

This is my Story

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[0 : 00] Turn back with me please to Acts chapter 26. Acts chapter 26. And we can read again at the beginning.

So Agrippa said to Paul, you have permission to speak for yourself. Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defence. I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defence today against all the accusations of the Jews.

Especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. It seems to be almost instinctive for new believers to want to tell about what the Lord has done in their hearts and in their lives and their souls.

And not even necessarily just new ones. But the interesting thing is it is such an instinct. And people when they get converted they often say, I need to go and tell everybody.

I need to tell my friends about this. I need to tell them what has happened. Other folk, it is the last thing they want to do. But for many it seems to be almost a spiritual instinct to go and to tell what has happened.

[1 : 23] You think of the woman at the well who has just become aware that Jesus is the Christ. And what does she do? She runs back to town and says to everybody, come on, you need to hear this man.

See a man that has told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ? And folk get so excited that they all come rushing out and many of them become believers as well when they meet Jesus. Or you think of the likes of Jairus whose daughter is dead and Jesus brings her back from the dead. And he says, don't tell anybody about this.

And, you know, scripture doesn't tell us that they did. But it does say that news about him spread throughout the community. I guess it's hard to keep that quiet when people knew that she was dead.

And then next day she's walking the streets again. And the news spread. Folk just couldn't stop themselves talking about it. There's a legion from whom the Lord casts out a whole pile of demons.

[2 : 22] And he says, can I come with you? I want to come and travel around with you, Lord. And he says, no, you go back to your own town. Tell them what the Lord's done for you. And he does that. And then good news spreads around that whole area of the Decapolis.

All kinds of stories like that. Jesus heals a leper. And he says, don't tell anybody about this. But the man goes away and tells everybody. And then we read that Jesus can't do miracles in that place. Because there's presumably so many people wanting to come and be healed. That he's got no time to actually preach. Which is what he's come to do. There's Andrew and Philip. And they go back to their brothers and to their friends.

And they say, we think we've found the Messiah. Come and see. There's all these characters. Plenty more. Plenty examples of that in scripture. Folk that find the Lord.

And they can't but speak about it. And they need to tell folk what's happened. And for some, that's a lifelong burden. And it was for the Apostle Paul.

[3 : 20] And he couldn't resist telling folk what had happened to him. Because it was such an example of God's grace. And he knew that that same grace could touch the hearts and lives of many others.

And bring them to faith in Jesus as well. So here he is. He's on trial before King Agrippa making his defence for the Christian faith.

He's been accused by the Jews of being a heretic and a blasphemer. They call him a troublemaker. They call him a riot starter. One of them even called him, a couple of chapters back, called him he's a plague.

He's like a disease that needs to be eradicated from the world. This man is a bad, bad man. And he has to defend himself.

And he has to defend his Christian faith. Which of course he believes to be the truth of God. He has to defend it before all these detractors that are wanting to brandish him and bracket him in all these ways.

[4 : 29] And he gets hauled before mobs. And he gets hauled before councils. And he gets hauled before governors. And he gets hauled before kings here in this chapter.

And one of the intriguing things is that no matter who he appears before, nobody finds him guilty of anything. They can't pin anything on him. They can't find a criminal charge to pin on him.

So you go all the way back to chapter 21 and verse 33 where he's in Jerusalem. And he's testifying. He's in the temple. A riot starts.

And when folk realize he's there. And Roman soldiers have to come rushing in. And we read, When they saw the tribune and the soldiers, the mob stopped beating Paul.

Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. And he inquired who he was. And what had he done? Who is this man? Why are you so hostile towards him?

[5 : 28] What's he done? There's nothing obvious that we can see here. He's just, you're about to tear him limb from limb. Why? What is it? And he can't figure it out.

And you get into the next chapter, chapter 22. And you get the same thing again. He appears before a council. And again, he's virtually, he hardly escapes with his life.

As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging to find out why they were shouting against him like this.

And he's saying, I don't know what it is you've done. I can't see anything. What on earth have you done? But on the next day, when he finds out Paul's a Roman citizen, then he better not beat him up.

On the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews. So he still hasn't got a reason for it. He's desperate to find out, but he's got no idea what it is Paul's supposed to have done.

[6 : 30] But he starts asking him questions. Tonight he finds out what on earth is it? And then he finds out there's a plot against his life. So he says, I'm going to send him up to Caesarea, get him out of Jerusalem, and send him to a kind of safe house up in Caesarea, a couple of hundred miles away.

And he sends a letter to Governor Felix, who's based up in Caesarea. He says, this man was seized by the Jews, and he was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers.

And I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen. And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. He said, I still don't know. I still don't know what it is he's supposed to have done wrong.

And that takes us then into chapter 25, where Festus takes over from Felix, takes over his job. He says, see if there's anything wrong about this man, and if there is, let them bring charges against him.

But they can't do it because they can't find anything wrong. And we go into chapter 25 and verse 10. Paul said, I'm standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried.

[7 : 38] To the Jews, I have done no wrong, as you yourself, Festus, know very well. And he's challenging them. He's saying, what is it you're saying I've done wrong? Because I don't think I've done anything wrong, and nobody is able to pin anything on him.

Festus, chapter 25, verse 18, when he meets up with King Agrippa, he says when his accusers stood up, they brought no charge in this case of such evils, as I supposed, that they would bring them.

But they didn't. And when Agrippa finally appears, Festus reminds him, he says, I found he had done nothing deserving death.

And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. And, of course, at the end of chapter 26, that we just read, the conclusion of the whole court case in chapter 26, Agrippa said to Festus, this man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.

He could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar. So there's nothing that Paul is doing that merits the abuse and the opposition and the trials that he is going through.

[8 : 52] No court finds him guilty of anything. And, of course, it's true that the Christian faith does not present any threat to secular courts or secular kingdoms.

That is not the concern of Christians. We want to see the kingdom of God spread. And it's a spiritual thing. We're not here to take over empires and to start riots and to try and get onto thrones or into positions of authority.

And Paul says, I'm no threat to Rome. I'm no threat to Caesar. I have done nothing wrong except believe what God has revealed to me.

His personal safety is not his concern. His personal freedom is not his concern. His personal reputation is not his concern. His concern is to preach Christ and to make folk aware of the claims of Jesus and desires that everybody he meets believes it.

And Luke, who's writing this book, he wants us to have that same conviction, that there is no threat from the Christian faith to the secular authorities. The Holy Spirit, who has inspired Luke to write the book, wants us to know that Christians are good citizens and that nobody could point a finger against Paul and say he's guilty of riot-making, troublemaking, stirring up the masses or whatever.

[10 : 19] All he wants to do is to preach the gospel. He's been preaching it for years at this point around the empire. He's travelled something like 10,000 miles in his attempts to reach the gospel.

You think of that, 10,000 miles. He didn't have a car, he didn't have a plane, a plane, any of that.

But on foot, perhaps on horseback, by boat, 10,000 miles, travelling around that kind of Mediterranean area, speaking the truth about Christ over a period of many years.

Despite opposition, despite jail, despite floggings and beatings and stonings, despite being outcast by sometimes his own family, sometimes strangers, he just presses on and he says, I want to preach Christ and I want to tell people about the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

And he finds himself here in the custody of Governor Festus, who, as I say, is a successor to Felix, a later successor of Pontius Pilate.

He assumes that Paul is bad. He must be bad for there to be such hostility against him. And he says, that was my presupposition. In verse 18 of chapter 25, when his accuser stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I had supposed.

[11 : 48] He says, I guessed he must have done something really bad. But then when I heard what he'd done, I couldn't find anything bad. But he'd made that assumption, he must have done something really bad.

And all he could figure out was that Paul was saying somebody was alive who other people were saying was dead. And he thought, why would you fall out over something like that?

If I said, Billy Graham was dead and you fellas said, no, he's not, he's still alive, we wouldn't come to blow us over it, no matter how vehement they are. I said, no, honestly, he died last year.

And you said, no, he's not. I never heard that. He's still alive. And as far as Festus was concerned, this was the rub of the argument. That some people were saying Jesus was dead and others were saying he was alive.

And he's thinking, why would you fall out over something as trivial as that? It's something that can easily be ascertained. And he's baffled as to what on earth is going on here.

[12 : 44] And he's visited by King Agrippa, who is the great grandson of Herod the Great, the one that the wise men came to at the time Jesus was born. This is his great grandson, King Agrippa.

He's the nephew of the Herod that imprisoned John the Baptist and killed him. And he's the brother of this lady, Bernice, who arrives at the court at Caesarea with him.

And there was, historians tell us there was something very suspicious and not right about their relationship. People felt there's something actually incestuous about the way they are so close and it was looked on with grave suspicion just how close they were.

She was not his wife, she was his sister. And folk thought there's something just not right here about it all. And Paul has to appear before them too and testify as to what it is he believes and why his freedom has been taken from him.

For two years now he's been in prison with no freedom because of the message he insists is true. And he wants to go to Rome.

[13 : 58] It had been his long time hope and ambition to go to Rome, the very centre of the empire, and to tell this gospel there to the highest authorities and dignitaries in the empire.

I'm not ashamed of the gospel, he would say in Romans chapter 1. He said, I'm longing for the opportunity to come and speak the gospel to you folks that are in Rome. I want to go there, I'm proud of the gospel and I want to bring it there.

And the Lord is guiding him there and the Lord has actually told him chapter 23 verse 11 stands by him whether in a vision or whatever saying, take courage Paul as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem so you must also testify in Rome.

So the Lord Jesus is telling him you are going to end up in Rome and he knows that no matter what happens to him in the meantime, one day the Lord is going to make sure he does get to Rome with the gospel.

The Lord is guiding him there. Paul's not ashamed of the gospel and he wants to preach it at the very centre of influence in the empire amongst all the movers and shakers, all the intellectuals and academics.

[15:09] He says, I'll take that gospel and I'll preach it anywhere. I just want to tell people about Jesus. I hope we too would say, I'm unashamed to tell that gospel anywhere, anytime, to anybody.

That's standing in the footsteps of the apostle Paul when we can do that. And here he is, he's in Agrippa's courtroom or Festus' courtroom with a King Agrippa present and he's put on the spot and they say, tell us, what's your story?

And he says, alright, I'll tell you my story, which is what he does for the bulk of this chapter. Let me say in two things what I want to say. Firstly, his method. Secondly, his message.

Just two simple things. His method and his message. So there's this in the first place. This is method. So the first thing we can maybe say about it, we're talking here about Paul's defence. The first thing we can maybe say about it, and you'll hear this in sporting circles sometimes, that the best form of defence is attack. So you're in a team, bear with me if you're not sporty, you're in a team, you're winning 1-0, you want to win the game, do you defend for the rest of the match hoping that you can stop the other team from scoring or do you go on the attack and try and get a second goal?

[16:35] To make it much more likely you're going to win the game. And for many, the best form of defending that one goal lead is go and attack, get another goal. The best form of defence is attack.

And that seems to be Paul's method here. He says, I'm not here in a sense to defend the gospel, I'm here to tell you what it is and I'm going to let you know about what it is.

He knows he's in the presence of Roman soldiers who could do him mischief he's in front of governors and kings and dignitaries and a whole lot of pomp and ceremony.

If you were in chapter 25 you'll see at verse 23 the next day, the day that Paul's going to testify, Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city.

So there's all kinds of dignitaries there, all posh people and strong people and mighty people and there's poor Paul and it says, and then at the command of Festus Paul was brought in.

[17:41] No trumpets, no pomp, no ceremony. Paul the prisoner shuffles in and he's kind of one man against this wall of people that are there to hear what he's got to say and who suspect he's got nothing much to say.

In reality he's in the majority because he's got God on his side and if God's on your side you're always in the majority. Never doubt that he's in the majority and he knows that and he has the confidence that I'm going to survive this because the Lord's promised I'm going to roam with the gospel and he knows he's immortal until his work is done.

Until he's done what God wants him to do he is immortal and nobody can touch him and he has that confidence and that knowledge that he's here to do what God's given him to do and that's true for you folks as well.

You're immortal until your work is done. Until God is finished with you and you've done everything he put you on earth to do you're immortal and nobody can stop that happening.

Pray that the Lord will use you for whatever reason he's put you on this earth. And what Paul determines to do is I'm going to preach the gospel to these folks.

[19:02] I'm just going to preach the gospel. I'm going to tell them about the gospel of Jesus. That's what they need to hear because that's why I'm here. That's why I've been put on trial.

Perhaps he's suddenly conscious that he has an opportunity to share the gospel with folk that have never heard it before and may never hear it again. For all he knows he looks around at these

soldiers and tribunes and emperors and kings and he thinks these folk may never have heard the gospel and they may never hear it again.

I'm going to tell it to them because I have an opportunity to do that this day. Well they've brought me here to say what is it that I'm supposed to have done. The Puritan Richard Baxter once described his ministry saying I preached as never sure to preach again and as a dying man to dying men and that was his conviction.

Maybe I'll never get to preach again. Maybe the folks in the audience in the congregation will never hear the gospel again. I'll preach to them as though I knew that were the case and that seems to be the attitude and the method that Paul comes out with at this time.

If they never hear it again I'm going to make sure they hear something today about the gospel and that's what he does and he begins in chapter 26 verse 2 and 3 I consider myself fortunate that it is before you King Agrippa I'm going to make my defence today and he's so courteous I beg you listen to me patiently and he's so courteous and so respectful in his whole approach and you pick up on it again in verse 7 he talks about he doesn't blast the Jews for being blind to the reality of Christ he says they earnestly worship night and day they earnestly worship and he says I'm not questioning their earnestness I'm saying they're wrong but I can't deny they're zealous and earnest for the things of God and he's respectful to them his accusers who he knows would tear him apart if they got the chance but he's so respectful and he's like that again in verse 25 when Festus accuses him of being mad

[21 : 19] Paul you're out of your mind your great learning is driving you out of your mind and he doesn't shout and yell back he just says I'm not out of my mind most excellent Festus and he's polite to him too and same again when Agrippa gives his famous answer in verse 28 are you going to try and persuade me to be a Christian Paul said whether short or long I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am might also become a Christian except I wouldn't want you to have to wear these chains these handcuffs I don't want you having to do that but I'd long love for you all to become a Christian and he's so polite and he gets a hearing and nobody can question him and nobody can nobody gets angry with him here because he has such a polite manner there's something to be learned from that isn't there there's something to be learned about being polite and respectful how often we see politicians and they're shouting at each other you watch question time sometimes and you can hardly hear what one's saying because from the other side of the table somebody else is saying something else and they're fighting and shouting over each other or Prime Minister's question time we've seen so much of it in recent months that you can hardly hear what they're saying sometimes angry words flying back and forth always in dodgy ground to mention individual politicians so bear with me if this is not your cup of tea but I'm always taken by Jacob Rees-Mogg when he's been interviewed and he's got such a gentle and polite manner about him you might not like his politics you might not like his plummy voice you might not like that he dresses like something out of Dickens but he's so polite and so respectful that he disarms the people that are contending against him and when interviewers interrupt him he stops he stops what he's saying and answers that next question without even going back to what he was trying to say in the first place and there's something so disarming about that whole approach and it seems to be

Paul's approach here as well there's a verse in Proverbs that says a soft answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger and there's something we could learn about all these things isn't there when we're trying to proclaim the gospel when we're trying to tell somebody if you're argumentative and hostile and bolshy in people's faces and they don't like it and it just turns them off but there's a gentleness and a politeness and a respect that will make folk listen and that's part of his method at this time too and then there's another side where he then begins to tell his own story and he starts having having established that he's not in angry mode he's in polite and respectful mode he says let me tell you what happened to me and he begins in verse 4 my manner of life from my youth spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem is known by all the Jews and he starts telling his own story folks there's something really powerful about telling your own story be ready to tell your own story because it packs a punch and unless it's something outrageous and you're actually telling lies folk cannot turn to you and say that's not true because it's your story and you say yes it is true this is what happened to me let me tell you what happened to me and there's something powerful about being able to say this is my experience this is my story might not be your conversion story you know

Paul here is telling his conversion story but just to be able to say let me tell you from my own experience it might be how I dealt with bad news how I dealt with disaster that came into my life and family folk maybe turn to you and say after all you've been through how have you coped how are you still here how have you not gone off your head and you say the Lord the Bible being in church it's all helped and that might be the very thing that makes folk sit up and listen and say tell me tell me your story tell me your experience it might be that when somebody speaks to you tomorrow morning and says did you have a good weekend well how easy it is to not say well I was in church yesterday and I really enjoyed it it was great I wish you'd been there how much easier to say hi it was alright did a few things on Friday Saturday and you don't say the thing that's most important and yet it can be a real opportunity can't it and sometimes that has the most impact and that's where

Paul is going with this that's his method he says let me tell you what happened to me and he knows that this is all well known to the public he's not telling lies he's not exaggerating he's not spinning it to make himself look better than he is he's saying it's not made up it's not heretical in fact everything I say is consistent with the Old Testament scriptures that even the Jews believe the very folks that want to lynch me they're supposed to believe the same things that I believe why is it thought incredible by anybody that believes the Old Testament scriptures that God would raise the dead if God is God and can do anything why would any of you say he can't raise the dead Jesus can't be alive because he was dead he says why would you think that was impossible if you believe in the God you claim to believe in it's the same the same

God and he tells a story this is the third time we've had Paul's conversion story you get it in chapter 9 as it were when it happens on the Damascus road chapter 22 he tells it again to the mob in Jerusalem that are waiting to kill him and here he is a third time you know three times about 16 17 chapters of Acts we're given the story of Paul's conversion and he picks different things at different times the Holy Spirit picks out different things at different times not all three versions are identical they're not wrong they don't contradict each other but he makes a point here that he doesn't make there he says something to the mob in Jerusalem that he doesn't say to King Agrippa he says something to King Agrippa that is not told as back in the story of what originally happened to him in chapter nine on the Damascus road but it's all true and it's all appropriate for the audience he's got make your message appropriate to the audience you've got

[28 : 01] I was speaking in a school in Nairn last week the message I was able to give to the children would not be the same message I'm able to give here tonight you're understanding I'm assuming I don't know who you are or what your background is or how much you know but I'm guessing that your collective knowledge is so much greater than these kids and I can't start by assuming that they know what a bible is or that they know who God claims to be you have to temper the message to the audience remember that that's what Paul does here that's part of his method he says what's appropriate for King Agrippa and those in the courtroom to hear but he leaves out details that they don't need to hear because he says I've only got so much time and so much energy to be able to share with you and I need to pick and choose what to say on any given occasion remember that when you're asked and given the opportunity to speak for the Lord you don't have to throw everything in just get the message out in verses 19 to 23 he shows again how orthodox his message is this is part of his technique his method as well he wants them to know that what

I believe is simply what you folks ought to believe with an Old Testament in your hand while at the same time saying it's fulfilled now in the New Testament era in Jesus understand that the Messiah you've always looked for is Jesus and that is consistent with everything the Old Testament had to say and he talks here about how the Lord has come and he has given the same message that has always been given through Moses and the prophets I am standing here testifying both to small and great I'm saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass that the Christ must suffer and that by being the first to rise from the dead he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles he says it was all there in the Old Testament if you wanted to read it go and read it and you'll see I'm not a heretic I'm not a blasphemer

I'm just telling you how the message has moved on and what God is doing in our day and he speaks about the resurrection of Christ he says I'm saying hang on Paul are you kidding you're actually saying you're not just saying Jesus is alive when other people said he was dead you're telling me you agree he was dead and he's come back from the dead Paul that's crazy you're out of

your mind is that really why you've allowed yourself to be in prison because you're saying a man came back from the dead and for Festus it's as you're mad you're mad you don't believe that surely you don't believe that that's crazy it's impossible it's non-scientific it cannot happen nobody believes what you believe

Paul and of course that is the crux of the issue and that's what Paul has done that's his method he wanted to get to the resurrection of Jesus because he knows that that's the very hinge that the whole gospel hangs on and if the Jews could only accept that Jesus had died and risen again and that he really is the Messiah they've been waiting for all these centuries then they will get it they will understand God's word and he's managed to preach the gospel and he's managed to preach the resurrection and he knows Agrippa can accept this because somewhere inside Agrippa for all his dodgy lifestyle he believes in some way the gospel and Paul is homing in on him and he's saying this is the gospel Agrippa this is God's word are you going to believe it are you going to accept it his method has enabled him to turn the courtroom into a preaching platform his courtroom has become the defence stand has become a pulpit and he's been able to share the gospel and that God given wisdom and God given ability is available to you and me too if you want it if you want to be able to tell folk about Christ if you want to be able to share the good news ask him help me to do that God when there's a world out there dying for the want of it give me grace to do what Paul did and to share the gospel even in the unlikeliest situations make me care enough care enough that I want to do that and I want to help people that's his method time's running on give me a few more minutes and I'll be ready move on to his message okay what's Paul's message here in the courtroom his message is a gospel message he's unafraid to say you go to verse 7 and he says this is or verse 6 I stand here on trial because of my hope and the promise made by

[33 : 43] God to our fathers he's saying I believe in God I believe in the Bible I believe in the promises of God and he's not afraid to say that there in this courtroom that doesn't believe what he believes he says I believe in God I believe in the Bible I believe in his promises I have a hope I don't mind admitting that I have a hope and sometimes you say these things and you think if I say these things they're going to make me feel like an idiot they're going to make me feel like a fool for being so old fashioned as to believe in the Bible and in God and in his promises Paul's not ashamed to do that and he says let me tell you I believe in all these things he gets to verse 8 and he says I believe in the resurrection I believe God brought Jesus back from the dead because I believe there's a God who is active and supernatural and engaged with this present world he hasn't created the world and gone away and is disinterested in what was on in it anymore he's engaged he's active in this world he's relevant he's real that's the

God I believe in and he brings people back from the dead he's brought Jesus back from the dead he's not ashamed to say that he believes the gospel is different from anything else and from any other faith or philosophy he says I agree he says the Jews are so earnest they worship God earnestly day and night but they're wrong they're wrong in this day and age we're told all religions are the same Paul says no they're not and these poor benighted blinded Jews that are so earnest and zealous in their faith they're wrong Jesus is the way the truth the life I was on the road to hell because I didn't believe in Jesus and he's saved me and he's brought me back and he's given me faith in Christ Judaism and Christianity are not the same all religions are not the same despite what some people say and needed to be brought off that road and put onto that road and I'm not ashamed to say that here in this courtroom he's not afraid to say I believe in the basic Old Testament message because I believe it's completely consistent with the New Testament message it just needs that key in the door where you understand that Jesus is the answer to all the promises and then you realise that this New Testament era is correct I believe God's message is still true but it's greater than we ever realised when all we had was the Old Testament it's fulfilled now in ways that we never imagined and he's not ashamed to say that there and then before all these people I believe in the resurrection of Jesus that it's true and rational and credible and God inspired in fact I believe in it so much I'm not even just wanting to come here and state it as a fact I'm not just going to leave it I believe in the resurrection I believe in the word of God I'm going to say to you King Agrippa do you believe it that would be a social faux pas wouldn't it you don't turn on the judge and start saying do you believe it it gets personal with him doesn't he King Agrippa do you believe this message I know you believe and he turns and puts Agrippa in the spotlight he wants folk to be challenged to accept the gospel and to believe the gospel and it's encouraging for him to see that Agrippa believes it he knows Agrippa believes it but on the spot

Agrippa doesn't accept that is he and he backs off and gives a clever answer just like that you're kidding time to think about the things you're saying here King James version almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian that implies that he's on the brink I'm not sure that's really the best translation this is probably a better one it's got more evangelistic potential perhaps in the King James version but we're interested what it really says and it's more or less along the lines of really in such a short time do you think in a few minutes of talking you think you can make me a Christian I'd love to know the tone of his voice is he angry is he sceptical hard to say but that's what he says I can't just become a Christian just like that he's almost persuaded if that's a correct translation that's the same as being not persuaded I hope as time went by he was persuaded but it's encouraging for Paul to know he can sense that the truth is impacting King Agrippa and that his defence for the gospel has had an impact this day but he knows he can't do that he can't convert Agrippa only the Holy Spirit can do that he can't change anybody else he can't change Agrippa or Bernice who'll be sitting there shuffling uncomfortably because he's been talking about folk repenting of their sins and they're thinking whatever a dodgy relationship is he can't convert Felix he can't convert Festus he can't convert anyone else and there are some people sitting there who would think

[39 : 23] Paul you'll never convince anybody of that nonsense nobody will believe your message it's rubbish and the New Testament is filled with stories of people who came to believe that message and who believed that gospel and we're here today because folk then came to believe the gospel and started to spread out around the world when we were still worshipping the sunrise at Calanish or whatever there was people coming across Europe to tell us the good news of Jesus Christ people believed the gospel and Paul knew that and he had the confidence and the faith and the hope to know that this gospel could change the world but he couldn't change anybody but at least he can walk out of this courtroom with a clear conscience I've told them I've passed the message on I can't make them believe it the Holy Spirit can work through it but I can't do anything to change these people later on he would write to the

Corinthians be steadfast be immovable always abounding in the work of the Lord because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain and I would say that to you folks as well your labour in the Lord is not in vain you might think the time you spend preaching the gospel the time you spend telling the gospel sharing the gospel praying for people to be saved and maybe you never see it your labour in the Lord is not in vain we don't know you don't know probably every one of us here is here because of the prayers of somebody else your parents your brothers your sisters your grandparents probably every single one of us at least on one level is here because somebody else prayed for us and somebody else told us it might have been your Sunday school teacher it might have been your school teacher it might have been your granny it might have been the woman next door somebody told us the gospel and it's why we're here and you might be that blessing to somebody else your labour in the Lord is not in vain that child in Sunday school this morning that kid at the youth club that thing you did at the schools that holiday club you ran that challenger bus visit that you organised that neighbour you chatted to that friend you spoke to who was asking you questions that person you invited along to church that kind act you did that you thought went unnoticed but maybe somebody was sitting there making mental notes saying why did they do that you don't know do you we just don't know what speaks to folk and what will speak to folk and for all you get discouraged and you say

I'm not seeing any answers to my prayers I'm not seeing any fruit for my labours that doesn't mean there isn't any and Paul just did what he did and he left it to the Lord Felix trembled when he heard the message Paul had and he said whoa I'm out of here I'll hear about this again and Paul could get discouraged at that rebuff because I don't know if Felix ever did come to faith he could be discouraged because Festus ridiculed him and said Paul you're out of your mind how can anybody believe the things that you believe he could get discouraged at that couldn't he he could get discouraged because Agrippa seems to be unresponsive and unpersuaded by his message but for all we know they all got saved in the end for all we know the Bible doesn't tell us but for all we know maybe Felix was converted maybe Festus was converted maybe Agrippa and Bernice were converted we don't know we'll find out one day but you don't know do you and Paul didn't know he just said

I'm going to do this anyway that was his method and that was his message and then he would leave it to the Holy Spirit the day will declare it the day will declare it and we'll find out then what God has been doing in the world and I'm convinced and I'm convinced that one of the joys of heaven when

we get there will be to find who else is there and the folk that you never realised would be there and the folk that you find to your amazement maybe you even had a part to play in that and seeing how God worked in the world be steadfast be immovable in the work of the gospel always abounding in the work of the gospel because your labour in the Lord is not in vain press on let's pray thank you