

Acts 25:13-26:32

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- [0 : 0 0] The following sermon is from Grace and Peace Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Grace and Peace is a new church that exists for the glory of God and the good of the northeast suburbs of Hamilton Place, Collegedale, and Ottawa.
- You can find help more by visiting gracepeacechurch.org. Okay. As we come to God's Word today, we are quickly heading to the end of the book of Acts.
- Only a couple more weeks after this. And so I wanted to just take a moment, if you weren't here last week, I wanted to just take a moment and catch you up on where we are in the story of Paul and the early church in Acts.
- You've got it written in your handout. Hopefully, someone told me that we may have been running low on handouts, so if you see somebody who doesn't have one, please pass it over to them.
- But let me tell you where we were. So last week, Paul was defending himself before one of the local Roman officials, and his name was Felix. And they were in Caesarea, which was kind of the Roman capital right on the coast.
- [1 : 1 4] Well, Felix kept Paul in prison for over two years. And the reason he did that was because he was holding Paul. Paul was kind of a pawn.
- He was a card that Felix just wanted to play in his dealing politically with the local Jewish leaders. And so he was waiting for the right opportunity. Well, it turns out that Felix was a pretty bad guy.
- Felix used a violent bloodbath in order to quell a protest against him, and he got removed by the Romans. If the Romans think you're too violent, you're a bad dude.
- So Felix gets called home to go to Rome, and he gets replaced by this guy named Festus. Festus is kind of the governor. Festus wasn't nearly as crudely political or violent as Felix was.
- And he was trying to figure out a way to resolve the dispute between the local Jewish leaders and Paul, even though Paul was still in prison. The story we have today is the story of when Festus tried to figure out how to free Paul.
- [2 : 2 2] And it all came because of this one big meeting. It was a meeting between Governor Festus and this guy named King Agrippa II. Now, let me just give you a little bit about the kind of political situation, just so you understand who the players are.
- It's complicated. Here's the best comparison. I want you to compare this to the way that things work in England. Okay, in England, you have the prime minister, right? Boris Johnson, I think, is the prime minister in England currently.
- He's the one with real power. He can actually enact laws. He works with the parliament. From a day-to-day perspective, he's the one who is actually making things happen. But you also have the queen.
- And the queen, she's just a figurehead. She doesn't actually do anything day-to-day. She doesn't have any formal power. All of her power is just influence.

She's got a pulse on what's happening with the people. She knows what the right things to do often are. And so there's this interaction between the prime minister and the queen, the royal figurehead.

[3 : 34] That's similar to what's going on here. You have Governor Felix. He's doing day-to-day governing. And then you have King Agrippa II. He's the figurehead. But he really gets the subtleties.

So in this passage, Festus is bringing Paul in front of him and King Agrippa because he's trying to get in on King Agrippa's good side.

And he's also trying to get King Agrippa's wisdom on how to deal with these Jewish religious and political things. Now, that's where the similarities to England stop.

And here's why. Because King Agrippa II is not to be compared with the queen. This guy is a bad guy. You want me to tell you his real name? His real name was King Herod Agrippa II.

Does his name Herod ring a bell? Anybody? Okay. So Herod the Great, he was the guy who was around when we read about Jesus' birth story. You know, Jesus was born, the Magi come.

[4 : 34] And Herod decides to go and slaughter all the babies looking for Jesus. Okay. That was Herod the Great. Herod's son, Herod the Great's son, Herod Antipas, He was the one we read about in the Gospels who took John the Baptist, had John the Baptist in prison, and he brought his daughter out and he said, I'll give you whatever you want.

And his daughter said, give me the head of John the Baptist on a platter. So for a party trick, Herod Antipas beheaded John the Baptist. Okay. Then you have Herod Agrippa I.

He was the one we read about earlier in Acts who martyred the Apostle James, the brother of John. This is Herod Agrippa II.

Okay. He's young. He's just coming into his own. He's actually had the reputation of kind of being a playboy. He played the ladies. He was actually in a romantic relationship with his sister Bernice at this moment.

So, Governor Festus was now welcoming and playing nice with King Agrippa II and Bernice. That's the kind of background of what's going on in this passage.

[5 : 48] So let me start in with verse 13 so you can follow along. Now, when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived in Caesarea and greeted Festus.

And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king. There is a man left prisoner by Felix. And when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him.

I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face, had the opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him.

That sounds nice enough. A little bit of, you know, due process there. Verse 17. So when they, meaning the Jews, came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man, Paul, to be brought.

Sorry, to be brought. When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. Rather, they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive.

[7 : 10] Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them. But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar.

Then Agrippa said to Festus, I would like to hear the man myself. Tomorrow, said Festus, you will hear him. So on the next day, Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and all the prominent men of the city.

Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. And Festus said, King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer.

But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him.

Therefore, I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after we have examined him, I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable in sending a prisoner not to indicate the charges against him.

[8 : 28] So, Agrippa said to Paul, You have permission to speak for yourself. Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense. I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, especially because you're familiar with the customs and controversies of the Jews.

Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently. My manner of life from my youth spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem is known by all the Jews.

They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion, I have lived as a Pharisee. And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day.

And for this hope, I am accused by Jews, O King. Why it is thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead.

Okay, let's just stop there for a moment. So, you kind of get the subtlety of this scene. It's actually kind of funny that Festus and Bernice come in.

[9 : 45] They're pomp. They've got like military folks. You can imagine the scandal of him and his sister, everybody knowing what's going on. And it's the contrast then is Paul comes in humbly, probably in chains.

Been in jail for two years. And yet, in that moment, with all of that going on, the thing that you see with Paul is that he had the courage to speak.

He had the courage to stand up and to speak the truth and getting right to the point. I'm a Jew. I'm fully in line with what the Jews believe except for this.

Jesus has been raised from the dead. He knew that he might sound absolutely crazy, but Paul has this kind of courage. You know, I think that's where I want us to kind of hone in today.

You know, as Christians, we know that we are supposed to speak about the gospel of Jesus. We're supposed to be people who talk about Jesus. But that's really hard.

[10 : 52] A couple of years ago, we were living in Austin. This was 10 or more years ago. We were living in Austin. We had this neighbor across the street from us. Wonderful guy. We had a great relationship.

He was a great friend of ours for a long time. He was not a Christian. In fact, he's a homosexual guy. And we would go swim at his pool.

Our kids loved him. He's a great guy. And I would go over and hang out with him. And one night he called. And he called and invited me over to have a cocktail with him. And so I went over one evening.

And we were talking. And occasionally, we would talk a lot about politics. And we'd talk about faith some. But I was always a little bit hesitant. And this night in particular, though, he really wanted to talk about faith.

In fact, he wanted to talk about the Bible, about Jesus and sexuality. Now, you know, I get paid to talk about Jesus.

[11 : 50] You know, like that's kind of part of the thing when you're a professional Christian guy. And, you know, so you would think that I would be pretty, you know, that I would relish this opportunity.

But I've got to be honest. I was super intimidated. Because I knew that some of the things that I might say would be offensive to him. And so we talked.

We actually had a really good, honest conversation. And our relationship continued on. In fact, I performed the funeral for his mother, which I was very thankful for.

And so even though I had fear, there was some relationship there that that context allowed me to have some of the courage to speak. And even in that moment, I'm not sure I had the courage that Paul shows here.

You know, maybe some of you have had that experience where you feel compelled to speak. Or you would like to think of yourself as someone who might speak about Jesus if you had the opportunity.

[12 : 54] But you actually are filled with hesitation. Maybe you're not sure that you would know the right thing to say. Or you're not sure that you know that person well enough that you could kind of, you know, navigate that.

Or maybe you think that you would offend them if you did speak. So here's the question. Where do you find the kind of courage that Paul displays here in order to speak in the normal course of your relationships in life?

Where do you find it? Well, I want to suggest there's two things you see here. Two hints that we get about what Paul is doing. So we're just going to look briefly at these two things.

First one is this. Paul knew, intimately knew his own story of grace. Paul knew his own story of grace. That's the first thing. So after where we read, Luke records Paul's conversion story.

Now this couldn't have been Paul's entire speech. You know, Luke is constantly whittling down what the speeches probably actually were. But Luke, in this book, he's recorded Paul's conversion story.

[14 : 06] Do you know how many times? Four times. Four times he tells that story. You know, Paul, he's a persecutor of the church. He's on the Damascus Road. God speaks to him.

He's blinded by the light. You know that story. Four times he tells us why. Why does Luke repeat it again right here? Because. Because it is essential for understanding the courage that Paul displayed.

Look at verses 14 to 18. It gives us a little bit of insight. This is just picking up in the middle of the story. And when we had all fallen to the ground because of the light, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

Is it hard for you to kick against the goads? That's just like saying, you know, kick against the goads is like an expression, kind of like beat your head against a wall or something. You know, why are you consistently doing this?

And I said, who are you, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus who you are persecuting. But rise on your feet and I have a, listen to this, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness of the things in which you have seen, in which you have seen me and to those to which I will appear to you, delivering you from, from your people and from the Gentiles to whom I'm sending you.

[15 : 34] Here's why. To open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and find a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

The resurrected Jesus talking to Paul, and he had a job for Paul to do that would be the salvation of people. See, Paul became, because his story of grace made him a witness to God's grace in his own life.

Let me say it this way. Paul's life would become a verification of God's message to the world. You see, before this, Paul thought his message was different.

He had that Jewish religious message, and that message was that God was coming to destroy. It was a message of judgment and anger. God was going to destroy all the evildoers out there.

All the bad people who weren't like us. You know, it was okay for Paul, because as long as he was on the right side of things, the side of the obedient people, the side of the passionate defenders of the truth, the side of the good people.

[16 : 50] See, that's the message of all religion, of all religious impulses, is that God is going to love me better if I am not like those people out there. Whoever those people are to you.

You know? If I'm not like the liberals. Or if I'm not like the conservatives. Or if I'm not like the sexually broken. If I'm not like the greedy.

Or if I'm not like the poor. Or if I'm not like whatever. Whatever that distasteful other person is.

As long as I'm not like them, then God's favor rests upon me. But, in this moment, Paul met God. And what he discovered was that God was actually a God of grace.

God's grace specifically to Paul. Paul was the one persecuting God's people so badly that Jesus said, why are you persecuting me?

[17 : 58] Not them. Why are you persecuting me? See, Paul realized that the evildoers out there was actually him.

The great offenders to God's holiness was actually not all those people out there who didn't live up to his expectations. It was actually him. He was the enemy of God.

In his supposed self-righteousness, he was the one who actually was the danger to God. He was the wicked one. And yet, in that moment that he discovered that reality, God didn't strike him down as he would have thought God would do for all the bad people.

God didn't strike him down. What God actually did was show him grace. See, that story of grace is the story of everyone who truly meets Jesus.

We discover that even on our best days, we cannot possibly measure up to all of God's commandments, to what God calls us to. We can't possibly live up to his standards, to his standards of goodness.

[19 : 13] And that our best achievements, as good as they are, can never make God love us. But what we also find is that in our greatest of failures, our greatest failures do not deter his love for us.

What we find is grace. Grace is about God not giving us what we deserve, but giving us far more than we could ever imagine because of Christ, because of what Jesus has done.

You see, for Paul, what this did was this gave him an incredible sense of courage. It changed the way that he saw himself in life. You know, last week, Dennis talked about speaking truth to power.

It's great. Go back and listen to it. But it also shows, it also shows how we are empowered to simply speak of Christ in our everyday encounters. You see, if your life is one of grace, it's going to empower you to speak, even if that is scary.

Even if it's, even if it is challenging. But if your life is built on one where you are just trying to be better than the other people out there, whomever you think that is, then you're constantly going to be at risk of losing your better than status.

[20 : 36] So you can never speak. You're going to live fearful, anxious lives, unable to have courage because you've got to uphold your own reputation.

And you're going to live in your life. Rico Tice is a writer and he writes about evangelism. He's a British guy. He writes, actually, he wrote this book. It's called Honest Evangelism.

It's really great. I put a link for that on the website. You can use that little QR code. You can find a number of different things there. Rico's great. And one of the things he says about evangelism, that if you're ever going to have real conversations about Jesus with people, you're going to have to get comfortable crossing the pain line.

The line at which you are crossing into something that you feel is going to be awkward. And that takes courage.

It takes knowing the story that you are living in. See, that life of courage is impossible without knowing the story that you're living in.

[21 : 42] Because once you begin to live out of the story of grace, it really frees you up for a different kind of life. I read an article that referenced George Orwell.

You know George Orwell, he wrote 1984 and... It was 1984, right? Yeah, that's right. And some other things. But in 1940, so right as World War II was like crashing into the world, Orwell wrote a review of Adolf Hitler's big book, Mein Kampf.

Okay? Orwell wrote a review of that. And here's some of what Orwell wrote about Hitler. This is fascinating. He says this, Hitler knows that human beings don't only want comfort, safety, short working hours, good hygiene.

They also, at least intermittently, they want struggle and self-sacrifice. He says, Whereas socialism and even capitalism in a more grudging way have said to people, I will offer you a good time.

Hitler has said to them, I offer you struggle, danger, and death. And the result is a whole nation flings itself at his feet.

[23 : 04] Isn't that fascinating? Orwell, neither of these men Christians said that the power of Hitler was that he offered people a life that gave them meaning in the midst of difficulty.

Something that they would sacrifice for. You see, what Paul discovered was that the grace of God was something that was, had given him a life that was worth sacrificing for.

It was worth having courage for. If our Christian message to this world is, this is the place to come where it's just comfortable and safe and it never costs you anything, what we'll find is that people without courage.

I'd argue that's actually exactly what we find in the American church. but if what we're saying is because of the grace of God, God's grace has come in and transformed us to such a degree that we can live with confidence in this world to go out and be the people that God has called us to be, that will transform us.

It will empower us to go and to do that which we are called to do. Hopefully not to the ends of genocide and great evil, hopefully to the ends of righteousness and goodness and following Christ.

[24 : 32] Okay, that's the first thing. You have to know the story of grace. Know your story of grace. The second thing we see in Paul is that Paul knew how to speak the story of Jesus.

Story of grace and then the story of Jesus. You know, Paul, it wasn't like Paul just talked about his kind of warm, fuzzy feelings. all the time. That wasn't the only experience he had to share.

He had firm theology. Look at this, verse 19. This is the end of Paul's speech here. Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision but declared first to those in Damascus then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea and also to the Gentiles.

What did he declare? That they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple, tried to kill me.

To this day I have had the help that comes from God and so I stand here testifying both to small and to great 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.

[25 : 46] Paul was crystal clear about what he was preaching. He was preaching who Jesus was. He is the Messiah. He's preaching what Jesus did.

He died and was raised. And he's preaching how should we respond. Repentance and faith. Trust in him. I mean that's really pretty simple.

Who Jesus is. What Jesus did. What should we do about it? You know this is not like you know super complicated apologetics arguments.

This is really simple. Who is Jesus? What do you do? What should we do about that? How should we respond? In fact that little outline if you want to know what it looks like to talk about Jesus it's those three things and that's really the only thing you need to talk about.

That actually matches Rico Tice. He has a little outline of how you can easily talk to people. Who Jesus is. What Jesus did. What are you supposed to do about it?

[26 : 49] And one of the things Rico I put a little video of his on the website. I've heard him speak a couple of times. I think he's hilarious. But one of the things he says is that every Christian should have one passage of scripture that you could explain to someone about Jesus in less than a minute.

Just one passage. Mine, you're welcome to steal mine is from Ephesians Ephesians chapter 2 that great those great two words in Ephesians chapter 2 I've preached on this a couple of times before those great words are but God.

But God. That's the message of the Bible in two words. Something's wrong. But God.

God has entered into this world by his grace. He sent Jesus. Who is Jesus? He's God. He's God's son. Come. What did he do? He's making things right.

What should we do about that? Well, we should trust him. It really seems simple. The question is do we have the courage?

[27 : 57] Do we have the courage to speak that way? There's a book that came out in the last couple of years. Maybe you saw something about this. I don't know. It got a lot of press.

But it's called Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus by a man named Nabeel Qureshi. And Nabeel is a memoir about his life.

And he was raised in a devout Muslim household. They were of Pakistani descent. In fact, his mother's family were full of Muslim missionaries.

So a very devout household. And he was a smart guy. He grew up in the U.S. as well as in England. And he talked about how growing up he knew lots of Christians.

He had acquaintances who were Christians. But he doesn't remember ever really talking about Jesus with any of them. You know, maybe they were intimidated. Maybe they thought because he was so devout that that would be offensive.

[28 : 55] And they didn't want to do that. And that made him question until he was in college and he made this friend named David. David was just another student. He was not some sort of trained apologist.

He was just another guy who became friends with Nabeel. David and Nabeel became friends. They continued to be friends for a long time. And they would get into all these kind of arguments.

You know how college students do. They get into all these late night arguments. They're yelling at each other about various things. And they're trying to, you know, find truth as great college students do.

And they probably yelled at each other a lot because he said they had to often show up at class and apologize to one another the next day. But one of the things that David did was he just said to Nabeel very honestly, have you ever really learned about Jesus?

Do you actually, like, have any understanding about who this person Jesus is, this historical person? And Nabeel was like, you know, I've never had anybody talk to me about that.

[29 : 56] And one of the things that Nabeel Qureshi says is that it was in the context of this friendship that this honest conversation about Jesus was able to take place.

And it took a long time. But David wasn't some sort of trained person. But, you know, he knew enough about the story of Jesus to just simply be able to talk about it.

So here's a quote from this book. He says this, Effective evangelism requires relationships. There are very few exceptions.

In my case, I knew of no Christians. Listen to this. I knew of no Christians who truly cared about me. No one who had been a part of my life through thick and thin.

I had plenty of Christian acquaintances. And I'm sure they would have been my friends if I had become a Christian. But that kind of friendship is conditional. There were none that I knew who cared about me unconditionally.

[31 : 00] Since no Christian cared about me, I did not care about their message. You know, look, I think if you're not a Christian and you're tuning in online or if you're here, that may match your experience.

That you've known Christians, but it's really a conditional relationship where they're just trying to get you into the church or something. I'm sorry about that. I've done that. For us Christians in the room who want to be faithful, we should take that as a real sincere criticism of us.

You know, I think the summertime is a really good time for you and me to make a different kind of shift. Think about this summer as a time that you could get to know a neighbor, a workmate, a friend in your neighborhood who may not be a Christian.

You may not have a ton of affinity for them initially. But to foster a relationship with them. Spend time. You may have the opportunity to talk about Jesus. You may not.

But our calling, Jesus' calling, how will they know us? They will know us by our love. Not by the effectiveness of our evangelism.

[32 : 29] They'll know us by our love. How can our love be seen if we don't love anybody? This is an opportunity for you. To be faithful to Jesus might require you to invite somebody over for dinner.

Go meet them out somewhere. Spend time with someone that you don't normally spend time with. Because here's the thing. There is courage in Jesus.

When we look to Jesus, we find the courage. When we look to the story of Jesus, as simple as that is, we find the courage to go forward. Sadly, and I'll just bring it to a close with this.

Sadly, simply having the courage to speak doesn't really determine the outcomes. Because we can't see the end of our efforts. Only God can. My neighbor across the street in Austin, I don't believe he ever came to know Jesus.

Still love him. We connect every once in a while. But I don't believe it has had that kind of effect. But that's what Paul learned. I want you to see this conversation that develops after Paul finishes.

[33 : 41] I'm just going to read a couple of these verses. And as Paul was saying these things in his defense, Festus, with a loud voice, said with a loud voice, Paul, you're out of your mind. Your great learning is driving you out of your mind.

They thought Paul was crazy. But Paul said, I'm not out of my mind, most excellent Festus. I'm speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things and to him I speak boldly.

For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice. For this has not been done in a corner. And then Paul turns to King Agrippa. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?

I know that you believe. That is fascinating. Fascinating. Paul is going right at Agrippa. He's saying, I know that you believe that this is true.

Verse 28, And Agrippa said to Paul, In a short time, would you persuade me to be a Christian? And 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, except for these chains.

[34 : 53] Then the king rose and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.

And Agrippa said to Festus, This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar. It doesn't work. Paul doesn't succeed. All he does is have this thing recorded in Scripture for us.

But here's the point. The last thing that Luke leaves us with, if he had not appealed to Caesar. This was Paul's ticket. Even in failure, this was Paul's ticket to Rome.

He's going to start going to Rome and we're going to look at it next week. This was the expansion of the church. This was God's end game. God may not complete his, God's purposes that he's completing through your relationships and your speaking may not be what you think it will be.

But it will be to his ultimate glory. It's his work. And you are called to obediently follow Jesus' work.

[36 : 06] Okay, we could talk about that all day. Because in a church, as a church is growing and developing, what it requires of us is that a church doesn't grow.

You know, grace and peace will not become the church that we want it to be. We will not achieve the mission that God has for us to be a place where people in this area discover God's grace and peace.

That's not going to happen because of, you know, cool music, you know, with a great vibe. Although I love it when we have a good vibe. It won't happen because of great programs like VBS and all the hard work we put into them.

And it won't happen because of great preaching. I hope it's great preaching. Some days it might be. Some days not. It will happen because the people of God live in obedience to the God who has had grace upon them.

That's it. That's all. May God do His work in us that we might be that people together.
Amen. Let me pray. Father, would you help that to become true of us?

[37 : 17] We cannot do that on our own. We need you. We have no other way. And we pray that
you do it in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.