrupts him. And not just casually. He interrupts him with a loud voice.

Paul thou art beside thyself. Much learning doth make thee mad. In other words. Paul you're insane. Is what he just said. Paul you're insane. All this learning you've been doing.

Is driving you to insanity. Is what he just told him. Now it's interesting that Paul. Had already written his letter. To the Corinthians at this point.

So let's look at 1 Corinthians chapter 1. Notice what he says. In 1 Corinthians chapter 1.

[22 : 33] Remember what Paul has just told Agrippa. He's given him the gospel. How that Christ should die. And be raised from the dead. Verse 18. Of chapter 1. For the preaching of the cross.

Is to them that perish foolishness. But unto us which are saved. It is the power of God. And so Paul had already written. To the Corinthians at some point. Before this. And said the preaching of the cross.

The message of the gospel. People are going to think that's foolishness. People are going to think that's crazy. People are going to think you're insane. And that's exactly what's happening here. Is he is.

He's telling the message of the gospel. The message of the resurrection. And Festus says Paul you're crazy. You're insane. This. All this learning is driving you to insanity.

And also in 1 Corinthians 2. 14. The natural man receiveth not. The things of the spirit of God. For they are foolishness unto him. Neither can they know them. Because they're spiritually discerned.

[23 : 29] And so this message of the gospel. This message of hope. This message of the crucifixion. And the resurrection. To those who are lost. To those who are unbelieving. It's going to be foolishness.

It's going to seem like insanity to them. And notice what Paul says. But he said I am not mad. Most noble Festus. I'm not insane.

But speak forth the words of truth. And soberness. He said I'm speaking to you in truth. And I'm speaking to you from a sound mind. That's what the word soberness means.

Sober. When we hear that word. We think of you know. Someone who's not drunk. But in the context of when. This word would have been used. When the King James Bible was being written.

Sober meant having a sound mind. Being in a right frame of mind. Not being crazy. As they have accused him of. It says for the king knoweth of these things. Before whom I also I speak freely.

[24 : 27] For I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him. For this thing was not done in a corner. In other words Jesus didn't die in secret. He didn't raise from the dead in secret.

This is well known. This was witnessed by. Over 500 people saw him alive after his resurrection. So this is not something that was done in secret. This is something that was done in the open.

And notice what Paul says. King Agrippa. Believest thou the prophets. I know that thou believest. And so now Paul is turning the pressure on to Agrippa. Agrippa you believe this.

I know you do. Then Agrippa said unto Paul. Almost thou persuadest me. To be a Christian. 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. And so Agrippa said. Almost thou persuadest me.

[25 : 24] To be a Christian. In other words it's not right now. Not right now. Maybe some other time. Take a little more time. But not right now. And so there's.

Unfortunately there's probably a lot of people. Who went out to meet the Lord. Who had said almost maybe. But not right now. That's always a dangerous thing to do. To put off. Once you've heard a clear presentation of the gospel.

It's always a dangerous thing to put that off. And say you know. Not now. Not this time. I need more time. Is the idea here. Almost. But I need more time.

Such a short time. I'm not. I'm not persuaded yet. But almost. Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said. I wish that. Not only thou. But also all that hear me this day.

Were both almost. And altogether. Such as I am. Except these bonds. In other words. I wish. I wish you all believed like I do. I wish you all were like me. Except these chains.

[26 : 23] I'm bound in. And when he had thus spoken. The king rose up. And the governor. And Bernice. And they that sat with them. And when they were gone aside.

They talked between themselves. Saying this man doeth nothing. Worthy of death. Or of bonds. Then said Agrippa undefestus. This man might have been set at liberty. If he had not appealed unto Caesar.

And so here again. Paul is found innocent. They still haven't got charges. To put against him. And they're sending him to Caesar. Still without. Without charges.

But remember what the Lord told Paul. He said you're going to. You're going to testify of me. Before kings. And governors. And rulers. And so. He's told him. Recently. And a few chapters ago.

He said just like you've testified. In Jerusalem. You're going to testify in Rome. Also. So Paul was on. Paul was on a mission. From the Lord. And the Lord was going to get him. To Rome.

[27 : 19] And when the book of Acts. Ends in chapter 28. That's where Paul is going to be. He's going to be in Rome. And so we'll see next week. He's going to start his. Voyage. By sea.

To get to. To get to Rome. And things aren't going to go. Real. Real smoothly. So we'll see how that goes. Next week. In chapter 27. Let's pray. Father. Father.

We thank you.