

June 30, 2024

“Fearless Witness”  
Lesson 5

Acts 26:1-11

**Intro**

The book of Acts is the record of how the gospel message of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead was spread, and how it changed people’s lives. The leading figure in this story is Paul, once known as Saul, who as a Jewish Pharisee persecuted the early church, trying to destroy it. But when he had a personal encounter with Jesus in Acts 9, Paul became a steadfast defender of the gospel message. He went on three different missionary journeys across Asia Minor. After the third journey, he went to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. But while there, his enemies tried to silence him and he was arrested. He had to resort to calling on his Roman citizenship to avoid being flogged, and was taken by a large guard to Caesarea Maritima, to stand trial before Governor Felix. But no decision was reached, and Paul was held under house arrest for two years, at which time, Felix was replaced as governor by Festus. This resulted in another trial before Festus. After this trial, King Agrippa comes to visit Festus, is told about the case of Paul, and he asks to hear Paul speak. This is the background that leads to today’s study passage.

**Read Acts 26:1-11**

1. vs. 1: Paul is going to get to speak about Christ to Agrippa, the king of Judea
  - Agrippa’s father, Herod Agrippa I, had arrested and killed the apostle James
  - It would be understandable if Paul was nervous about speaking to this king
  - But Paul is used to these situations; he has been defending the faith for many years
  - Paul’s case is somewhat difficult for civil authorities to deal with
    - Their job is to keep law and order
    - This case involves religious belief and practice which may have been violated
    - The Romans don’t know what to do in this case
      - Should they step in, or let the Jewish religious authorities decide?
  - Paul is aware of this point of tension, and uses his Roman citizenship to aid him
  
2. vs. 2: Paul shows deference to Agrippa in how he begins
  - Acknowledging those in power, especially in a trial, is a wise way to begin
  - Paul says he will make his defense “against all the accusations of the Jews”
  - There are two main charges the Jews have made against Paul so far
    - he has been causing divisions among the Jews
    - he has desecrated the temple
  - There will be other accusations in some of the following verses
  
3. vs. 3: Paul says he is “fortunate” (vs. 2) to speak in front of Agrippa
  - Here he notes that Agrippa is “well acquainted with all the Jewish customs”
  - Agrippa was outwardly Jewish
    - He made a point of following some aspects of the Law of Moses
    - He was knowledgeable enough for Paul to know he would understand the charges
  - Because of this, Paul begs for Agrippa to hear everything he will say

4. vs. 4-5: Paul begins his defense with his behaviors and lifestyle  
He says that his life is known by the Jews, from his childhood  
There is nothing about his life that isn't known as relates to his Jewish practices  
This statement puts his accusers on the defensive  
They would have to agree with what Paul says about his Jewish life  
This also establishes Paul as telling the truth here  
If he tells the truth initially, he is more believable in things he says later  
He notes that these accusers can testify to the truth of Paul's next statement  
Paul says he was a Pharisee, which he calls the "strictest sect" of our religion"  
The first-century Jewish historian Josephus mentions five branches of Judaism in that day  
Pharisees (right-wing formalists)  
Sadducees (left-wing aristocrats)  
Essenes (ultra-right wing purists)  
Zealots (militants)  
Herodians (supporters of the Herodian line of kings, like Agrippa)
5. vs. 6-7: Paul brings up the point that he is hoping for what God promised in the OT  
This is a part of Jewish history, and something that the Jews are hoping for also  
The "ancestors" who got the promise were called faithful for believing in far-off promises  
(See Heb. 11:10-13)  
The promise was that they would live again after being dead  
If this is God's promise, Jesus is part of the fulfillment of that promise  
If this is so, why are these Jews attacking and accusing him for believing that promise?
6. vs. 8: Paul asks a rhetorical question here  
"Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?"  
If God raised Jesus from the dead, that guarantees He will raise us also  
Paul is showing that his beliefs /practices are in line with what all Jews believe
7. vs. 9: Paul acknowledges that he was once like the men who now accuse him  
He was opposed to Jesus and His followers, and tried to do everything to stop them  
He uses the designation "Jesus of Nazareth"  
Without last names at this time, people used other ways to tell people apart  
Jesus Himself used this title in referring to Himself
8. vs. 10: Paul tells us what those actions were that he took  
He arrested those who followed Jesus, and He agreed to put them to death  
His reputation for this was known at least as far as Damascus (see Acts 9)  
He is showing those who accuse him that he once held the same views  
This would hopefully cause them to wonder why Paul changed his mind
9. vs. 11: Paul finishes this account of his former life with one further confession  
He not only punished these believers he arrested, but tried to destroy their faith  
He says he "tried to force them to blaspheme"  
This means he was trying to get them to deny Christ as their savior  
There is a second reason why Paul would use these details in defending himself  
A person who admits doing such horrible things wouldn't by lying about anything else

King Agrippa, in listening to this account, had to have been reminded of his father  
His father conducted persecutions of the same kind during his reign (Acts 12)  
His son, now listening, would know all about his father's actions  
Here is Paul, confessing to doing the very same kind of things  
If it was OK for his father to do these things, wasn't it OK for Paul to do them?  
Again, Paul's confession coupled with his changed life should have raised questions  
What caused Paul to change from accuser to defender?

Application: All believers who turn to God were once God's enemies, says Romans 5:10. But God desires to make peace, find reconciliation, and have people live in newness of life. Paul wrote in multiple letters about the reconciliation that God brings to our lives. Paul suffered many forms of abuse because of his stance for Christ. Yet he followed God's call on his life to bring the gospel to everyone that God led him to. This is our calling as well, to be reconciled with God, to likely suffer some abuse and scorn for speaking for Him, and to take His message of reconciliation everywhere we go.

Prayer: Almighty God, though we were once Your enemies, You sent Jesus to die for our sins. Thank you for salvation and reconciliation with You. Help us to communicate this message to others effectively and honestly. Help us to make disciples, and not be concerned about winning arguments and being right. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

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