

ACTS – Lesson 26

Acts Chapter 26

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Memory verses for this week: *1 Tim 5:17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.*

Introduction: In Chapter 25, Paul presented his case to Festus who came to rule after Felix. After hearing the case, he asks Paul if he would like to be sent back to Jerusalem to stand trial there for the accusations of the Jews. Knowing they intended to kill him, Paul wisely appealed unto Caesar.

At the end of last week's lesson, Festus had Paul brought before King Agrippa so that he might make some ruling on the case to write about when sending Paul to Caesar. In all of Festus' findings, nothing proved worthy of death like the Jews had claimed. This week we hear what Paul had to say to King Agrippa.

Here, Luke presents Paul's testimony and defense before Agrippa. It is similar in nature to what he proclaimed on the stairs of the Roman castle in Jerusalem two years earlier. In so doing, Paul held back nothing from Agrippa. Paul accounted for his actions and told this noble the truth concerning Jesus Christ and the gospel, the power of God unto salvation unto anyone who believed. Unfortunately, Agrippa being full of pride considered Paul's witness beneath him and voluntarily rejected the King of kings, the one living God who created all and is over all that is. Many say that if Agrippa would have just listened to Paul done some things differently that he would have been saved.

I. Paul's Defense before King Agrippa

Acts 26:1 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself.

Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:

Acts 26:2 I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews:

Acts 26:3 Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

Though Festus was clearly the presiding official, the 'hearing' was for Agrippa's benefit and he accordingly gave Paul permission to speak. Paul spoke with eloquence and great authority. Though Paul had been a political detainee, nevertheless, he happily took the occasion to not only present his case, but to

witness before a king as Jesus had foretold in Acts 9:15. He may have even harbored hope that Agrippa as a nominal 'Herodian Jew' could intervene on his behalf. Though there, no doubt, is some manner of flattery on Paul's part in noting that Agrippa was an "expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews," nevertheless, what he said was accurate. Agrippa was the appointed king of Judea under the Romans and had charge over the Temple, the appointment of the high priests, and oversight of the Jewish system. Paul knowing this sought his patience in hearing him.

Perhaps we have no greater record of Paul rising to the occasion the way that he does before King Agrippa. His presentation is tremendous, and he truly uses compelling words as he presents his case before the large assembly. Jesus had warned the apostles in His personal ministry that they would be taken before Kings to give an account of the gospel, and God promised to give them the words to speak in that day.

Luke 21:12 But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake.

Luke 21:13 And it shall turn to you for a testimony.

Luke 21:14 Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer:

Luke 21:15 For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.

Luke 21:16 And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death.

Luke 21:17 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.

Luke 21:18 But there shall not an hair of your head perish.

The things Paul says are exactly the right things to say under the circumstances, and no doubt God gave him those words that day. We may lose our ability to keep focused when before people of nobility, but it did not seem to bother Paul the least bit. Paul knew he was in the right, and he kept on hanging on to the truth. And when we do that, and our truth is based upon God's Word, we will be ultimately victorious, even if we were to lose our life down here. As Paul began his speech, he acknowledges how happy is to have the privilege to speak before King Agrippa, since he was knowledgeable and familiar with the customs of the Jews. Festus did not have this same knowledge.

While Festus was qualified to try the legal questions of the case, he did not know anything about the people's customs, their laws or traditions. And he certainly was not aware of what fanatics they were concerning the Mosaic law and Judaism. Paul was thrilled to bring this defense before someone who knew

about the people, and he felt Agrippa was an expert in the matters that were involved and would be able to detect any false statement quickly.

Acts 26:4 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;

Acts 26:5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

Paul begins his defense by describing how his earlier life at Tarsus and then Jerusalem was an open book to the Jewish nation. His pedigree as a Jew was replete. He further, in effect, turned the tables in noting that his antagonists, “if they would testify,” would verify what he was about to say. In so doing, Paul returns the responsibility to his Jewish adversaries to prove any wrongdoing on his part.

Then Paul makes an interesting comment. He indicates “that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.” Though the term Pharisee today is viewed largely as negative, Paul took pride therein. The Pharisees were the conservative branch of Judaism of his day. The word translated as straitest (akribhstatov akribestatos) has the sense of ‘the strictest’ or the most precise in observing the Mosaic law.

Paul declares that he was well known among the Jews, especially among those that were accusing him of his acts. They had known the manner of his life, and he had been brought up according to the strictest sect of the religion as he lived as a Pharisee.

II. The Three Accusations of the Jews

Acts 26:6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers:

Acts 26:7 Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

Acts 26:8 Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

Paul established before Agrippa the predicament he faced as being “judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers . . . for which hope’s sake” he was accused of the Jews. That promise was that the Messiah would come, suffer, die, and rise from the dead. Paul then posed to Agrippa the rhetorical question, Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? The word translated as incredible (apistovapistos) literally means ‘unbelievable.’ Indeed, what is so incredible about God raising one from the dead?

The first thing Paul was being accused of was the hope of the resurrection. We know the Pharisees believed in the resurrection while Sadducees denied the resurrection. But the vast majority of the Pharisees denied the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is our basis for all of our hope beyond the grave. Paul shows that this doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, as King Agrippa undoubtedly knew, was the thing which all the Jews were looking. The Jews who stand before the wailing wall in Jerusalem today are still praying for the promised Messiah to come, while they overlooked the one God sent nearly 2,000 years ago according to scripture. Paul explains that his first crime was that he testified of the resurrection of the dead.

Acts 26:9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Acts 26:10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

Acts 26:11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

Paul begins to rehearse his early history of persecuting the church. As a zealous Jew, he at that time considered it his duty to persecute those believing in Jesus. In further noting his initial persecution, he commented how he had personally imprisoned the saints (i.e., holy ones). Though Scripture only specifically records the martyrdom of Stephen in Acts 7, what clearly is implied here is that he was only perhaps the first.

It is evident that Paul had taken part in other martyrdoms. In noting how “when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.” The word translated as voice (qhfov psephos) literally means a ‘stone.’ It is an idiom referring to the practice of the Sanhedrin of voting by placing either a white stone (for acquittal) or a black stone (for conviction) into an urn. Paul was at one time a voting member of the Sanhedrin. (That in turn implies he was married which was required for members. If that be the case, Paul evidently became a widower.)

It is of interest that the Jews needed the permission of the Romans to execute Jesus, though evidently ignoring that requisite in martyring others. Perhaps the answer is that Jesus was a major public figure who could not be ignored. However, for ordinary believers, the Romans may have looked the other way.

It may be that Paul, during the time he zealously spent rounding up the Christians had authority in the warrants that he possessed to kill any who refused to cease from their activities concerning Jesus. Perhaps Paul, who would not ignore the Jewish council or Rome had been told that these Christians were no

longer considered Jews. Certain sects of our government carry out their plans in a like manner so it is plausible.

In mentioning “strange cities,” Paul implied he had gone on other missions of persecution prior to the one to Damascus. He further elaborates how he punished oft “in every synagogue,” persuading hapless Christians to blaspheme. In fact, Paul said that he was “exceedingly mad against them.” The word translated as mad against (emmainomai emmainomai) has the sense of being ‘insanely angry.’

Paul explains how he had earlier thought like the others, and had done many things contrary to the name of Jesus Christ. And this Jesus was the one who God had sent to die for our sins, and was the first to be resurrected from the dead.

1 Cor 15:17 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.

1 Cor 15:18 Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.

1 Cor 15:19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

1 Cor 15:20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

1 Cor 15:21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

1 Cor 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

1 Cor 15:23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

In verse 10, Paul declares how that he had not believe in Jesus at all, but rather had persecuted any and all who named the name of Christ. All through his life, Paul seemed to never forgive himself for persecuting the church prior to his conversion there on the road to Damascus.

1 Cor 15:3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

1 Cor 15:4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

1 Cor 15:5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:

1 Cor 15:6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

1 Cor 15:7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

1 Cor 15:8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

1 Cor 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

1 Cor 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

1 Cor 15:11 Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.

Acts 26:12 Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

Acts 26:13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

Acts 26:14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

Acts 26:15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

Having established his Jewish credentials, Paul then proceeded to describe his conversion on the road to Damascus. (We will note only details not described in Acts 9. For the complete discussion, see the comments on Acts 9. Paul indicates that he had not only authority but permission (commission) of the high priests for his quest. It is of interest how Paul described the light which focused upon him as being "above the brightness of the sun at midday." That light evidently was the glory of the resurrected Christ confronting him that day. He also mentioned how Jesus spoke to him in the Hebrew.

Paul always went back to the road to Damascus when he told of his salvation experience. You and I who know the Lord can point to a day and a time when Jesus came into our hearts and put our feet on a solid rock. My day came in the third week of August in 1964 that Sunday morning when I realized my condition before God and realized that I was condemned and guilty before the Lord. I was 13 years old, and I didn't believe I would live long enough to get from my seat near the back of the center section of the church there in Munday, Texas. But God did let me live, and has blessed me for 41 more years at this date in 2005. As most every one, I've had a lot of dark days, but God has been there through the darkest of those days. But most of the days have been in the sunshine and rejoicing on the mountaintop. Like Paul, I've never been the same since the day I was saved in 1964. I've never been called upon to suffer like Paul, but I hope if that day comes one day that I might show the same courage that led Paul through his days there in those prisons. An earthly prison is nothing compared to the prison of sin that binds every lost man and woman. When you know Jesus as Savior, you are free indeed.

Acts 26:16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;
Acts 26:17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

Paul further indicated that Jesus said, “for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness.” The word translated as minister (uperethv huperetes) essentially has the sense of a ‘servant’ (literally, an ‘underrower’ on a galley ship). Being in ‘the ministry’ is not only witnessing of Christ, but certainly being a servant.

In quoting Jesus, Paul noted that he would be a witness, not only of what he had seen, but also of what Jesus would later reveal unto him. Indeed, Paul would receive a number of revelations directly from Jesus during his ministry. In that initial confrontation on the road to Damascus, Paul revealed other details otherwise not noted. He recalled that Jesus even then promised that He would deliver him from the people—in this case evidently the Jewish people; and from the gentiles to whom he was now sending him.

Several words used here are filled with implication. The word send is translated from (apostellw) apostello which is the verbal relative of (apostellov) apostolos’ (i.e., apostle). Even on the road to Damascus, Jesus intimated to Paul that he was then and there being called and sent as an apostle. The word translated as delivering (exairew exaireo) has the idea of ‘rescuing’ or ‘extricating.’ Implied is that Paul would certainly find himself in many a predicament throughout his ministry in which the Lord would extricate and deliver him as needed. That probably is implied in what Jesus told Ananias in Acts 9:16 that Paul would suffer many things for His name’s sake. Indeed, the Lord did deliver Paul throughout his ministry.

Acts 26:18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.
Acts 26:19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:
Acts 26:20 But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

Paul revealed further what Jesus said to him on the road to Damascus. He was now sending him:

(1) “to open their eyes.” Spiritual illumination undoubtedly is what is in view.

(2) He was “to turn them from darkness to light.” Preaching the gospel, without a question, is turning men from the darkness of sin and false doctrine to the light of salvation.

(3) He was to turn them “from the power of Satan unto God.” Those who are lost frequently are under the power of the devil.

(4) The ultimate goal was that people might “receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith” in Christ.

Paul indicates that forgiveness as well as an inheritance in heaven is by faith in Christ. Moreover, being sanctified is likewise by faith in Christ. The word translated as sanctified (‘agiazw hagiadzo) is a perfect, passive participle which literally means ‘those who have been made holy.’ To be sanctified is precisely such. It refers to our position in Christ upon receiving Him as Savior.

In fashion characteristic of Paul’s entire ministry, he declared that he was “not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” Though we today have not had a confrontation from Jesus, we do have a commission from Him of which we are obligated to be obedient. Paul notes that he immediately was obedient in so witnessing first at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and ultimately to the gentiles. (It was at this point in his similar testimony in Acts 22 when his Jewish audience erupted.)

He summarized his early message in that “they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.” Paul’s seeming emphasis on repentance is not another gospel, but rather a usage of terminology designed for Jewish ears. (The emphasis being on the good works that follows the new birth.) Saving faith is a turning to God and then trusting Christ.

Paul had gone to Damascus with intentions of binding Christians to be brought back to Jerusalem. Rather, he met Jesus and was saved himself. And after that, Paul turned from persecutor to preacher of the Gospel. He tells King Agrippa in verse 19 that he was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision. He now declares the second of his three accusations by the Jews. The second was that he preached unto the Gentiles. We know that this was a direct command given to Paul from God.

Just as Peter was taught a lesson with the blanket being let down from heaven with all the various animals on it, God taught Paul that all men were worthy of salvation. This was foreign to the Jews, and they did not view the Gentiles as good in any way. They referred to them as dogs. All of us can learn from their mistakes that God can use all people, all races, all nations and kindreds in His work. Jesus died for all men on the cross, and desires that all will come unto Him.

2 Pet 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Rom 5:15 But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.

Rom 5:16 And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification.

Rom 5:17 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

Rom 5:18 Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.

Rom 5:19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

Rom 5:20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

Rom 5:21 That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Acts 26:21 For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

Acts 26:22 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:

Acts 26:23 That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

Paul now summarized the essence of his incarceration. For this the Jews had caught him and sought to kill him—for preaching repentance toward God and faith in Christ. Paul, proceeding, declared that even to that day he had continued with God's help to witness to both "small and great" He further noted that his message was based upon the Scripture ("the prophets and Moses") that "Christ should suffer and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people and to the Gentiles."

Paul alluded to the enigma for many a rabbi of a suffering Messiah (Isaiah 53) and that He would rise first from the dead. Though there had been other resurrections for example, Lazarus in John 11, they all had eventually suffered death again. Jesus' resurrection was permanent. . Paul, perhaps, had Isaiah 9:1-2 in mind as he said that Christ would give light not only to the (Jewish) people, but the gentile world as well.

We see the third accusation of the Jews in these verses. This was the one that probably made them the most upset, and that was that Jesus was the Messiah of the Jews.

John Calvin made this observation in his commentary on Acts concerning verse 22 where it says I continue witnessing both to small and great. “Paul said this so Agrippa might realize that this even applied to him. Offering the Gospel to ordinary people does not stop it from reaching kings. Christ gathers everyone in the same embrace, so that those who used to lie in the gutter and are now raised to such honor may rejoice in his unmerited goodness, and so those who are in high places may willingly humble themselves and not think their brothers beneath them—so that they be made God’s Children. In Romans 1:14, Paul stated that “Both to the wise and the foolish” lest the Romans’ confidence in their wisdom should prevent them from submitting to his teaching. Let us learn from this that a teacher cannot choose his hearers. If we limit our efforts to the great, whom God joins with the small, we hurt God and deprive the people of their rights. “

Paul claims that he said none other things than those which the prophets and Moses had promised that should come. This was the truth, and we know that Jesus came exactly at the time God had appointed and lived a perfect and sinless life, and died exactly on the day chosen in eternity years before man was ever created. Paul explained how that Christ was to come according to the prophets and to suffer, and then be raised from the dead after three days and three nights according to the scriptures. And he would be a light both to the Jews and the Gentiles.

Gal 4:4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

Gal 4:5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Gal 4:6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Gal 4:7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Remember what Simeon said when they brought Jesus to the temple.

Luke 2:28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

Luke 2:29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:

Luke 2:30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

Luke 2:31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

Luke 2:32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

Acts 26:24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

Acts 26:25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

Acts 26:26 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

Festus had had enough. He interrupted Paul and said loudly, “Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.” Festus in effect told Paul, ‘You are unbalanced.’ To be more colloquial, Festus said to Paul, ‘You’re crazy. All your education has made you deranged.’ Paul, to his credit, promptly replied that he was not mad, noting Festus as noble. Rather, he in fact spoke truth and soberness.

The word translated as soberness (swfrosunh sophrosune) has the sense of ‘soundness and focus of mind’. It is the antithesis of ‘mania.’ Continuing, Paul returned his focus to Agrippa in noting that the king was generally aware of all what he had said concerning Christ. He concluded by reminding that the entire message of Christ—his life, death, and resurrection—“was not done in a corner.”

Festus interrupts and speaks out in a loud voice declaring that the much learning Paul had bestowed upon him and caused him to become mad. Paul quickly and calmly answers him that he is not mad, but was speaking forth the words of truth and soberness. When the truth we speak includes the gospels, it cuts the sinner to the heart. And as we have found, the sinner has two choices. Accept the truth and be saved, or lash out against the one who has preached the truth to them.

Heb 4:12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Heb 4:13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Acts 26:27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

Paul now zeroes in on Agrippa. He attempts to lay a foundation of faith by asking the rhetorical question, King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Though Agrippa was a non-observant Jew, living in sin, nevertheless Paul was confident Agrippa believed the Old Testament Scripture

as he indicated. In all likelihood, Paul's strategy was to get Agrippa to admit his belief in the Scripture and then proceed from there to faith in Christ.

Paul turns to King Agrippa, and declares how that he was certain that he knew all of these things. Christ's death on the cross was not done in a corner hidden, but was done before all. Paul asks him "Believest thou the prophets?" And before he can say a word, Paul said "I know that thou believest." To stand against God's divine words of prophecy requires a fool, and Paul did not relate King Agrippa to be one who would not trust God.

Acts 26:28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

Acts 26:29 And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

Agrippa interrupted Paul and said "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." The translation of this sentence has been of long controversy. Specifically, the words translated as almost are the focus of much debate. In reply, perhaps with a tone of disappointment, Paul indicated that he wished that all who heard him that day were as he was saved and knowing the Lord, with the exception of his physical bonds.

Agrippa answers Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." I wonder how many I have witnessed to that have had a similar response. So close, but yet still lost and undone before God.

J. Vernon McGee said this about these 2 verses in his commentary on Acts.

"Agrippa was an intelligent man. "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Friend, do you know that you can almost be a Christian and then be lost for time and eternity? How tragic that is! "Almost" will not do. It must be all or nothing. Either you accept Christ or you don't accept Christ. No theologian can probe the depths of salvation and its meaning. Yet it is simple enough for ordinary folk like most of us to understand. Either you have Christ or you don't have Christ. Either you trust Christ or you don't trust Christ. Either He is your Savior or He is not your Savior. It is one of the two. There is not middle ground. It cannot be almost. It must be all. Paul answered "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." Paul is saying that he longs for them to have a relationship to Christ and be like he is—except for the chains. He wouldn't want chains on anyone. This is the man who had been a proud and zealous Pharisee, the same who had a few years before bound Christians in chains and put them to death. Now his attitude is different. He wants all people to become Christians and to have a vital and personal relationship with Jesus Christ."

I wonder if someone reading this lesson might be in the same position as King Agrippa. You recognize the truth of the gospel, you are convicted of your sins, and you almost want to be saved. Don't let Satan keep you bound another day. Bow your head, repent of your sins, and ask Jesus to come into your heart. It will be the most important thing you ever do in this life. After this life, we have an eternity to live. It is our choice, heaven with Christ, or eternal punishment in hell with Satan. Our sin has a price, and some one has to pay it. Jesus took all the sins of all mankind on himself there on the cross of Calvary. But God will not force his gift upon anyone. Jesus is there for all who desire to come.

Acts 26:30 And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them:

Acts 26:31 And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.

Acts 26:32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.

The exhibition was over. The dignitaries had heard this Jewish-Christian preacher. Their curiosity was satisfied. They all arose and conferred amongst themselves. They piously commented that Paul had done nothing worthy of death, much less even being held. The hypocrisy of it all it was that both Festus and Agrippa had either the authority or influence to grant Paul's freedom. Neither had the integrity to do so. Agrippa closed the meeting with the sanctimonious comment that he might even had been set free had he not appealed to Caesar. Either Festus or Agrippa could have arranged dismissal of the vague, elusive charges against him. Neither did.

We know King Agrippa was deeply convicted, but like Felix, we have no record that he ever came to Christ for salvation. Agrippa rises up and walks out with the others. They get together and Agrippa tells Festus that he finds nothing worthy of death or bonds in Paul. He says that if he had not appealed to Caesar, he would have let the man go free. God had told Paul he would testify of Christ in Rome, so Paul was soon to be on his way to Caesar.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be blessed.