

Paul and King Agrippa

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to Acts chapter 26. I'm reading again in verse 19.

Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. I think it's true to say that there are few people who are burned with greater passion for the gospel than this man, the Apostle Paul.

And wherever he was, he proclaimed Christ. Whether it was in the marketplace, whether it was in the synagogue, whether it was in prison, whether it was in the courtroom, whether it was in the palace.

It didn't really matter where Paul was. He used every opportunity to debate, to argue, to preach. Because he had a burning passion to declare to people this great news that Jesus Christ, the risen Christ, was the savior of sinners.

And Paul is here standing trial. Festus is the new governor. The new governor. And he is handed, as it were, this hot potato, this political prisoner.

[1 : 24] And Festus was going to discover very quickly that the Jews were very difficult people to deal with. That it was really, that Jewish politics were actually very hard to handle.

Because he was facing a dilemma with Paul. On the one hand, if he released Paul, he knew that the Jews were going to make all kinds of problems for him.

But on the other hand, he couldn't keep Paul indefinitely without some definite charge against him. Because Paul was a Roman citizen. And Paul had all the rights of a Roman citizen.

And so Festus knew that he really was in a real dilemma. Because he knew there would be an uproar if he released him.

And he knew that he himself would be in trouble by keeping him unless there was some definite charge against him. And we find here that Festus gets this official visit from King Agrippa.

[2 : 34] Or this is King Herod Agrippa. He's of the Herod dynasty. In fact, he was the last of the Herods. He was a great grandson of the Herod that killed the babies in Bethlehem.

So when Festus told Agrippa about Paul, Agrippa was very keen to meet with Paul and to hear Paul.

And so with great pomp and ceremony, Agrippa and Festus make their way to the audience hall. And of course there's this great crowd and Paul is called before them.

And Paul begins to testify. Why? Because they gave him, it's more or less they said, right Paul, this is your moment. You tell us why you're here.

Charges have been brought by the Jews against you. You answer them. And as we see in the way that Paul answered, both Festus and Agrippa at the end, they say that this man has done nothing worthy of death.

[3 : 34] In fact, he's not even worthy of prison. This man actually should be released, but because he had appealed to Caesar, they weren't, as it were, at liberty there and then to release him. But Paul is given this wonderful moment of freedom.

And here we have the fulfillment of the very prophecy that the Lord had given to him way back that he would, in fact, preach and teach.

And that he would stand giving, what we may say, preaching in front of kings and governors.

Because the Lord told him way back that he was going to proclaim the gospel to the very highest. And here we find fulfillment of that particular prophecy.

And so Paul begins by giving a wee bit of his background. And when we actually read there from verse 4 to verse 11, we see that Paul was, as he reminds us often, he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees.

[4 : 43] If you wanted to know the Bible, he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees.

He said, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It's hard for you to kick against the goads. In other words, Paul knew. He knew the Bible.

He knew the law. He knew all these things. But it was his prejudice against the truth that was shackling him. And he was filled with hatred.

And, you know, often we wonder, as we look around today and worldwide and see the persecution of the Christian church, and you say to yourself, you know, it's so strange.

Why? Why are people persecuting the Christians? If any of you support the Barnabas Fund and get their magazine there, you see throughout this world that it doesn't matter what country you go to, the Christians are suffering.

[6 : 09] And churches are being torched. And Christians are being imprisoned. And pastors are being killed. And families are being killed. And all the time there is this persecution of the Christian.

And it's all so irrational. And you say to yourself, can they not see what they're doing is wrong? Do they not understand the wickedness of this?

But nothing has changed. Because here is the Apostle Paul. Somebody who should have known better. Somebody who was brought up with the Word.

Somebody who had the whole of the Old Testament. And yet was so blinded that he actually thought he was doing God's work by giving the vote.

When a person was brought, when a Christian was brought before the council, and they would say, is this person worthy of death? Paul says, I voted. My hand went up. Yes, kill him.

[7 : 09] Or kill her. And when he was going down to Damascus, it tells us that he was breathing out slaughtering. His very breath was hatred to Christ and his cause.

And that hatred is still throughout this world. Christ is hated. And let us not be under any delusion of that.

That is, if it weren't for God's restraining grace, we would be suffering the fires of persecution here in this country as well.

And who knows what may yet come. But that's what's happening in so many parts of this world. So, here is Paul, and he's giving his testimony, and he's telling the background and what he was like.

But then he tells us here about the heavenly vision. And so he says, therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.

[8 : 14] And, of course, he tells us about this heavenly vision from verse 12. And for Paul, this was very simply the gospel call.

This was the way that the Lord intervened in Saul's life. It was dramatic. It was sensational. And, you know, there are many people who still think that in order to become a Christian, that they have to experience like a Saul of Tarsus experience.

They think that there has to be something sensational, something dramatic, like some great display from heaven, some display of lights, something similar.

They talk about, I need a Damascus Road experience. Well, what Saul experienced was unique. And what Saul experienced had to be unique, because Saul was given a vision of Jesus Christ, which you and I will not be given.

We will, it's by faith, we'll see, but Paul had to, or Saul had to, because he was being appointed as an apostle. And an apostle, there were various qualifications, but one qualification an apostle had to have was he had to be a witness of the risen Savior.

[9 : 44] He was someone who had to have seen Jesus Christ risen from the dead. And that is why Paul talks about the fact that he was, as it were, a witness to Christ out of time, out of the normal time, where Jesus revealed himself, and gave him this vision, and gave him this revelation of himself, so that he was given this qualification to be an apostle.

So you and I are not to look for that. This was unique for Saul of Tarsus, who was to be the apostle Paul. However, I believe that side by side with this, accompanying all these things, as he was given this revelation of Jesus, there were certain things that are similar to a person, to every person, who receives the call of God in Jesus Christ.

And the first thing we would say is that there was a heavenly call. And a gospel call is a heavenly call. Remember when Jesus said to Nicodemus, Nicodemus, you must be born again.

Literally, you must be born from above, from heaven. And when we think about it, the gospel didn't originate on earth.

The gospel didn't originate with a group of people coming together. The gospel originated in heaven. It is God's purpose.

[11 : 20] It is God's idea. It's God's plan. It's all with God. And it has come from heaven to us. And that's where we've always got to remember.

And that is this gospel call. And as it comes tonight to us, it comes to us from heaven. And it's a call that calls, as it were, our mind and our heart to heaven.

In Colossians, we're told, set your affection upon things that are above. You see, it's possible for people to drift through life, never really thinking about spiritual things, never really thinking much about God and Christ, about heaven and hell, and about the spiritual nature of man.

There are a lot of people, they just drift through life. And it's quite easy, as we live out our days, where there's so much happening, not to think about spiritual things.

But you know when the gospel comes, and when we're challenged by the gospel, this is one of the things that happens. It brings us to think about eternal reality.

[12 : 33] It brings us to, for our mind to begin to think about these things, about who God is, about God's challenge to our life, about our responsibility before God, about our accountability to God, about the fact that one day we're going to have to stand and give an account for all that we've done in this life.

And so, it's a vital thing that we are challenged and made to think about these things. And so, when the gospel call comes, it comes from heaven, and it brings us to think about, we could say, things of heaven.

But more than that, not only does it come from heaven, not only does it make us think about heavenly things, but it's a call that calls us ultimately to heaven.

because that is the end. That is the destination of those who accept Jesus, those who respond to this call.

And tonight, every person who has responded to this call of the gospel and has accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, they're journeying to heaven.

[13 : 57] That's where you're going. That's every day, it's taking you closer and closer to heaven. It all originated there, worked through, and you're going back there.

That's how it, it's an amazing thing, but this is what is taking place. There are two roads, my friends, two roads, and you're either walking one road or another tonight.

And two roads, there's only two destinations. God asks you, which road are you on? Because remember, there's only two destinations.

I hope that you are on the road that is leading to heaven. Well, in this vision, as Paul was given this vision, I believe that there were other things that he was given to see.

First of all, he was given to see that he had a need. And I'm absolutely persuaded, it doesn't go through to show us all that, but these are essentials to the gospel call.

[15 : 05] First of all, showing us that we have a need. Now, maybe you're in here tonight and you don't realize it, but that there is a deep-rooted need within your heart. And do you know who you need?

You need Jesus Christ. Maybe tonight you don't know that. Maybe tonight you don't see that. Maybe tonight you don't feel that. But let me tell you, you need Jesus. That's one of the things when the Lord begins to work in your heart.

He reveals to you that you have a need. And that what you have and what you are in yourself is not enough. That you are not right before God.

You know, that's one of the most difficult discoveries for us to make. And that is why so many people take offense to the preaching of the word.

Because they are being told that they're not good enough in and of themselves. Nobody likes to hear that. You don't like it. I don't like it. Because there is a natural pride within the heart which says, ah, but I am good enough.

[16 : 10] Nobody would dare say they're perfect, but they still deep down they say, but I'm not that bad. I'm okay. You see, we make our judgments according to our own standards.

Not according to the standard that God has set. And when we measure ourselves against the standards that God has set his own holy law, every single one of us fails miserably.

And that's one of the things that God does as he begins to work is to show us that we have missed the mark desperately.

That we've all come short. Not one of us in here tonight that has met the mark, that has attained to the standards that God has set.

So that's one of the things that he showed Saul that day. Because Saul gloried in his righteousness. He gloried in all his pharisaical qualities.

[17 : 14] And then he saw that they were filthy rags. That's why in Philippians he gives this list of what he was and he said, all these things that I gloried in, they were just refused to be thrown away.

But then side by side with that, in that call, we are given the provision where God shows, yes, you've come short of my standards.

Yes, you are a failure, you've failed, but there is a remedy, there is a provision in me. And that's what God shows and that's what God showed Saul as well.

And that he was able to see that everything that he needed for his soul was to be found in Jesus Christ. but it was also a vision of opportunity because, as he tells us there in verse 16, but the Lord said, but rise and stand upon your feet for I have appeared to you for this purpose to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you.

You see, when the Lord works within a patient's heart, not only does he show them a need, not only does he give provision for that need, but then he gives us the opportunity once we have come to believe in him, to accept him, to embrace him, to have him, he then gives us the opportunity to serve him.

[18 : 54] You see, that's one of the wonderful things about the gospel. Every believer has an opportunity to serve. You may be saying to yourself tonight, well, I don't know where I can serve.

Well, everybody has a place for service. Not everybody will be frontline service. But wherever you are, wherever God has appointed you, wherever your lot is in life, wherever you're situated in life, whatever it is, you have opportunities there for Jesus.

Later on, the apostle was to say, we are ambassadors for Christ. In other words, when we go out, we go out not representing ourselves, but representing another king from another kingdom.

That's what a Christian is, an ambassador for Jesus Christ. And that's what Paul, or Saul then, was brought to see, that he was saved to serve.

And that's one of the most liberating, wonderful things for the believer. And the Lord will use you wherever you are.

[20 : 02] And maybe you say to yourself, you know, I don't know what gifts I have. Well, the Lord gives every person different gifts. Some people, it may be gifts in the home.

You might be very good at welcoming people. You might be somebody who has the ability just to encourage people along the way. You might be somebody who's able to, as we use the word, to give a word in season.

You might be somebody who's got the ability just to befriend, to get alongside people. Maybe you have a heart for people who are in trouble.

Maybe you have a heart for people who are sick. That's the way, that's the way. God puts burdens in people's hearts and he equips people so that they serve him where they're at.

And that's one of the wonderful things going on. Throughout this world, Christians are serving in a whole variety of different ways. And that's one of the wonderful things that's happened.

[21 : 09] And Paul came to understand this. And another thing that we could say about this vision is that it was very unexpected. Paul wasn't looking for it. It happened just in the twinkling of an eye.

It was the last thing on his mind. In fact, at that particular moment, Paul, or Saul, was engaged in the devil's work.

In a sense, he was Satan's number one tool at that particular moment in the attack upon the church. he's going full pelt to Damascus with nothing but murder in his head.

He is going to get round up as many Christians as he can. He is going to create havoc in the church in Damascus. And Satan will be rubbing his hands saying, my word, this man Saul, I have him.

In a moment, it all changes. And the tool that was most powerful in the hand of Satan becomes the most powerful tool and instrument in the hand of God.

[22 : 19] What a radical transformation. And this is what God is able to do. And so, we find that in this moment that there's this, we're not to limit the Lord.

Of course, the Lord normally works gradually, bit by bit in people, drawing people here and there and through all the different influences that come upon a person's life.

And bit by bit a person so often will come to faith. But sometimes it's dramatic. Sometimes it's radical. I'm not saying it's going to be exactly the same as the Apostle Paul because we showed how, for particular reasons, the reasons.

His had to be different. But yet, there were so many factors that will be exactly the same. We looked at these things. But maybe the Lord will deal suddenly with you as well.

And then, time is going, just we see that, therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. I was not disobedient.

[23 : 29] let me ask this question tonight. Are you disobedient to the gospel call? There are some people who, and I don't think they come to church, there are some people who are defiant against the gospel.

They have set their heart and their mind to have nothing to do with the Christian faith. There are people like that, and if they do come to church, it certainly would not normally be on a Sunday night or a Sunday morning.

There are people, and they just made up their mind that the Christian faith is not for them. They are defiantly disobedient at any time when they may be challenged.

And when I talk about being challenged, say, for instance, through the providence of people's deaths or things, because very often we're shaken in life. Things happen. All of a sudden something happens, and you're shaken.

It brought you to rethink things. It happens often. We're brought to see our own vulnerability and our own frailty, challenged by these things, and yet people make a deliberate decision.

[24 : 46] No. I don't think that our church is made up of people like that. But I do think that there are people who come to church regularly, who are disobedient to a gospel call.

And I don't think that I would say they're disobedient by way of procrastination. And their thinking is that one day I'm going to see to this. One day I plan to be a Christian.

I don't think there's a regular church goer who would come week in, week out, who says, you know, I don't believe any of this gospel. It has got nothing to do with me. I never, ever, ever, ever want to become a Christian.

I don't think somebody like that would keep coming to church. I believe that those who come to church hope one day that they will become a Christian.

But they're not being obedient to the gospel call. Because tonight there is a call coming out in the gospel. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall be saved.

[25 : 56] That's what it says. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. To put off that, and that's what often people do. And they say, well, I'm going to see to it later on.

The more convenient time. Sometimes people in their twenties say, oh, well, I'll leave it till the thirties or forties. I'll leave it till I get settled down. Leave it till I get married and settled down. And I sort of get established in life.

Maybe when I get to middle age, then I'll, that's kind of, that's a good age to start thinking about becoming a Christian. I know, in fact, and then when you reach, as the years go on and you get into your thirties, forties, and maybe the fifties, and then say, oh, better leave it till retirement.

Then I'll have time. And then retirement comes and you say, oh, I'll leave it till I'm into my seventies. And so it goes on. Every day or every year intending later on, oh, it's something I'm going to see to, I must see to it.

Procrastinating. You know, it's possible to procrastinate into hell. It's a fearfully serious thing where people are always intending one day to do and never do.

[27 : 09] Please do not be in that category. Here is the gospel call. And that's what Paul is saying, that he was not disobedient to it.

Don't become too engrossed with what's going on in life. You see, again, it's possible that you do intend, when you come to church, and you say, oh, I get challenged.

The word, what, affects me? And then as the week goes on, you get so caught up in all that's happening. It's as Jesus said about the, in the parable of the sower, that the weeds choked the good seed.

And Jesus went on to show that the weeds there were the cares of this world. And as we get engrossed in life, it strangles these spiritual thoughts.

And they get choked and you forget about them until you come to church again. And I say, oh, yeah, I remember last time I was here, I was challenged. And then it goes again. My friend, please, for your soul's good, listen to what the word is saying and respond to it.

[28 : 23] Ask the Lord, Lord, help me. Because maybe you're saying, it's all very well saying, it's time to respond. I don't know how to respond. That's the beauty of it. It's a Lord who will help you to respond.

And you go to him and say, Lord, help me. Help me by your grace tonight so that I will be able to take Jesus as my Savior.

Lots of things I don't know and I can't understand and it's just too much for me. But I need Jesus and I need you to help me to get Jesus.

You know something? The Lord will not turn a prayer like that away. If that is the real prayer of your heart, he will not turn your way.

And so we find that for the apostle this call changed his life. Changed it totally. Because that's what happens with the gospel. It changes lives.

[29 : 26] You know, we can often try and change your own life, change habits, change attitudes and things like that. Sometimes we can be reasonably successful. Often it's a failure. But when God comes into a person's life, he changes from inside out.

The seed of God is planted within the heart. That's what happens. That's the new birth. That's regeneration. God's seed planted within the heart.

And that seed grows. And that seed begins to bear fruit. And the fruit of the spirit begins to manifest itself in a person's life. A Christian should be known by their fruit.

It should become evident. A life of love. A life of hope. A life of peace. A life of gentleness. A life of long suffering. These are the qualities and the fruit that should be evident within a person's life.

By their fruit, you should know them. And that was so obvious in the Apostle Paul. What a change. The man who was so full of attitude and anger.

[30 : 35] It's now the man who's so full of love. People could see that change. You ask the Lord to change you.

Let us pray. Oh Lord, our God, we give thanks for the changing power of Christ. And we pray that we might all know it within our own heart and within our own life.

We pray to have mercy upon us and to do us good. We pray to bless us each one and help us as we go on in life, facing all its challenges and all its opportunities.

We pray, Lord, to bless the fellowship which will take place shortly and pray to bless Paul Ahmed who will speak to us. And we ask, oh Lord, that the grace of God might be experienced by us all.

Do us good, then we pray and forgive us our sin in Jesus' name. Amen.