

PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE KING AGRIPPA

Acts 26:1-18

Introduction. Acts 26:1.

1. Paul arraigned before the court. Acts 26:1.

2. Festus had stated the case. Acts 25:24-27.

3. Agrippa had assumed the presidency of the assembly.

Agrippa's great grandfather was the one who had innocent children murdered in the days of Jesus. His grandfather had murdered John the Baptist. His father had murdered the Apostle James. Each of these rulers had died soon after his atrocious deed. Is it any wonder that when the cause of Christianity was laid in the hands of Agrippa that he trembled and quaked? The struggle between duty and popularity was terrific. The battle between pride and justice was merciless. The destinies of his family had linked him with these Christians in an unfavorable way.

(1) Agrippa was face to face with destiny.

He stood face to face with the world's foremost preacher, and he had an opportunity to learn of Jesus from the highest authority. This privilege was a coveted thing, one that thousands would have welcomed. If Agrippa did not use that opportunity he would have more to answer for because of it. Unusual opportunities bring unusual responsibilities. God expects more of people who know than He does of people who do not.

Agrippa faced his destiny that day. Within the next few minutes he would decide for or against eternal life. A man's hesitation—even for a moment—may mean the difference between his success and failure. It may be the dividing line between life and death. Any man who faces such an hour, and realizes the importance of it, will tremble. Agrippa was very near the kingdom of God. He was almost to the deciding point. He was convinced, but not convicted.

(2) Agrippa sidestepped destiny.

He confessed that he was badly disturbed about his soul, but it ended with that. He was at the very gate of heaven, and he turned away without entering. Victory was within his grasp, but he dashed it to the ground, and it was lost for ever. To be almost saved is to be wholly lost. No man is half saved and half lost. He is wholly lost or wholly saved.

4. Agrippa granted Paul permission to speak for himself. Acts 26:1.

5. Paul made his memorable defense. Acts 26:1.

Not so much to prove his innocence, as to explain the reason for his becoming a Christian and preaching the gospel. The story of his conversion was always Paul's apologetic for Christianity.

I. The Address. Acts 26:2-23.

1. His opening remarks. Acts 26:2-3.

(1) His happy approach to the king. Acts 26:2.

What a Christian gentleman Paul was, dignified, gentle, and courteous! Paul was happy to bear witness for his Lord and the Gospel to the king.

(2) His tribute to the king. Acts 26:3.

He expressed his delight in the opportunity of speaking to one who was so fully acquainted with Jewish hopes, customs, and controversies. And how conclusive was his testimony, based as it always was on facts.

2. His early life reviewed. Acts 26:4-11.

(1) His manner of life. Acts 26:4.

a. Born in Tarsus.

b. Educated in Jerusalem.

"My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews." Paul is here referring to his behavior from the time of his youth. It was such that he could refer to it with pride.

(2) His religion. Acts 26:5.

He had lived conscientiously as a Pharisee. The religion of the Pharisees made heavy demands upon its adherents. "I lived a Pharisee." "Regardless of its strictness and severity, I lived the life." While others were professing, Paul was performing. I like those words, "I lived the life of the religion I professed." How many can say as much today?

The Christian religion is a voluntary matter. There is no force or compulsion in it. It is a cheerful religion. Some religions make people melancholy, but Christianity does not do so. The happiest people in the world are real Christians. It is also a personal religion. None can be Christians by proxy. Being a Christian is a matter of personal relationship to Christ.

(3) His endorsement of the promise to the fathers. Acts 26:6.

He was still holding to that promise of God.

(4) His expectance of the fulfillment of that promise. Acts 26:7.

This hope had become the basis for the accusation against him.

(5) His faith in the resurrection. Acts 26:8.

Twice Paul had been before Roman judges, and they were men who knew little or nothing of the Jewish religion and hope. At last he had a chance to tell his story to Agrippa, a Jew of expert knowledge of Jewish history and religion. This man would surely hear him with an understanding and sympathetic heart. At least theoretically, he believed in the resurrection of the dead.

Paul emphasized the fact that the resurrection of the body is not incredible. What kind of a God do we have if He can do no more than men can do? If He could give life the first time, can He not give it the second time? The resurrection is incredible if God is left out. The whole history of Israel was a testimony to the effect that God can bring life from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was an evident fact. There was the empty grave, the absence of the body, and the testimony of many witnesses who saw Him. He appeared in person to as many as five hundred at one time. Moreover, the Jews could not produce His body, even though they claimed they had stolen it. If they had produced it, they could have hushed every claim of the Christians, but they could not do it.

(6) His former opposition to the name of Jesus. Acts 26:9.

He had done many things contrary to the name of Jesus. In doing so, he had acted sincerely and conscientiously. We may be sincere and conscientious without being right. Paul blames his conscience for his early wickedness in persecuting Christians, and without doubt that was responsible for it. He had been mistaught and misguided in his early training, and had been filled with wrong information and a wrong spirit.

a. A perverted conscience.

(a) Conscience is not always right.

This fact is shown by thousands today, who have so seared their consciences that they no longer rebel at evil deeds. They can even approve of wickedness and laugh at the most heinous sins.

(b) Conscience may be a dangerous guide.

It may see things through colored glasses and measure them by imperfect standards.

(c) Conscience is not concerned with methods, but rather with ends to be gained. Paul thought he was doing right in persecuting Christians. His purpose was to serve God, which was right, but his method of doing it was wrong because he killed the worshippers of God in a

sincere effort to serve God. He was sincere, but sincerity alone was not enough. One may be sincere, and yet be wrong.

b. A converted conscience.

(a) Paul's conscience was changed immediately when he met the Lord. He asked the Lord what He wanted him to do. He had found a new Master.

(b) The first step in conversion is an awakened conscience. When one is awakened, he stands at the crossroads of life. His destiny is in the balance.

(c) Decision is the next step an awakened conscience must take. In Paul's former life conscience had been his Master, but now a new monarch is on the throne, One who is higher than conscience. He had known no higher rule than to obey conscience, but now he must make conscience obey his Lord and Master.

(7) His authority for endeavoring to destroy Christianity. Acts 26:10.

This authority was obtained from the chief priests.

(8) His persecution of believers. Acts 26:10-11.

a. He shut up some in prisons.

b. He voted their death.

"I gave my voice"—literally, "I cast my pebble," that is, my vote, "against them." In ancient courts the accused was condemned by black pebbles, and acquitted by white ones. This phrase was sometimes used in the sense of giving assent or approving.

c. He punished them in synagogues.

This happened in all the synagogues in Jerusalem and the various places in Judea where he went. Scourging was the customary form of punishment inflicted in the synagogues.

d. He compelled them to renounce their faith.

That is, he endeavored to force them to rail at Christ and the Gospel.

3. His experience of conversion. Acts 26:12-18.

(1) While on his journey to Damascus. Acts 26:12.

He was on a mission of strenuous opposition to Jesus. He was carrying out his sincere conviction.

(2) At mid-day, he saw the vision of light from heaven. Acts 26:13.

It was a supernatural light, brighter even than the noon-day sun.

(3) His call from the Lord. Acts 26:14.

"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" "It is hard for thee to kick against the goads." The figure is that of an ox being pricked by a goad, then ignorantly kicking back and receiving another wound. It is a fruitless resistance to a superior power. So, it is implied, it had been with Paul. God had been dealing with him, ever since he had met with Stephen, when he was baffled by him in argument. His conscience had been touched, and his heart troubled. But he recoiled from the true light. In prejudice he had rushed madly on, and tried to crush the promptings of the Spirit and the misgivings of his soul. This certainly teaches that it is both difficult and dangerous to resist God.

(4) His conversion. Acts 26:15.

The change was radical and complete, wrought not by the will of man but by the will of God.

(5) His commission from the Lord. Acts 26:16.

When Christ appears to us, it is for a purpose. In Paul's case, the Lord's purpose was "to appoint him a minister and a witness." He was sent to be a witness for the Lord, which implies a personal knowledge. One cannot bear testimony unless he knows some fact first-hand. Paul had an experience to tell, and the world needed his experience.

He was sent to be a minister to the Lord, which implies service. You can

worship God without serving, but you cannot serve God without worshipping Him. Men cannot minister to the Lord without ministering to men.

(6) His deliverance. Acts 26:17.

He was to be delivered from the anger of the people and from sin. He was to be delivered from the Gentiles who would not persecute him, but would ignore him. He was assured a hearing among them.

(7) His message of salvation. Acts 26:18.

All the elements of the Gospel are contained in this verse. There is first the condition of man by nature. Eyes, which are blind, in darkness, under the power of Satan. The object of Paul's ministry was "to open their eyes that they might turn from darkness to light." By opening the eyes of sin-blinded men and turning them from the power of Satan unto God, they would receive the forgiveness of sins and become the heirs of God. In this verse we have: illumination, conversion, emancipation, and sanctification.