

How Will We Respond?

Acts: The Spirit Moving / Acts 26:19-32 / September 27, 2026

Introduction:

This morning, we come to the conclusion of Paul's climactic witness before Agrippa. Last week, we covered verses 1-18 where Paul stood before two powerful men and, rather than focusing on proving his innocence, he boldly proclaimed the full hope of God in the gospel. This week, that focus of the remainder of Paul's witness will fall on what is done with the gospel Paul proclaims. Our passage has three movements: Paul's response to Christ, his proclamation God's power in the gospel, and Festus and Agrippa's response to Christ. All witness to Christ calls for a response, and these movements contrast Paul with Festus and Agrippa to guide our hearts to consider how we will respond to the Christ he proclaims. The first movement is found in verses 19-21, where,

Paul Shares His Response of Faith

Pay attention to how Paul transitions in verse 19. Look at verses 19-21, "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me." Therefore, and his reference back to the heavenly vision show Paul is bringing all that transpired to its appropriate conclusion, which Paul says was his faith and obedience. He is essentially saying, "because I stood before the risen and glorified Jesus, know He had authority to command my life, I obeyed." Then, he summarizes the extent of his obedience. Beginning where he was in Damascus, then traveling back to Jerusalem and all throughout Judea, Paul called Jews and Gentiles everywhere to respond like him by repenting, turning to God, and walking in obedience to the commands of Jesus. Paul didn't say, "wow that was cool." Or "thank God I am saved," and simply move on with his life. He immediately and radically shaped his life around Jesus and His commands. And this, he says, was the reason for the Jews seized him and tried to kill him. In this short, yet powerful summary, Paul stands as model of faith in the risen Christ. Church, Jesus is a traveling who knocks on your door to ask you if you what to consider buying his product. He is the risen Lord of all, with the authority to command our lives. And His call on your life is a call to truly and fully follow Him. The next movement is found in verses 22-23, where,

Paul Proclaims the Power of God in the Gospel

Follow the focus of Paul as he continues. Look at verses 22-23, "To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles." First, he declares God has helped him fulfill his calling by protecting him and empowering his witness. This, he says, is the impetus for him standing there to testify to people "small and great." His boldness comes from his awareness of God's sustaining grace. Then, he says he shared only what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass. The Old Testament was often summed up as the Law, or Law of Moses, and the Prophets. So, Paul is saying he is testifying to the resounding truth of all Scripture. And what was that? The Christ would suffer. The Christ would be the first to rise from the dead and enter glory. And the Christ would proclaim light to all peoples. The plan of God from eternity past, and prophesied throughout the Scriptures, was for light to dawn on all people through the death and resurrection of His Christ. In Luke 24:44-47, when sorrowful over Jesus' death, some disciples are met by Jesus on the road to Emmaus, and He opened their minds to see how, "the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms" wrote "that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations." This is the central claim of the gospel. And note Paul and Jesus' words, "the Christ must, or should," suffer and rise. The necessary suffering and resurrection of Jesus are essential to the gospel message. Why? In 1 Corinthians 1:18, Paul says the word of the cross is the power of God to those who are being saved.

Paul does not leave his witness void of the power of God in the gospel but proclaims it boldly before all knowing God is with him. This brings us to the final movement in verses 24-32, where,

Festus and Agrippa Resist in Unbelief

Before Paul can finish his witness, he is interrupted. Look at verses 24-26, “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.’” Festus had enough. The idea of a suffering and resurrected savior of all people was the pinnacle of insanity, so he concludes Paul’s great learning must have driven him mad. Richard Longenecker comments, “Down through the ages Festus’s response has been echoed by men and women too trapped by the natural to be open to the supernatural, too confined by the ‘practical’ to care about life everlasting” (Richard Longenecker, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, p. 554). Nothing is new under the sun. Yet, Paul not only insists he is not out of his mind, but that Agrippa’s knowledge of the prophets and the public nature of Jesus death and resurrection prove Paul’s words are full of truth and common sense. Continue in verses 27-28 where Paul turns his attention to Agrippa, “‘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?’” In effect, Paul is indicating belief in Jesus should be the inevitable result of believing the prophets. Agrippa, though, won’t be cornered by Paul into responding. So, he refuses to answer and deflects by pridefully asking if Paul really thinks he could persuade him to become a Christian so quickly. Pay attention to Paul’s rebuttal in verse 29, “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.’” Note Paul’s heart in this response. “I would to God,” might be more helpfully translated “I wish to God” or “I pray to God.” And what is his plea? Whether it happened quickly or took much longer, Paul desired for Agrippa and everyone present to become like him, except for the chains. He longed for everyone to respond to Christ like him in faith and obedience. Sadly, our passage doesn’t end in belief. Look at verses 30-32, “Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, ‘This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.’ And Agrippa said to Festus, ‘This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.’” Luke concludes with a private conversation where Paul’s innocence is declared again, yet he is not freed because of his appeal to Caesar. There’s no indication of repentance and turning from Festus, Agrippa, or Bernice. Only a reminder of how Festus’ self-preservation led to Paul’s appeal. Consider these movements, as Paul’s proclamation of the power of God is sandwiched between his response of faith and Festus and Agrippa’s resistance in unbelief. This moves us to consider how we will respond and beckons us to become like Paul. So, I want to close by asking, what does it look like to become like Paul? First,

1) We Humbly Believe and Obey the Risen Christ

In 1 Corinthians 1:18, Paul says, “the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Don’t miss the power of God in the gospel, for it lies in the truths of the suffering and resurrection Christ. Don’t consider these truths to be folly like Festus. Don’t resist the implications of them on your life like Agrippa. Ponder the truths of the suffering and risen Christ. Hear Christ proclaiming light and calling you to repent and turn to God for forgiveness. Light, John 1 says the darkness will not overcome. Light, Jesus says in John 8:12 is the light of life that comes to all who follow Him. As Kent Hughes says well, “True sanity lies with the Pauls of this world—those who build their lives on the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is mad to live, as the majority does, as though ultimate reality resides in what we can see, taste, and touch” (R Kent Hughes, *Acts—The Church Afire*, p. 328). Church, Paul’s final words point to the heart of God. Peter tells us in 2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach

repentance.” See Paul’s example of faith and hear him calling you to repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with repentance. This is the way to true life. Obedience to Christ as a lifelong endeavor. But make no mistake about how that obedience works. Jesus makes it abundantly clear those deeds cannot come from our own strength. In John 15:4-5, Jesus says, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” Obedience is the fruit of connection to Christ. Consider the vineyards around us. No branch produces grapes when detached from the vine. For any branch to bear fruit, it needs nutrients that come from the vine. Likewise, for any of us to perform deeds in keeping with repentance, we need to be firmly connected to Jesus Christ. This is why we must turn to Christ, and keep turning to Him, striving to hear Him in His Word and communing with Him through prayer, worship, and fellowship with His body. It is as we abide in Christ, that we bear much fruit. So, humbly come to the risen Christ in faith, so that you can obey His commands and walk in the light of true life. Second, becoming like Paul means,

2) We Boldly Witness and Pray for God’s Power to Move

Consider the steady, bold, and faithful witness of Paul. He immediately followed Christ’s call to be a witness, telling everyone he could about the suffering and risen Christ. Then, rather than seeking to prove his innocence, he declared the suffering and risen Christ as the hope of God. He trusted God’s power was with him. And consider his final words again in verse 29, “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.’” Family, let this ring in our hearts today. As Tony Merida comments, “Paul’s statement reflects the heart of one interceding for the lost audience. The man had been beaten and persecuted by Jews and ridiculed by the Romans, but he still wanted people to know the Savior! Once again Paul gives us a model for witnessing to unbelievers—not only in words but also in heart” (Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts*, pp. 375-376). Do we long for people to know the hope of God in the gospel like this? Of course we want to persuade them to follow Jesus. We shouldn’t be ashamed of that. Christ is their only hope. But let’s remember, we are not persuading them to adopt our political ideology or culturally specific way of life. We are persuading them to know the God who came to seek and save the lost. Can we say, “whether short or long”, we pray for all to become like we are? Even those whose lifestyle may offend us? The story of Rosaria Butterfield is a beautiful example of this. Butterfield was a lesbian feminist and professor of English and Women’s Studies at Syracuse University. She was also an outspoken critic of Christians, wondering why they hated people like her until she met Ken Smith, a presbyterian pastor, who wrote a letter in response to her article she described as “the kindest, most intelligent, and most intriguing letter of opposition I’ve ever received.” That letter, and a subsequent dinner invite with his wife Floy, turned into a two-year dialogue and friendship over hundreds of meals until her eyes were opened to the glory of Jesus Christ. Butterfield speaks of how their care for her as a person, genuine hope in the gospel, lack of fear in spending time with her, and lack of mocking her showed the love of Christ and caused her to read Scripture in a different light. How did the Smith’s approach this relationship? In a 2021 interview with the C.S. Lewis Institute, Ken says, “With Rosaria we were simply praying for the hearing. And one day she showed up at church. And we never invite people to church, because they expect that. We invite people to Christ. We invite people to our home.” (<https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/an-unlikely-friendship/>). Prayer and a desire for her to know Christ was their approach. There is much more to the story which you can learn from her book “The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert,” and the interview. Their story speaks to what a witness like Paul can look like today. Could your witness look like this? Oh family, set your heart on becoming like Paul, being bold in your witness and praying for God’s power to move.

Conclusion:

As the worship team comes for our time of response, take some time today to ask how God is calling you to become like Paul. Maybe you need to stop resisting the authority of Christ, see His glory in the cross and resurrection, and turn to God for salvation today. Perhaps you need to turn your eyes upon Jesus and reconnect with the vine to find the help you need to obey His commands. Maybe you need to believe God's power can reach the heart of that person you have been sharing the gospel with and press into the patient and prayerful witness of Paul. Or maybe you need to lean into Christ's call to make disciples of all nations for the first time. Whatever the Lord may be pressing on your heart, the question today isn't whether we will respond. It is, how will we respond? Let's pray as we move into this time together.