

## SHARING YOUR STORY

*Series in Acts: Advancing the Gospel*

**Acts 25:23-26:32**

Chadron Berean Church

We all like a good story, don't we? We tell stories, we read stories in books, we watch stories in movies. Stories move us. They bring out our emotions. They make us think. Stories are powerful. One of the most powerful stories, as it relates to God's story, is your own. That's sort of what we're going to talk about today as we continue working our way through Acts. We're in chapter 25 & 26 today. Paul is in protective custody and has been for a while now. Today we'll read through his 5<sup>th</sup> hearing, where he shares the gospel by sharing his story and how the gospel changed his life. It's his last and longest discourse, and something of a climax in the book of Acts in that it acts as a summation of his life and ministry and previous hearings.

### I. PAUL'S HEARING BEFORE AGRIPPA. (25:23-27)

*25:23 So, on the next day when Agrippa and Bernice came amid great pomp and entered the auditorium, accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought before them. 24 And Festus said, "King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen present with us, you see this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. 25 But I found that he had committed nothing deserving death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him. 26 Yet, I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord. Therefore, I have brought him before you all and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the investigation has taken place, I may have something to write. 27 For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him as well."*

So with Paul having **appealed to Caesar**, it is now necessary for **Festus** to develop a detailed report for Caesar.<sup>1</sup> He has to explain, somewhat embarrassingly, why his first trial led to the defendant's right of appeal and he better not waste Nero's time. Because Festus has no official charge, he must fish for some credible charge or reason for this, and hopefully get some backing from other Roman officials.<sup>2</sup> So when King **Agrippa** and **Bernice** come to meet Festus and pay their respects to this new governor in town, that opportunity presents itself.

The hearing before Agrippa II begins with **great pomp** (v. 23). The word pomp reminds us of a military parade and the loud, cheering crowds when some official governor or presidential candidate comes to town. Something like a political rally. That's the idea here. Interestingly, it's a similar situation to 15 years ago when his father, Agrippa I, died being eaten by worms in Caesarea for dressing like a god and failing to give glory to God. So you have Agrippa and these leaders entering with all of their magisterial garb and here comes short, bald, bowlegged Paul in chains. At least that's how one early witness of Paul described him.

26:1 Now Agrippa said to Paul, “You are permitted to speak for yourself.” Then Paul extended his hand and proceeded to make his defense: 2 “Regarding all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate that I am about to make my defense before you today, 3 especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

4 “So then, all Jews know my way of life since my youth, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and in Jerusalem, 5 since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion. 6 And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; 7 the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. For this hope, O king, I am being accused by Jews. 8 Why is it considered incredible among you people if God raises the dead?

9 “So I thought to myself that I had to act in strong opposition to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, after receiving authority from the chief priests, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being put to death. 11 And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and since I was extremely enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

So Paul begins his defense tactfully and politely. He expresses his gratitude for the opportunity to present his case before **Agrippa**. Agrippa has a **Jewish background**, has jurisdiction over the temple in Jerusalem, and is well-acquainted with Jewish beliefs so Paul looked forward to sharing the gospel with someone like him. Paul is primarily going to be speaking with him. For him, this is a wonderful opportunity to share the gospel.

**Trails = Testimony.**  
**Opposition = Opportunity.**

One of the things I enjoy about these chapters with Paul on trial is Paul’s positive attitude. Even when his life is on the line and being imprisoned for 2 years, he isn’t some fear-stricken, self-defensive man begging to get out or have an overwhelming martyr complex. His witness is vibrant because it’s not about him, but about Jesus. He **turns trials into times for testimony** and **opposition as opportunity** to be a light and witness. It’s been said, “*the doors of opportunity hand on the hinges of opposition.*” As our culture grows increasingly dark and hostile to Christianity, let’s remember this is an opportunity to be a witness for Jesus and see God’s faithfulness.

But after a polite introduction, he begins with a **brief defense of the Christian faith by telling his story** and how he started out as a **Pharisee**. Pharisees were the most conservative, orthodox group within Judaism. They knew God’s Law well and vigorously defended it. Paul says in

Philippians he was a Pharisee and a Hebrew of Hebrews – zealous for the Law and blameless according to the Law. This is something his everybody knows about him, a high profile citizen.

But also notice how Paul also identifies with ethnic Israel and Judaism. Just like in his defense in Jerusalem, we see his use of the word **our**. “*Our faith*” or “*our fathers*” or “*our twelve tribes*”. He also says, “*my own nation.*” It’s important to identify with those you are trying to reach for Christ, but Paul is also doing something else. He is demonstrating that Christianity is not religious sect or some new belief system like the chief priests accuse Christianity of. It comes from within the fold of Judaism as the **hope** of the Jews going back to their **Jewish fathers** like Abraham. So Paul is not betraying the Jews. He *is* a faithful Jew who understands that Jesus is fulfillment of the Jewish hope of the **resurrection**, and he has the audacity to believe that a Creator God has the power to raise the dead.

But Paul wasn’t always a believer in Jesus. **Before Christ**, he was no different. In fact, he too, persecuted Christians like he now is. He thought God wanted him to be hostile to Christians. In fact, the chief priests commissioned Paul to persecute Christians far away, but his story took a dramatic turn along the way:

*12 “While so engaged, as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, 13 at midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who were journeying with me. 14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ 15 And I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16 But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you as a servant and a witness not only to the things in which you have seen Me, but also to the things in which I will appear to you, 17 rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, 18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.’*

So here **Paul shares how he got saved**. It’s Paul’s **Damascus Road conversion experience** that we’ve become familiar with in the book of Acts. This is where Jesus stopped him and the horse he was on, cold in their tracks. And it seems to me that while in route to Damascus to persecute Christians, Paul knew in his heart that he might be wrong about what he was doing. I say that because Jesus said Paul was **kicking against the goads**. I think that while he stood there holding the coats of those who were stoning Stephen before this, that Stephen’s testimony pricked Paul’s conscience that the Christians just might be right.

**Goads** were sharp, pointed sticks used to drive livestock. If an animal or an ox didn’t want to move forward or they wanted to kick, the goad would prod them into obeying their shepherd the hard way. So to kick against the goads would only make things more painful for the animal, driving the goad into their flesh. The Greeks used this agricultural metaphor to convey the idea

of a person fighting against the “gods” only to make it more painful for themselves.<sup>3</sup> Do you I ever do that? Jesus was saying that Paul was fighting against God’s plan for him, and the Lord finally prodded him in a direction and mission he was forced to follow. His new commission or calling from the great High Priest, Jesus, would be to be an apostolic **minister** and a **witness** of the resurrected Christ before Jew and Gentile.

Verse 18 is one of the best summary statements of gospel ministry there is. Paul said Jesus sent him to **open the eyes of the blind, turning them from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to the dominion of God**. This is a major theme through Luke and Acts – the idea of being spiritually blinded (esp. the Jews). Through ministry, by God’s Spirit and grace, we want to help open peoples’ eyes to see Jesus for who He really is and understand what He has done for us. Before Christ, we are spiritually dead and blind to this. But once we come to faith in Christ, we are born again spiritually by the regenerating work of the Spirit (John 3). The Spirit seals us as God’s children, His possession. We are thus transferred from Satan’s kingdom to God’s kingdom. We are **sanctified**, or set apart, for God.

Paul also says we receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance. **Forgiveness of sins is what it is**. We are released from the punished of our sins by the holy Judge of the universe because He paid for our sins on the cross. So we have a perfect standing before God and there is no condemnation for those in Christ (Rom. 8:1). And an **inheritance** referring to eternal life and heavenly rewards. We will live forever with God in His kingdom... such good news! Such great hope! **Eternal life is a free gift by God’s grace for those who trust in Jesus** (Rom. 6:23).

*19 “For that reason, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 but continually proclaimed to those in Damascus first, and in Jerusalem, and then all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they are to repent and turn to God, performing deeds consistent with repentance. 21 For these reasons some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to murder me. 22 So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place, 23 as to whether the Christ was to suffer, and whether, as first from the resurrection of the dead, He would proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”*

So **Paul share his life after coming to know Christ**. Just as he was **fully devoted** to God before his conversion to Christ, and so he was after. He went and shared the message that men should **repent and turn to God, performing deeds consistent with repentance**.<sup>4</sup> Basically, when someone turns to Christ in faith, because they’ve been born of the *Holy Spirit*, they begin to live godly. He teaches them what it means to walk with Him. God’s grace is not an excuse to sin but teaches us to live righteously and godly (Titus 2:11-12). Part of the reason I think Paul brings this up is because his prosecutors mainly wanted him dead for their misunderstanding of Paul’s teaching on the Law – that Christians aren’t under Law and he told people to forsake the Law (Acts 21:21). Well, just because we’re not under Law, doesn’t mean we’re lawless (Rom. 6:13; 10:4; Gal. 2:16; 5:18). We’re under the Law of Christ and fulfill the Law through righteous living by the Law of the Spirit of life (Rom. 7-8; Gal. 6:1-2).

Paul explains that for his faithful proclamation, the Jews arrested him but with **God's help**, continues to **testify** to small and great, as he is in this very moment. He concludes the argument by reaffirming that his ministry and teaching is in full accord with what **Moses and the Prophets** said would take place,<sup>5</sup> that the Messiah would suffer and die for sins but be raised again. This was a stumbling block to the Jews, but good news for all who welcome it.

## II. **THE RESPONSE TO PAUL'S STORY. (26:24-32)**

*24 While Paul was stating these things in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you insane." 25 But Paul said, "I am not insane, most excellent Festus; on the contrary, I am speaking out with truthful and rational words. 26 For the king knows about these matters, and I also speak to him with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you believe." 28 Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you are going to persuade me to make a Christian of myself." 29 And Paul said, "I would wish to God that even in a short or long time not only you, but also all who hear me this day would become such as I myself am, except for these chains." 30 The king stood up and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them, 31 and when they had gone out, they began talking to one another, saying, "This man is not doing anything deserving death or imprisonment." 32 And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."*

So, in response, **Festus** proves to be uninterested in Paul's message. He is not interested in Scripture, prophecy, or the doctrine of the resurrection. He calls Paul **mad** – out of his mind. That's a fairly common reaction we experience from the world. But in response to him, Paul says he is **not insane**. His words are **truthful and rational**. The NASB says words of sober truth. The NIV says true and reasonable. The reason that Paul's message cannot be brushed off as insane is because it all happened **publicly**. The ministry and resurrection of Jesus, the birth of Christianity, and even with Paul's own conversion on the Damascus Road there were other witnesses present. It "*wasn't done in a corner*" he says. Everyone knows this is true, including king Agrippa. No one can deny this is what happened. How amazing that the men standing there could not deny the resurrection 30 years after it happened.

Paul then turns to **Agrippa** who knows OT prophecy about Jesus. He asks, "*King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you believe.*" Agrippa is now on the spot before all the people. Festus can tell Paul is trying to convert him and feels the pressure. He probably feels the prick of his conscience that Paul is telling the truth and the Spirit is working on Him, but if he answers positively or negatively, either way he loses face with someone. So, like a good politician, he avoids the question and stands up to end the hearing, however not without declaring Paul innocent and that it's unnecessary for Paul to go to Rome – a journey we will resume in January, Lord willing.

If you have ever shared the gospel with people, you know there are various reactions to it. Some believe and it's such a great joy. But most are like Festus and Agrippa. They either think you're crazy, or they are struck by it, but not willing to fully embrace it. Because of these responses, we tend to second guess ourselves or complicate it. But be encouraged because Paul experienced the same thing we do.

**Share your story of God's grace.**

On top of that, I'd encourage you to share **your story, your testimony**, where God took you from darkness to light. Like Paul, sharing your personal story is one of the most powerful ways you can help others come to know Jesus. Your story will give others hope and cause them to reflect. Some of you may need to put it on paper for the first time. You might outline it like Paul with who you were before Christ, how you met Christ, and how he has changed your life Christ – all with a focus on God's grace.<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter 3:15 says, “*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.*”

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<sup>1</sup> Last week Paul stood trial before Governor Festus. Like at other trials, Festus realized Paul was innocent, but he still miscarried justice by not releasing Paul out of a desire to do the Jewish leaders a favor (24:27; 25:9). If he upsets the Jewish leaders who are prosecuting Paul, then he risks losing office as a governor due to complaints and riots. Instead of release, he asked Paul if he would be willing to go back to Jerusalem and Paul knew that was a dead end. In fact, they were planning to assassinate him on the way. So Paul went over Festus' head and in fulfillment of Jesus' promise that he would go to Rome (23:11), appealed to Caesar. Paul will go to Rome and stand before the Supreme Court of the Roman Empire in defense of his life and ministry and as a test case, a defense of Christianity altogether. One of the main purposes of the book of Luke & Acts (both written by Luke; Luke, Vol. 1; Acts, Vol. 2) is to defend Christianity against the charge that it is a social or political threat (Luke 1:1; Acts 1:1).

<sup>2</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 713.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 716.

<sup>4</sup> Repentance (changing one's mind) for one man might look like turning from living in open sin and rebellion against God, not caring about the things of God, to confession of sin and trusting in Christ as Savior. By God's grace through the Spirit, he learns to live righteously and godly. Repentance for another man might look like turning from his imperfect self-righteousness – trusting in his good deeds and good behavior (Isaiah 64:6) – and instead, embracing Jesus' perfect righteousness that is granted to him by faith in what Jesus did for him in paying for his sins on the cross (Philippians 3:2-11). Both men, in turning to Christ, have turned from sin, and repented. (Ironsides, *Lectures on ...*, 613.)

<sup>5</sup> Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Jerusalem to Rome: Studies in Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1972), 182-183.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.navigators.org/resource/how-to-prepare-your-personal-testimony/>