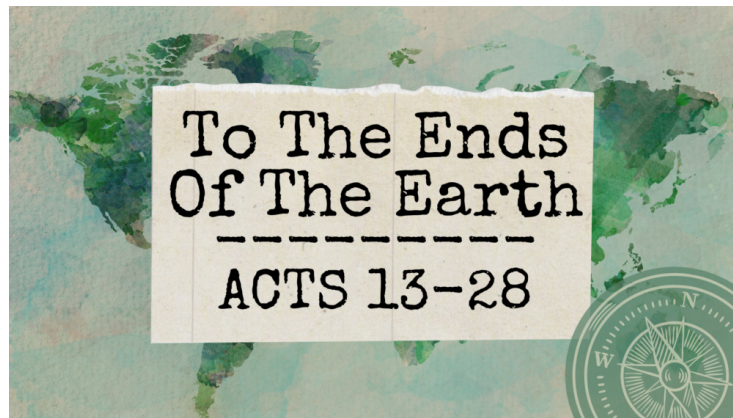


Called to Witness Again



Acts 26

Bro Ricky Cunningham

Acts chapter 25, which Chris preached on last week, sets the stage for Acts chapter 26. The stage is set with Festus knowing Paul has appealed to Caesar. In his interrogation of Paul, he doesn't believe Paul has done anything worthy of imprisonment or death, so he doesn't know what to charge him with to send him on to Caesar. Festus inherited Paul from Felix and he wants to deal with Paul, but he knows it's going to look bad on him as a new governor if he lets someone appeal all the way to the supreme court of Rome to Caesar without there being a proper charge. It just so happens that Agrippa and Bernice—she is his wife, but also his sister—is in town. Festus decides since Agrippa is king over the Jews that maybe if he tried Paul he could help him find a charge so that it would be proper when they send him on to Caesar. I love what Luke does. Have you noticed some of the little details that Luke gives? See, the court is now seated, but Luke tells us that when Bernice and Agrippa came in they came in with great pomp. That word, pomp, is actually the Greek word, *phantasia*, from where we get our English word, fantasy. The word literally means to make an appearance, to appear a certain way.

This week, our family was at Disney World. There are some things we just love about Disney World, but because of Covid, we knew we weren't going to get to participate in them. One of them is all the Disney parades and we knew there weren't going to be any. To our surprise, there were times when we would be in one of the parks, especially Magic Kingdom, and we would hear music and see a float. On one of the floats, there was some pomp. There were two people who made an appearance, but they looked like mice. One looked like a male mouse and the other looked like a female. They were Mickey and Minnie, but they weren't in their traditional costumes. They were in their fiftieth anniversary costumes because Disney is celebrating its fiftieth year. But our favorite float was this huge float with all of the Disney princesses. You could tell each princess by the dress they were wearing. We were there for a week, so we were in Magic Kingdom on three different days, opening and closing the park too. On the second and third day, I began to notice that some of the princesses weren't played the same lady, but they had the same pomp, the same dress, so all the little kids just recognized them as Snow White or Cinderella. See, the dress made the appearance of the person. What was neat was that not only did you see all these Magic Kingdom princesses in their dresses, but you also saw all these little girls walking around who believed they were princesses because they also had on a princess dress.

Get this picture. Agrippa comes in with his royal attire and crown on. His sister/wife, Bernice, dressed royally as well. Festus was dressed in his governor robe, and the military tribunes dressed in their regalia. It says the prominent men—the bankers, the lawyers, the doctors—came in and they were all dressed to the nines, so to speak. Then Festus introduces Paul, the prisoner, still most likely in chains. Festus is not going to question him, he is just going to give him permission to speak and let him defend himself, let him apologize for his behavior. For our Scripture reading, we are going to skip what Paul tells Agrippa, but I want you to hear their reaction. We are going to read chapter 26:24–29. we are going to set the stage on why we really need to pay attention to what Paul says because he doesn't get to finish what he says; he gets interrupted by Festus.

Scripture

"And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind." But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.""

Agrippa is king of the Jews, and he is questioning Paul. If you are a history buff, you know that this is Herod Agrippa II. This is the great grandson of Herod the Great. I personally struggle with remembering the family tree of Herod. I got reminded this week when we were at Disney that my little granddaughter, Evie Kate, still struggles to figure out all the family connections. Evie Kate knows we are all family, but there was one moment when she looked at me and she was trying to figure out Kiki's relationship, and she was just bewildered when I explained again that Kiki is her daddy's sister. You would have thought I had told Evie Kate that for the first time! When I said, "You know, right, that your dad is my son?" She just got this look on her face. She knows I am Papaw to her, her granddad, but she still struggles to put all the connections together. Well, when it comes to Agrippa's family, like Evie Kate I struggled to make all of the connections. This is Herod Agrippa II, the great grandson of Herod the Great. You remember Herod the Great. He was the one reigning when the magi came for the newborn King of the Jews and realized he had been tricked by them, and then he ordered all of the male babies in Bethlehem from two years old and younger to be killed. Because of the warning of an angel, Joseph took Jesus and Mary, fled Bethlehem, and went to Egypt. Then Herod the Great dies and his kingdom was divided into four parts.

Three of his sons reigned over parts of the kingdom. Because Herod Archelaus was reigning over Jerusalem and Bethlehem, when Agrippa came back to Israel, he went to Nazareth to stay out of that region because Herod's son was reigning there. One of his other sons reigned also, Herod Antipas. This was the one Jesus called the fox. He was the one who beheaded John the Baptist. We met Herod Agrippa I in Acts chapter 12. He put Peter in prison and he had James killed with a sword.

Paul's Defense before Agrippa

So in Acts chapter 26, Agrippa is the son of Herod Agrippa I, and he is now seated on the throne of Israel. Now, I have to say that Agrippa is more of a figurehead than an actual king with actual authority, but Festus represents the Roman side of government and Agrippa represents the Jewish side of government. As chapter 26 begins, Agrippa motions for Paul to speak. Now, I don't know if this is significant or not, but again, Luke is in to some details. Before Paul begins to give his defense, Luke tells us Paul stretched out his hands and he immediately begins to gesture. This is the third time in the book of Acts that Luke mentions when Paul is speaking he is gesturing or motioning with his hands. Luke is telling us Paul started full force right in the beginning, and then Paul basically tells the same story that he told in Acts chapter 22 when he was in front of that Jewish mob. This was actually the same story that was recorded in Acts chapter 9. It just so happens that all three of these stories have fallen to me to preach.

Can you imagine how I feel this morning having to preach on the same thing for the third time? And most of you were here the first two times! Why would Luke do this to me? I mean, we just have two chapters to go and we hear Paul's story again but we heard it just six chapters ago! Nineteen chapters before this, we heard it the first time. So when the book of Acts starts out, a third of the way into the book we see Paul's story, historically. Then three quarters into this book, we hear Paul retell his story to the Jews as an apology. Now, ninety percent into the book, just ten percent to go, Paul tells it again! Why does Paul tell his story three times? We don't have any others stories like this told three times. I just want to give you my opinion and make an educated guess. Under the leadership of

the Holy Spirit, Luke understood that one of the greatest teaching techniques is called repetition. When we kicked this book off, Jesus told the disciples to go back to Jerusalem and stay there. He told them not to do what He told them to do until they received power from on high, the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit came upon them, they would be His witnesses and they would start in Jerusalem, go to Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. They were called to witness. Many of us were raised in churches where we learned to witness by taking the book of Romans and going through the Romans road. Some of us came to Hardin and learned Continuing Witness Training where we taught you how to witness with a memorized presentation of sharing scriptures. Many of us witness by using a little tract or booklet. That is all good, but I think Luke is trying to tell us by repeating this story three times that we, just like Paul, have been called to witness—and one of the primary ways we witness is by sharing our story. We all have a story if we are a Christian.

You will notice in this story that Paul is going to do the same thing he did in Acts chapter 21. First he will talk about his life before Christ, then how he met Christ, and then about his life after Christ. Do you remember your life before you met Christ? Do you remember meeting Christ? Is your life radically different now than it used to be? See, you have a story to tell. God has called you and me to be a witness, and one of the ways we witness is by realizing our lives tell a story—not just our story but it tells God's story. Many times, God is going to bring us opportunities, whether it's a crowd of people or if it is one on one, we have a story to tell. God wants us to tell our story because our story is really His story of how He changed our lives through His Son Jesus Christ. Now, I don't want to bore you with Paul's story because you already know it, so let's just hit the highlights.

This story is going to cause Festus to interrupt Paul and tell him he has lost his mind. What in the world did Paul say that would cause a governor to think he was out of his mind? Look at verses 4–11 with me. Basically, Paul does two things. He talks about before he met Christ he was a Pharisee and then he became a persecutor of the church. Paul starts out by saying all of you here know me. You know my life story. You know I was raised in

Jerusalem. You know I was religious from my youth up and you realize I am a Pharisee. He explains how the Pharisees were the strictest group of followers of Christ. Please remember that Paul was tickled to death to be talking to Agrippa because Agrippa understands all the customs and controversies of the Jewish people. The reason I told you that family tree is because he had heard the story of his great grandfather trying to kill all the male babies in Bethlehem because he thought the Messiah had possibly been born. He knew about John the Baptist being beheaded because of his preaching. He knew how his dad had put Peter in jail and had killed James. Now he is sitting on the throne, so to speak. Paul knows he knows all the customs, but he knows all the controversies. He knows those things that as a nation they are spiritually divided over. Here, he reminds Agrippa he was a Pharisee—strict, followed the law to the letter, that he was one of those guys dedicating himself to be holy believing that if one of them kept all six hundred and thirteen of God's laws, God would usher in the Messianic Kingdom. Paul says... *That is why I am on trial. I am on trial because I was raised a Jew in the pharisaical party, very conservative. When we read our bibles, we knew that God made a promise to our fathers, and I am being tried for the hope I have in that promise.* What is that promise? That God would send a Messiah and deliver His people, but not just His people, but the people of the whole world—and Paul says I am being tried for that. Basically, Paul is saying the reason he is being tried is because the Pharisees and the Israelites (other than the Sadducees) believe in a resurrection from the dead, so why does it sound so incredible that God raised Jesus from the dead?

Paul Links Christianity to the Hope of Judaism

Do you see what Paul is doing? He is tying Christianity and following Christ to being a true Jew. He is basically saying... *You taught me in all of my schooling to look for the coming of a Messiah. I know that Messiah has come and I am being tried for it, and no one can believe that God raised Jesus from the dead! Why is it incredible that God raised Jesus from the dead? Is that something too big for our God to do?* Can you imagine how silly that sounds? Let's think about this. Our God, Israel's God, took nothing, and created everything. That's a pretty big God. If God can start

with nothing and create everything, do you think it would be too hard for Him to raise Jesus from the dead? If our God can cause water to come up from the earth and down from the heavens and destroy all of humanity except for a few people in a boat, are you telling me it is incredible for God to raise Jesus from the dead? If our God can lead a nation of people out of Egypt and when they get to a body of water called the Red Sea, cause a wind to blow to dry out the waters to where there is a freeway through the sea and march all of His people to the other side—and then, Pharaoh's army pursue them and while they are in the middle of the sea God cause the water to go back together and drown the whole army, are you telling me that God can't also raise Jesus from the dead? I know there are a few of us who have been influenced by liberal theologians, and you say it wasn't the Red Sea, it was the Sea of Reeds and it wasn't really a sea, it was a swamp. Well, Praise God that He is big enough to drown Pharaoh's army in ankle deep water! Glory hallelujah, what a God!! If our God can do that, are you telling me He can't raise Jesus from the dead? These are the things Paul is speaking to because they know these stories! About Jericho, because they believed when Israel got into the Promised Land to this big city called Jericho with this really big wall around it that God said let's not bomb it, on the seventh day let's walk around it seven times and blow a trumpet. When they blew the trumpet, the walls of Jericho fell, are you saying a God who can do that can't raise Jesus from the dead? What about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego...they were put in a furnace that had been heated up seven times hotter than it's ever been and the guys who were throwing them in there disintegrated, but Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out they didn't even smell like smoke! Daniel went into a lion's den, and the next morning he woke up. He used Leo's mane as a pillow and his tail to swat flies! Are you telling me the God who saved Daniel from the lion's den can't raise Jesus from the dead? Paul thinks this is incredible that they didn't believe this story!

But now, Paul transitions and says he didn't believe the story either. He says...*As a matter of fact, I was opposition leader to this party called the Way! I was a Pharisee and I went to the chief priests who gave me authority. I tracked them down and pulled them out of the synagogues because I knew they were infiltrating our synagogues and taking*

opportunities to speak, trying to say Jesus was the Messiah. I would have them put in prison. When it came time, I ordered some of them to die; I even cast my vote. (Casting his vote meant he threw a stone too.) I didn't just go after Jews living here in the homeland; I went to areas outside of Israel to synagogues, with authority, to arrest, persecute, torture, and kill the Way. Whoa, you think you have a past! All of us have a life before Christ.

Paul's Speaks of His Conversion

Then Paul tells them how he met Christ. He said he was on his way to Damascus to do the very thing he had just told them about. Then a light shined at noon, brighter than the noonday sun. He and all of those with him fell to the ground and he heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Now, I talked about this in Acts chapter 22, but I want to repeat it here. Please pay attention to this. Paul didn't believe he was persecuting the Messiah. He thought he was persecuting the church, and Jesus took it personally. Jesus didn't ask Paul why he was persecuting His followers; He said why are you persecuting me. I hope you understand that Jesus believes He is the head of the church and the church is His body. He believes He is one with us. Can I caution you? When you talk about the body of Christ, about the bride of Christ, you are talking about Christ. Jesus took what Paul did personally.

Then, Paul wants to know who he is talking to, and He recognizes this has to be the Lord. It's not an angel. It's not a vision. He said, "Who are you Lord?" The voice identifies Himself, "I am Jesus..." Now, when Jesus asked why Paul was persecuting Him, the first two stories don't reveal what Jesus said afterward in this story. The ESV says that Jesus said, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Get this picture. Jesus is appearing to Paul and letting him know right off the bat to be careful because it is going to be hard if he starts kicking against the goads. This word, goad, is talking about what many of us would think of as a cattle prod. It was an instrument that had a sharp point on it that farmers would use to hook an animal up to an implement for the first time, trying to break that animal. For example, if they would put it on a single plow, a lot of times that animal would rebel. It wouldn't go forward, so to get the animal to move

the farmer would take a stick with this sharp point on the end of it and prod it. Boy, when that point stuck in the animal, it would move. Then the animal would stop and it would get prodded again. Finally, the animal knew if it didn't do what it was supposed to, it was going to get a stick, a prod, and it would quit kicking. They would give into the will of the farmer. I am told that the Jews would hook their animals to their wagons and they would put the newly trained animals in the rear. There was a plate on the front of their wagons that had sharp spikes on it so that when those animals would kick, their foot would go into that spike and that would cause them to quit kicking.

We have a lot of animals on our farm. Now, you have heard me tell this before, but it is amazing what Celisa can do with those animals. She can take a bucket of feed and they will follow her all over the farm. But when we get them into the corral to work them, sometimes some of them will resist. The first ninety percent will go through just like she wants them to. If you ever get the privilege of working with us on the farm, she will hand you a cattle prod and show you how to use this stick. She will tell you that you never hit an animal of hers. If the animal won't go where you want it to go, you start hitting the ground with that stick and that will tell the animal where to go. You never raise your voice on our farm when working with animals...you just don't do that. Celisa is always at the head catcher giving the shots and things like that, and I am always out in the lot with the cows. They all do exactly what they are supposed to do until the very end, and I don't know if the ones going through there first tell the ones at the end "ooh, that hurts," but those last few just don't want to go. There are a few of them that me beating a stick on the ground just doesn't work on, so I get to that point where to change their will I just whack them right across the nose (don't tell her that)! After a couple of whacks on the nose, that cow changes its mind and it goes down to the head catcher, stands, and gets its shot.

That is what Jesus is talking about here when He says it is hard to kick against the goads. He is saying it is going to be really difficult for Paul if he resists His will. Have any of you learned that lesson yet? Have you ever tried to do it your way instead of God's way? If you belong to God, He is

not going to let you do it your way. The more you resist, the more it's going to hurt. God is telling Paul not to resist what He is getting ready to reveal to him.

Before I tell you what Jesus said, I want to remind you that in the first two stories, it appears that God told Paul to go into the city and this guy named Ananias would tell Paul what God wants him to do, and he does. But in Acts 26, Paul doesn't bring Ananias into the story. He makes this appear that while they are on the road to Damascus, Jesus speaks to him and tells him what his commission is. I read a lot of people this week who say this is a contradiction here. There is not a contradiction. God did tell Ananias what to tell him three days later. The reason Paul now talks about this as Jesus telling him instead of Ananias telling him is because Ananias was just delivering Jesus' message. It wasn't Ananias telling Saul what was going to happen; it was God telling Saul what his call was through Ananias. See, sometimes God steps into our lives through other people. They are not really speaking what they want to speak to us; many of them are speaking what God has led them to say to us in order to help us understand what God's will is for our lives. When that happens—if they are being led of God—it is as if God is telling you. You have had those moments in your life where God has used other people in your life.

Paul's Purpose

Now, here is what Jesus said to Paul. Verses 16–18 says, "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, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you 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 a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." Whoa! Did you hear this? God stepped into Paul's life (who was known as Saul) not just to save him, but to save him to use him in the life of others. I wish we could believe that for ourselves. God did not step into our lives just so we could be saved ourselves, but in being saved from sin, He could use us to witness to others so that others could have the same thing in their lives that we now have in our lives.

Here is what I think is happening here, and why Paul may have written 2 Corinthians chapter 4. That chapter is where Paul said if our gospel is veiled; it is veiled from those who are perishing. He talked about how the god of this world, Satan, has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, lest they should see the light. He talked about how God spoke light out of darkness, referring back to Genesis. Then about how God has spoken light into our lives so that we could see the face of Christ and come to understand the knowledge of who Jesus is. Paul believed that man, spiritually dead, is blind to the truth of God. Do you believe that, really? Let me just ask you this...When you run into someone who is physically blind, do you help them? Do you expect them to do what you do? You treat them differently, right? Why don't we give people who are spiritually blind the same treatment? Why are we so mad at people who don't know Christ for the things they do? Why do we want to blame them for everything? Why don't we treat them with the respect that they deserve? They don't know God! They are spiritually dead, spiritually blind, and they don't see what you see! They can't see what we see and won't see what we see until their eyes are opened. Paul believed God called him to open the eyes of people who were just like him, Jews and people who lived in other nations. How many of you believe that about yourself? That with the call to salvation comes the call to serve, a call to be commissioned, to be sent out, and to be sent out, God uses us to open people's eyes.

Our Purpose

Now, how do we open people's eyes? By sharing our story. Telling them about Jesus, and then knowing that when we tell the gospel God chooses to break into people's lives and cause the darkness to go away, and then them seeing the light and coming to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Faith comes by hearing and hearing from the Word of God! God gives us the opportunity to tell our story. In telling our story, we get to tell Jesus's story. In telling Jesus's story, other people's eyes are opened to the truth of who He is. Once they see, they can now turn from the darkness they are in to the full light of God. They can turn from Satan to God. Do we grasp that? People who don't know Jesus are following Satan! I know that nobody would willfully follow Satan, but they are blind, they don't get it,

they don't understand. That is why if we are really going to be patient with somebody, let's be patient with somebody who doesn't know Christ. If you want to be impatient with somebody, be impatient with me because I know better...but a lost world doesn't. Please tell me you get this. That is why God has called us to share our story. That is why God has called us to witness. It is so He can take our witnessing and open their eyes so that they can turn from dark to light, from Satan to God, and receive forgiveness of sins. You can be forgiven, not just of your past but forgiven of everything, anything you will ever do that is wrong! God releases you from the consequence of that and brings you into a right relationship with Him. I have had the privilege of sharing Christ with some people who didn't come to know Him until they were in their fifties, sixties, or even seventies, and they have a tainted past. The one thing they just can't get over is if they are really forgiven of all of it. Yes, you are. All of it! It is cast as far as the east is from the west. God said I remember your sin, your iniquity, no more!

A Seat at the Family Table

Catch this last part of verse 18. Not only will a sinner receive forgiveness of sins, but he receives "a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." God He gives him a seat at the family table among all of those that have already been set aside who have put their faith in Jesus. That sinner comes into the family and has a seat that is identical to ours! This is cool! Because of the way I was raised, I can't understand this but I have had person after person (people who lived outside of the gospel and have a terrible past) tell me that one of the hardest things they struggle with is not only knowing they are forgiven but also knowing they can come in here and be just like us, sit down with us, and feel like they are part of us. There is something within them that says they don't fit. You do fit! Your past doesn't cancel out your present or your future. The moment a person's eyes are opened and they turn from sin and put their faith in Jesus, they have a seat at the family table just like you and I do. Wow!

Can I say this about Hardin? I want to brag on you guys. I have been with you for a lot of years and one of the things I love most about this church is if you took a picture of all three of our services and then take a picture of

our community, you would see this church looks just like this community. We are not a colony; we are a family. We are the family of God. What I mean by this is if we walked out to the parking lot, we would see some vehicles that are paid for and there are some that may be repossessed this week—some of us live paycheck to paycheck, but some of us have never had to live that way. That is a reflection of this community. There are different skin colors, different neighborhoods. That is what the church is supposed to be. We see past the pomp, past the clothes, past the material things, and we see a brother and a sister. That bond is not built on economic social status, or race, it is built on our Father as God, our brother as Jesus. We are one! If there is one place on the planet where everybody has an equal seat and there is no difference, it is the church of Jesus Christ. You will never be able to legislate what the church has. In any government or society on the face of this planet there will be divisions, but those divisions should not be among God's people. Why? Because we have a story, and our story is, we are all the same. We were sinners who met Christ—and God didn't just save us to be a saint, He made us a saint so we could go back into the world of sinners and let them know that they too can be forgiven just like we are. They too have a seat with us at the family table, amen! Do you believe that? Have you met Christ? That is what Paul is telling—how he met Christ.

Obedient to the Heavenly Vision

Then, Paul talks about his life after Christ. You can't do what this next verse does in English, because if I turned a double negative on a paper in school I would get red marks. In the Greek, when you emphasize something you use double negatives. Paul says in verse 19, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision..." Why didn't Paul just say he obeyed the vision? No, he used a double negative to emphasize, "I was not disobedient." What was the heavenly vision? Paul was supposed to take the message of Jesus to the world, and he said that is why I am on trial. He said I am a Jew who realized God had fulfilled His promise to our people, to our fathers, and I haven't stepped outside the Jewish faith; I am living out the Jewish faith. Guys, please see this. The church does not replace Israel; the church fulfills Israel. Israel's purpose was to bring forth

the Messiah and then the Jews come to know Jesus, the Gentiles come to know Jesus, and then God build us into a church...so Paul doesn't understand. He said all he was doing was saying what the Bible said. He said the prophets and Moses all agree that the Messiah was supposed to suffer, and after He rose from the dead, He would be a light to Jews and Gentiles. He said he read his Bible and it told him what would happen, and now he recognized Jesus as the Messiah because God stepped into his life. Paul said that is why he was being tried, because he believes Jesus is the Messiah and He has fulfilled everything the Bible talks about. And that the Jews were mad because he was preaching this simple message God told him. That message is you have to repent, which means change your mind, turn to God, and you have to have a life that backs up your repentance.

Now, I have to say something here. Be careful in how you evangelize. I don't want you to ever make works part of salvation. A man is justified by faith in Christ alone by God's grace. I also don't want you to turn faith into an easy believism. Never lead someone to believe that they can just say something with their mouth, like a sinner's prayer on the front row of a church, or a Bible school, or under a tree, and believe because they asked God to save them that they are really saved. That won't fit this test. Paul said he preached to the Jews and he preached to the Gentiles that salvation is a change of life. Yes, you repent, but you know you really repented because your life changes. Your life shows it. You turn from darkness to light. You turn from Satan to God. See, in your life after Christ, there ought to be a life change. If there is not a life change, there is a really good chance you are like the devils who believe, intellectually, that there is a God but they don't have saving faith. Saving faith comes from the heart. It's a commitment, a trust in, a reliance upon what Jesus Christ did for you on the cross.

Festus Questions Paul's Sanity

Now, Festus had a fit. He yelled at Paul—you are out of your mind; all of your education has made you crazy! We have a term for this in Dexter. We call them educated idiots. You have got so much education you are a fool. Do you know what I am talking about? That is what Festus says to Paul! Paul says I'm saying the most rational thing a man can think! I will never

forget, about fifteen years ago, Celisa and I were studying at home. She said, "This story is crazy. It is unbelievable!" I said, "What?" She said, "That God would send His Son in a body just like ours, take all our sin upon Himself, go to a cross and die, be buried, and three days later rise again. That doesn't make sense!" To the natural man, it does not make sense that you could put your faith in what God did for you and not have to do something for God. It doesn't make sense. That is why Festus is telling Paul he has lost his mind. The only way you are going to believe that story is if the Holy Spirit of God opens your heart and eyes to the truth of who Jesus Christ is. When He opens up your heart to the truth, you know the most rational thing you can do is put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. That is what Paul did.

Watch what Paul does next. He tells Festus that King Agrippa knows this is true because these things weren't done in a corner. Remember, this is Agrippa II here. He had a great grandfather who tried to kill Jesus because he thought he might be the Messiah. Another family member had John the Baptist beheaded. Another family member did not want the church preaching about a resurrected Messiah so he had Peter put in prison and killed James. This is what Paul is alluding to when he says it wasn't done in a corner—Agrippa and his family knew this was true, even though he was from the Esau side of the family, not the Jacob side. Then, Paul turned to Agrippa and said, "Do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." Agrippa said, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" Now...erase out of your mind all those sermons you have heard about this and preachers telling you that Paul almost persuaded Agrippa to be a Christian. That is not what this is talking about. You were misled. Agrippa is not saying he has thought about what Paul has said and he almost persuaded to become a Christian. No, Agrippa is smart and he understands what Paul is doing. Paul is saying if you have a Jewish background, you know about the coming Messiah the prophets and Moses talked about who is supposed to die, be buried, rise again, and be a light to all the nations. So, if you believe the prophets, then you should believe in Jesus. Do you see that connection? Agrippa got it and he says, in such a short time, based on my background, are you trying to persuade me that I should be a Christian? I love what Paul said back! He said...Whether I have a short time

or a long time, I don't want just you, I want everyone in here who hears me to be as I am, a follower of Christ—but I hope you don't have to bear these chains.

Please hear me. Paul was talking to Agrippa, but his mind wasn't just focused on Agrippa; he wanted everybody who heard his story to know Christ. Don't just pick out a few. Don't just want your children to know Christ; want somebody else's children to know Christ. Don't just want your boss to know Christ; want everyone at your work to know Christ. Don't just want your husband to know Christ...do you get it? Recognize that some people just have a short window. Don't blow it! With some people you will have a longer window, but don't let so much time pass that you don't ever tell them your story. Your story is a God story, and God has called us to witness. Let's not be disobedient to the heavenly vision.