

The Destination of Those Who Almost Believed

Acts 26

Paul has been imprisoned for more than 2 years without formal charges against him and now is given audience of King Agrippa and Agrippa's sister Bernice.

Paul previously made his defense before Felix and then Festus who were both Roman magistrates but were unfamiliar with the customs and opinions of the Jews and were therefore were unqualified to judge a matter concerning Jewish customs and doctrines.

But now Paul finds himself giving his defense before King Agrippa who was himself a proselyte to Judaism as well as an avid student of the Old Testament scriptures.

Acts 26 (NKJV) — 1 Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You are permitted to speak for yourself.” So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: **2** “I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, **3** especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently.

Paul understood that Agrippa should be able to better appreciate his defense and motives. Paul considers this opportunity to share not only his defense **but also his testimony as fortunate**, even though he understood that his appearance before Agrippa was really outside of any legal process. But **even if the effort in giving a defense would not free him**, it would be a fulfilment of the words of Jesus.

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Mark 13:9 (NLT) — 9 “When these things begin to happen, watch out! You will be handed over to the local councils and beaten in the synagogues. You will stand trial before governors and kings because you are my followers. **But this will be your opportunity to tell them about me.**

Paul himself taught Timothy to be ready in season and out of season to preach the Word.

Again, this is not really a legal court hearing against Paul. In reality there aren't yet any charges brought against Paul as Neither Felix nor Festus found any violations against Roman Law concerning Paul's case. At this point Felix himself still remains at a loss as to what charges to write up against Paul concerning his appeal to Caesar.

But all that aside, the reality is that Paul isn't really the one on trial. Yes, it is Paul who is being attained and having the defense. **But that is all just a formality. It is really the gospel that is on trial.** Jesus's very words **“you will stand trial because you are my followers”** rings so true for Paul's situation.

Paul begins his defense by speaking of his life as a Jew even from his youth.

4 “My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. **5** They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

Paul again begins to build his defense on the fact that **he is not on trial** as one who was living in opposition to the Laws and customs of Judaism. Pointing to the manner in which he previously lived in adherence to the Law as a Pharisee. Thereby building the defense on his own character, in that having lived as the strictest of the Jews prior to his conversion, **he would not now live in opposition of what was right before God as a Christian.**

6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. 7 To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. For this hope’s sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews.

Paul had previously assured Felix that his beliefs as a Christian **were not in opposition** to what was taught by the law or the prophets.

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Acts 24:14–15 (NLT) — 14 “But I admit that I follow the Way, which they call a cult. **I worship the God of our ancestors, and I firmly believe the Jewish law and everything written in the prophets. 15 I have the same hope in God that these men have, that he will raise both the righteous and the unrighteous.**

So here as Paul speaks before Agrippa, He continues to point out that his **hope of the resurrection** was the very same hope that the patriarchs had. **And he assures Agrippa that this hope of the resurrection is ultimately the reason for him being in chains.**

This hope and expectation of the resurrection was not a concept brought about by Christianity. The resurrection was spoken and taught of by the patriarchs themselves.

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Psalms 71:20 (NLT) — 20 You have allowed me to suffer much hardship, but you will restore me to life again and lift me up from the depths of the earth.

The resurrection was the theme of the promise of eternal life throughout the Bible.

When Jesus spoke to Martha after her brother Lazarus died. Mary’s answer to Jesus revealed that she held to and understood the hope of the resurrection.

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John 11:23–24 (NKJV) — 23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” **24** Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

After being 4 days in the grave, Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave. **But that was resuscitation** not the resurrection.

Several people experienced being brought back to life in the bible, but again these are all a case of resuscitation.

The **resurrection** is a transformation into a new body, **not merely a re-establishment of life within the previous body.**

What hope would there be in coming back again in these **worn out, sin filled, broken down bodies** only to once more face death someday.

The resurrection is **being raised in a body that is made for heaven.** A body that will never again **experience death or pain.** As a side note: Being a doctor will be a sorry occupation in heaven. You're going to be awful bored. **I am just saying!**

Many years before his death, Billy Graham said there will come a day when they will say Billy Graham is dead, don't believe it for a moment because on that day, **I will be more alive then ever!**

Now Billy Graham as well as every other believer who has gone home before us, still await the bodily resurrection that we will all experience together on that glorious day.

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1 Corinthians 15:50–54 (NLT) — 50 What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever. **51** But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! **52** It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed.

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53 For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies. **54** Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: "Death is swallowed up in victory.

Paul presents a question.

8 Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?

Paul had shared with Felix that **there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.**

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Hebrews 9:27 (NKJV) — 27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,

If judgment comes after death, then the wicked must be resurrected in order to stand judgment.

We will all experience a resurrection, but for those who reject Jesus as their Lord and savior, it will be a resurrection resulting in being condemned to eternal punishment.

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Daniel 12:2 (NKJV) — 2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.

But for us who put in faith in Jesus Christ, we will experience the resurrection to eternal life not eternal contempt.

Ask yourself this morning, which resurrection are you going to experience?

9 “Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. **10** This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. **11** And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities. **12** “While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, **13** at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. **14** And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ **15** So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

For the 3rd time within the book of Acts, the details of Pauls persecution against the church and Paul’s encounter with Jesus on the Damascus are recorded.

He says **“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.** And then goes into detail about how he in fact did live contrary to Jesus through his pursuit and persecution of the church.

Paul had already presented the fact of his hope in the resurrection itself, but now he points not just to the resurrection itself, **but now to his encounter with the resurrected Savior.**

One detail shared in vs. 14 that was not mentioned in the 2 earlier accounts of this encounter, was the fact that in the presence of the glorified Lord, **all those present** on the road to Damascus **were knocked to the ground.** **Not just Paul.** This was not just a vision that Paul experienced but the glorified Jesus was present among them all, **and in His presence, no one was able to stand.**

This just reminds me that a day is coming when the Bible says every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord of all.

But for those who **wait until that day, before they confess that Jesus is Lord, it will be too late.** They will have already rejected the free gift of salvation that God gives to those who put their trust in Jesus.

16 But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. **17** I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, **18** to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

Paul shares not only the facts about his encounter with the risen Lord, but the role for which he was commissioned. Pointing out that he was commissioned to both the Jew and the Gentiles.

If you wonder what is the matter with humanity today, why in the world people are acting the way they are and doing to the things they do? Understand that it is because **they are lost, broken and fragmented** and in a **state of spiritual blindness, living lives controlled and influenced by Satan.**

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Romans 1:21 (NKJV) — 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, **but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.**

But in case were tempted to start looking at the world through our self-righteous goggles, we must remember that we were all once just as lost as the world around us. I am always reminded that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. No one comes deserving salvation. We are all guilty as sinners. The Bible is very clear that there is not one righteous outside of Jesus Christ.

The only solution is Jesus!

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Ephesians 2:1–5 (NKJV) — 1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, **2** in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, **3** among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. **4** But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, **5** even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Jesus told Paul that He was sending him out into a world that was blind and living in darkness in order that their **spiritual eyes could be opened through the gospel** and they could **have their sins forgiven** and **be delivered from the control of Satan.**

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Two thousand years later we can see the truth of Jesus' words. How accurately he analyzes the problem! Their blind. And then the Lord Jesus analyzes why men are blind. "Because," he says, "they are under the power of Satan." Behind the darkness is the great enemy of mankind, who is twisting and distorting the thinking of men, clouding their eyes, and spreading abroad widespread delusions. He has loosed into this world a great flood of lying propaganda. And everywhere today men and women have believed these delusions and lies.

Ray Stedman

But Jesus came to deliver mankind from that darkness and breaking the control of the enemy from their lives. He came to set the captives free. **Understand that God wants to open the eyes of the lost, wash their sins away and give them an inheritance in His kingdom. He made this possible for every single person by sending His own Son to die on the Cross.**

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Colossians 1:13–14 (NKJV) — 13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, **14** in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

19 "Therefore, King Agrippa, **I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20** but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. **21** For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.

I was not disobedient! I declared to the Jews and to the Gentiles; **repent, turn to God and do works appropriate to repentance** or as **TLB and prove their repentance by doing good deeds.**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that when you preach the forgiveness of sin without requiring repentance you are preaching a cheap version of God's Grace.

Concerning the connection between repentance and the new life of a believer:

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"The change is radical, both inwardly and outwardly; mind and judgment, will and affections, behavior and lifestyle, motives and purposes, are all involved. Repenting means starting to live a new life."

J.I. Packer

Jesus himself did not preach a gospel that was void of requiring repentance.

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Mark 1:15 (NKJV) — 15 and saying, “**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.**”

When we truly repent, **we turn from the power of Satan to God.** In our fallen sinful state, we were walking away from God. **But repentance means to turning to God.**

How could we possibly believe that we have a relationship with Jesus if we remain walking away from Him?

22 Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—**23** that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.” **24** Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!” **25** But he said, “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. **26** For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. **27** King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.”

Paul explains that the very message that he has been sharing is that Jesus came and suffered on the Cross, was raised from the grave, and is now the **Light unto the World** as the glorified Savior. But Paul explains that because he also shared this message with the Gentiles as well as the Jews, is the reason he was seized in the first place.

Festus then proves the truth of the scripture **concerning the blindness of those perishing.**

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1 Corinthians 1:18 (NKJV) — 18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Festus yell out, “**Paul you are beside yourself**”. It all sounded ridiculous to Festus.

But Paul doesn’t allow Festus’ attack to rattle his focus but merely confirms that he is speaking both **truth and reason** turning his attention back to Agrippa, affirming that he is certain that the King knows these things.

And then Paul make a very bold move and puts King Agrippa on the spot, pinning him down with the question as to whether he believes the prophets or not.

Put yourself in King Agrippa’s shoes for a moment. He shows up with all his royal prestige to hear Pauls defense, more out of curiosity than anything else.

But now as an avid student of the scriptures, Agrippa is pinned to the wall by Paul asking him to give an account concerning both the historical facts about Jesus and the teaching of the prophets. Paul presses

him with the question, **do you believe the prophets?** Even boldly confirming to him, **“I know you believe”**.

28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.” **29** And Paul said, “I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.” **30** When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them; **31** and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, “This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains.” **32** Then Agrippa said to Festus, “This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

The Greek is a little obscure concerning Agrippa’s reply to Paul. Therefore, the various translations interpret the reply a little differently. The NKJV, KJV, and NLT make it seem as if Agrippa answer reveals that he is just on the edge of believing. As if he was telling Paul, man you almost got me.

But many of the other translations present Agrippa’s answer more **as a sarcastic question as to whether Paul really thought he could truly convince Agrippa so easily or quickly to become a Christian.**

I am not certain what Agrippa meant by his reply. But the fact is, **it doesn’t matter.** Whether Agrippa just fell short of surrendering to Christ or it was the furthest thing from His mind. **His destination was going to be the same.**

Understand, **there isn’t going to be a single person in heaven, who was almost saved.** Close only counts for Horse shoes and hand grenades but not for redemption.

Hell is going to be full of people who fell short of completely surrendering their life to Jesus. There are a lot of people **who will think about it and they might even be convinced of its necessity.** Yet they themselves will fail to surrender to the truth of the gospel. Without fully surrendering, there is no salvation.

I ask you a very directed pointed question this morning. Do you believe all that the scriptures say about Jesus. Do you believe that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life and the only way to heaven?

Do you believe there is going to be a Resurrection of the Just and the Un-Just? The only way to be Justified is through Jesus Christ!

Slide 17

Acts 4:12 (NKJV) — 12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Do you believe this? **No pressure, but all eternity is at stake!**

