

**PAUL PREACHES IN THE FACE OF POMP & POLITICS**  
**March 19, 2017 morning service**  
**Acts 26**

Thank you, team. Somebody ought to say glory, shouldn't they? Amen. Glory be to our great God. Thank you, choir, orchestra, Brother Travis for being here with us today. Welcome to all of you. Take your Bible and let's go to Acts if you've not found that yet in Acts 26 and we're going to back up to Acts 25 for a little while before we jump into Paul's message. We're preaching on ten sermons printed in the book of Acts. Today is the ninth, nine in a row that we've looked at beginning back at Pentecost in Acts 2 and working our way through. These sermons that have been recorded in Holy Scripture and written out after they were given. We've been looking at them and trying to squeeze the juice out of the grapes of great preaching recorded in Acts.

We come to the ninth sermon today and it is the 26<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts. Paul is there but before we jump into the message, the setting is very important. We find this setting back in the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter because Paul has been under arrest. He is in Caesarea. Felix was the governor but Felix has been relieved of his duties and called home to Rome. Festus is the governor and he wants to take Paul up to Jerusalem, try him before the Sanhedrin and Paul says, "No, I will not go because I am a Roman citizen and I will not be tried by the Sanhedrin. Rather I appeal to the throne of Caesar which is my right as a Roman citizen." Festus says, "You've asked to go to Caesar. To Caesar you will go."

He's got a problem. He's not certain of the charges. What does he write to give to Caesar? He said, "I've brought this man on his appeal to your throne." King Agrippa, who is in that line of the Herods, that Herod family. You know when Jesus was born and then came King Herod Agrippa, I and following him King Herod, II would come later. We find Herod Agrippa is king. He's been appointed in this area. His assignment is not as large as the governor but as the king of that area and he's Jewish in his background and he understands and he comes to town. Festus says, "I've got a problem. Can you help me discover what we should charge this man with?" Agrippa says, "I've always wanted to hear this guy you've been talking about." He said, "You shall."

We find the setting of Paul before Agrippa in chapter 25 beginning in our text in verse 22. Hear the word of the Lord.

*Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself."  
"Tomorrow," he [that is Festus] said, "you shall hear him." [Now don't miss verse 23.]  
So, on the next day when Agrippa came together with Bernice [Now that's his sister/his wife. When he came together with Bernice] amid great pomp [that's an important word], and entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. Festus said, "King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you see this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that*

*he ought not to live any longer. But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him. 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. For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him.”<sup>1</sup>*

It is pretty absurd, isn't it? "I'm going to send Paul up to the Caesar but I don't know what I'm going to charge him with. Agrippa, would you help me with this? Would you hear him and then help me write the charges and we'll send him to Rome and Caesar can deal with him?" Now go back to verse 23. It's very important. When Agrippa came with Bernice, his sister/wife, amid great pomp. The word pomp, it's the only time it's used in all of the Greek New Testament is right here in verse 23. It is the Greek word fantasia. Fantasia. It almost sounds like something Disney ought to use, doesn't it? They came with great fantasia. This text says in the auditorium there were the commanders, brass shields, and steel swords, prominent men of the city dressed in fine silk and turbans with jewels around their forehead. The commander, Festus, was there along with Agrippa and no doubt in scarlet and purple they walked into an auditorium with gold and marble. It's fantasia. It's great pomp. They're making great spectacles of themselves. Then notice the last four words. Paul was brought in.

Get the picture. Fantasia is all around. Gold and glitter and marble and silk and purple, scarlet, jewels, brass. The county commissioners are there. The city council is there. The mayor is there. Anyone that's someone. All the commanders of the regiments are there. They've all gathered in this auditorium with pomp, fantasia. Then lastly comes a bedraggled man in chains. You can hear it clink. It may be his feet are shackled, his ankles maybe. Maybe he's got chains from his arms down to his feet. We're not certain. All we know is when we get to the end of the sermon in chapter 26 Paul said, "I wish all of you were just like me except for these chains." Now did they unchain him while he was speaking? I'm not certain. Was he on a long lead so that every time he raised his arm to speak they could hear the chain rattle? I don't know but they brought Paul in, dressed in prisoner's attire and shackled and he stood in silence before the pomp, before the fantasia of Rome in this city called Caesarea. Caesar by the sea.

In verse 1 of chapter 26: *Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his [apologia, his] defense [his apologetic of the faith]:*

Now Paul then speaks for these verses and the sermon is recorded. I'm not going to read it. You can read those verses beginning in verse 2 all the way down through verse 29. You can read his sermon but I'm going to just lift verses out of it today and Sharon will pop those up on the screen if she can keep up with me as she is

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professional and very adept to do. We'll keep up with one another. You've got your copy of scripture. If you don't, there's a book in front of you and you can open it.

Paul is preaching to all but he's just got eyes for one. He's really just got one person. Look in your text in verse 2. He says, "King Agrippa." In verse 7 he says, "O King." In verse 13 he says, "O King." In verse 19 he says, "King Agrippa." In verse 26 he says, "The king knows." In verse 27 he says, "King Agrippa." He keeps again and again and again and again, "O king, O King, O King Agrippa." There are a lot of people listening but he's really just preaching to one.

Now let me confess. I've done it. I've walked in this room with a few hundred. I've walked in this room with 1200, 1500, 2000 people and I've preached to one. I invited a friend and he's sitting right over here. Now I know everybody's listening but this is the guy I'm after. There was a man that sat right up here for months and listened to me. I never did call his name but everybody said, "Boy, you were really preaching to," and they'd call his name. I'd say, "Yeah, I was after him." I was thrilled unto heaven the day he walked down and trusted Christ. Thank God, now we can move onto somebody else.

I'm telling you, if you ever speak in public that is not a good way to do it but we can't help it. Sometimes someone's just on our heart so heavy that we build a whole sermon just for one person in the room when we ought to be preaching to 1500, 2000. But Paul's just got eyes and voice for one.

He's been brought before Agrippa and he's going to make sure Agrippa understands. What does he say to King Agrippa? Four things I've outlined there for you in your listening outline that I want you to see. Number one. Paul says to Agrippa, "My life has been changed. Now, King Agrippa, don't miss this. My life has been changed." He stands in reverence. He stands in honor of a wicked man yet he's the king and he honors him and he does not speak until he tells him he can. Then he makes an appeal and he says, "I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, to be here, to make my defense before you today. I ask that you patiently hear me." He makes his appeal in kindness and then he strikes out and he says, "First of all, I want you to understand, King Agrippa, my life has been changed."

In verse 4 he says, "You then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem. King Agrippa, you know Judaism. You know the Old Testament, the prophets, the law. You know it and everybody here that's a Jew, you know that since I was a little boy, circumcised, a little Jewish boy growing up in the synagogue, I was a faithful Jew." He says that in verse 4. Since I was a kid, I grew up in the synagogue.

In verse number 9 he says that, "I was hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. I heard all this stuff that he came against us and he spoke of being the Messiah. I was mean. I was hostile to His name." In verse 10 he says that he went as far as persecuting the saints. "I locked up the saints in Jerusalem. I received authority from

the chief priests to do so. I had papers that said I could do it. They were put to death and when they were put to death, I voted for it. I said, 'Kill them all. Strike his head from his body. Cut him asunder. Hang him by the neck.'" He said, "I voted, kill them all."

Then in verse 13 he says, "O King, one day at high noon I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me." He gives his testimony. This is the third time it's found in Acts. We saw it last Sunday. We also saw it when Luke recorded it. You know the story if you've been reading your Bible very long. Paul's walking down the road. The sun comes and he falls blind. Ananias comes and speaks to him and the scales fall from his eyes and Saul, Paul is gloriously saved. In verse 19 he says to him, "O King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to this heavenly vision." What Paul says, "I put my faith in Christ and I've been changed. I've been saved. I've been transformed." II Corinthians 3, verse 18, Paul would later write these words himself, "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord."

Somebody say glory. We see the glory of the Lord being transformed into the same image from what's that word? Glory to glory, just as from the Lord the Spirit. He said, "The glory of God struck me." Let me tell you, friend, every time the glory of God touches – that's why you ought to be in church on a regular basis. You never know when the glory of God is going to touch your life. You're changed from glory to glory to glory to glory. Sometimes you'll come and God doesn't seem to move but then there'll be that glory, glory, and He's changing you and transforming you. He said, "King Agrippa, this little Jewish boy has been changed."

Last night I preached in Destin at the Hilton Hotel. I go there annually and speak to my friend Scott Dawson's evangelistic association. We were there last night, my wife and Beth Harris, my administrative assistant, went with us. When I walked in the room for dinner, Dr. Lewis, I saw him. He walked right up to me. I didn't know who he was. I hadn't seen him in nearly 40 years. He stuck out his hand and I said, "Good evening." He said, "Ted, Tom Caradine." I said, "My Lord and mercy." He was the most vile, wicked, godless man ever to set foot on Samford University's campus. You do know sinners go to Baptist schools, don't you?

Tom Caradine was at Samford when I was there. He was the vile, wicked member of the Pi Kappa Phi Fraternity. One night – it was all over campus the next day – one night at a fraternity party he brought in a cake and had a naked woman come out of it. That went all over that Baptist school's campus. Tom Caradine was called to the president's office for his actions. He was reprimanded but he stayed. Vile, oh my, he was awful. The most godless man on that campus and everybody knew it.

He asked Cindy Parsons on a date. Cindy Parsons said, "I can't go out with you. I'm a saved girl and you're a lost man." He said, "What do you mean?" She began to share with him how she'd been saved by the gospel of the Lord Jesus. He began to listen. What the president of a Baptist school failed to tell him in the office, a little

Baptist girl told him on a date. Cindy was with him last night because she led him to Jesus, disciplined him, married him, and been with him now for nearly 40 years. He's the executive pastor of a Presbyterian church in Birmingham, Alabama. Here's a guy that used to get naked women out of cakes on a Baptist university and now is the executive pastor of a Presbyterian church. I'm here to tell you, that's transformation, beloved. That's what that is. That's what the glorious gospel will do for any man or any woman that will come to Christ. He will change you.

"Hear me, Agrippa. This little Jew who was a mean-spirited Pharisee is now a messenger of God's grace both to the Jew and the Gentile." That's what Paul is saying to the old king. "I've been changed by God's grace." Let me tell you, friend, what God did for Paul and what He did for Tom He'll do for you. He's still in the life transforming business.

"Agrippa, my life's been changed." Secondly, he said, "King Agrippa, number two, don't miss this now." He said, "The tomb of Jesus is empty." Now don't miss this. "King Agrippa, the tomb." Look in verse 8. He said as he was speaking, "Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead? Why is that incredible?" You see, the Pharisees believed in the resurrection but the Sadducees did not. He said, "Why is it incredible unto you?"

Then you skip down to verse 22 and you find him saying, "So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, to the pomp and the unponpous, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles. Agrippa, the tomb of Jesus, it's empty."

When he preached the resurrection Festus the governor, look what Festus did. In verse 24 Paul was saying this in his defense, "And Festus said in a loud voice, 'Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad.'" "You've lost your marbles." In verse 25 Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of – what? – sober truth." What's the truth? The tomb of Jesus is empty. You think of this man. If it was 2017 he'd be wearing an orange jumpsuit in the middle of all this pomp, chained, shackled. My life's been changed and what's changed is that the tomb of Jesus is empty.

We're working on it and we're going to try to make it happen. He's been here before more than once. Josh McDowell is our good friend. We're trying to maybe think about Josh coming back to be with us and help us in apologetics. We love Brother Josh. I got out one of his old books this week and began to read. Josh McDowell, I like Josh McDowell because I love old preachers. Josh is an old preacher. I put up with young preachers but I love old preachers. Josh has got a son that's a great apologist now. Josh McDowell went to law school. He said, "While I was on that campus I was trying to answer three questions." This is what he writes in his own testimony. "I was trying to figure out who am I, why am I here, and where am I going?"

Let me tell you, friend, if you don't know who you are or why you're on planet Earth or where you're going when you leave planet Earth you need Christ but he didn't know that. He was just lost. He said, "I began to talk in the Student Union Building with other students." He said, "One day I talked to some people and it seemed like they kind of had it together and I asked him, I said, 'You seem like you've got all of life put together. What's made the difference in your life?'" He said, "A little girl with a long, bony finger pointed at me and said two words, 'Jesus Christ.'" Josh said, "I looked at her and said, 'I'm tired of religion.'" She said, "I didn't say religion. I said Jesus Christ." Josh said, "Don't give me that stuff. You mean you believe in a man in the Bible that they say died and rose?" She said, "Yes, Jesus Christ."

Weeks went by and Josh dropped out of school. It became his life's mission to write a new book and that new book was to refute the truthfulness of Jesus. He quit school and traveled everywhere he could go and every library around the world gleaning information. He says in his own testimony in *Truth That Demands a Verdict*, he said, "I was sitting in a library in London, England when it settled in my mind, there is more evidence for the truth of Jesus' life and death and resurrection than there is evidence against it." He said, "I had to decide and I went home and got on my knees and I said, 'Lord, if you're God, thank you for loving me, for dying for me and as best I know I open my life to You and ask You to come into my life, forgive my sin, and change me.'"

Josh McDowell got up a redeemed man. The very Jesus he was trying to destroy gave Him new life. He ran headlong into the empty tomb because Jesus is not in there. He's out of there. He is sitting at the right hand of the Father. He is alive forevermore and it doesn't even have to be Easter to talk about that. He's alive. He's alive. He's alive. "Hey, Agrippa, the tomb of Jesus is empty."

Thirdly, he said, "King Agrippa, all people everywhere must repent. Everybody has to repent." We find that in verse 19 and 20. He says, "I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision but I kept declaring both to those in verse 20 of Damascus first, also at Jerusalem, then throughout all the region of Judea even to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God performing deeds appropriate to repentance." He said, "Agrippa, what I've been preaching is that you must turn from your sin and turn to God in repentance." How do you do that? You say, "Jesus, thank you for dying for me. I confess that I'm a sinner. I open my life's door right now as best I know and place my trust in You as Savior and ask You to take over my life and I will follow You. I thank You for changing my life."

Friend, that's repentance. It's the word *metanoia*. It means to change your mind. You're going one way, away from God, and you turn and say, "I no longer will go away from God. I'm now going to go toward God." The Bible says that He commands now men everywhere to repent. Repent. He's calling you to repent. Sitting in that balcony, I'm telling you, God's calling you to repent. He's asking you to turn from the world and

turn from yourself and turn toward God and repent. He's asking people across this ground floor, turn from yourself, turn from sin, and come and follow Christ.

"Agrippa, O King." He did not make fun of the king. He did not belittle the king. He did not curse the king. He honored the man in authority but he called him to repentance. Oh dear friend, hear the great apostle. "My life's been changed." Hear that prophet, that Bible writer say, "The tomb of Jesus is empty." Hear him say, "O, Agrippa, you must turn and repent." Then Paul, I cannot fathom what must have been in his heart. This took Holy Ghost courage. When we look in our Bible we come to verse 27 and he says, "King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets?" He knew that he believed the Prophets because Agrippa is out of a Jewish background. He knew he believed in Isaiah and Ezekiel and Jeremiah, Major Prophets. He believed in the Minor Prophets. He knew he believed and he said, "Do you believe the Prophets?" He quickly said, "Agrippa, I know that you do. I know you believe the Prophets." Verse 28. Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." And Paul said, "I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains."

"I would that God would do for you what He's done for me except that I hope your faith doesn't land you in prison." Now when we look at that verse 28 it is one of the most scrutinized verses in all of the word of God. It has been translated six, seven, eight different ways. If you're reading the King James this morning, you know what he says. "Paul, almost I'm persuaded to become a Christian." Is that what he said? We're not certain. The Greek construct is very difficult in verse 28 but Agrippa said something to Paul about being persuaded and "I've just heard you. Do you think I can just do it right now and I would become a Christian?" Agrippa uses that word. He knows what a Christian is. It's a Christ follower. Agrippa uses the word Christian and persuaded and short time. "Paul, you really think?" Some people think that he's making fun but we don't think he is. I don't. I think he's having an honest assessment. "Paul, in this short period of time I'm almost." Agrippa was almost. He got close.

Some of you are in this room today and you're close. You're really close but you're lost. I'm not talking about being a Baptist. I'm talking about being a believer. I'm not talking about having religion. I'm talking about what they told Josh. Jesus Christ. I'm talking about you following the Lord and turning in repentance and coming after him. John Bunyan, the great writer of *Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunion said that many people will go to hell from the gates of heaven. What he meant by that was they would get very close to the door of getting in but they would not enter in. Therefore, they'll go to hell from the very gates of heaven. Almost is not in. Close is not enough. Church is not enough. Baptism is not enough. It is Christ.

Billy Graham, the day he walked the aisle and got saved, Billy Graham says they were singing the second stanza of an old song. We don't ever do it now. I can't remember when I've heard "Almost Persuaded." It's also a secular song that's pretty godless but there's an old hymn that says, "Almost Persuaded." I'm close. I'm almost there but not quite.

You know, Adolf Hitler grew up in the church. He was almost persuaded but he's in hell this morning. Agrippa was close. He heard the gospel from one of the greats but he's in hell this morning. They got close. They were almost persuaded but they're in hell today. My high school basketball coach I talked to last week, he's close but if he doesn't get right with God he'll go to hell when he dies.

How are you? How are you? "Agrippa, will you be saved today?" Hey, Tom, Teresa, Jim, Janet, will you be saved today? "Paul, I'm close to being a Christian." Isn't it time, beloved, that you got up off the stool of deciding and decided? You say, "Preacher, I'm just not sure." Let me tell you, if the Spirit of God is wooing you, it is time for you to believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be, what's that word? Saved. Amen. Saved. Saved.

Somebody across this ground floor ought to get saved today. Amen. Somebody's in this room. You've been saved but you've never publicly gone forward. You've never professed it, never been baptized after you got saved. Today you ought to get ready to do that. You say, "Preacher, I'm close." Don't give me that. This message is for you today. Now.