

Acts 25:13-26 - John Karmelich

1. My title for this section of the Bible is "Paul's last stand". It is the last recorded sermon of Paul to someone familiar with Jewish laws and customs. Paul's letters recorded just how badly Paul wanted to win over the Jewish nation for Christianity. This was his final chance. Although this was a Roman trial, the guest-of-honor was very familiar with Jewish customs, and had rule over appointing the Jewish High Priest.
 - a) This section is Paul's trial in front of King Agrippa. He is otherwise known as King Herod Agrippa II.
 - b) Many commentators call Paul's sermon in Chapter 26 the "high point" of Paul's speeches. Like the "Mars Hill" speech in Athens, Greece in Acts 17, it is brilliant in its points, but it fails to convert anybody.
 - c) One has to ask the question: Why did Luke include all these details about Paul's trial in front of King (Herod) Agrippa? More verses are dedicated to this speech than any other in Paul's trials in front of Jewish and Roman audiences.
 - i) This trial was held publicly in a large amphitheater. Luke may have been in the audience to record more of the details.
 - ii) I believe part of the answer, like Paul's Mars Hill speech is to show that brilliant speeches alone can't win people for Christ.
 - a) God called Paul to preach to the Gentiles, and not the Jews. Paul's heart was to win over his fellow Jews. Despite its clear Gospel message, the speech fails to win any converts.
2. Another issue we are seeing here is the fulfillment of a promise made to Paul through Ananias. God said to Ananias ""the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel." (Acts 9:15 NIV)
 - a) Notice that this prophecy says 3 things about Paul. It says Paul will be God's witness before 1) Gentiles, 2) "their kings" (a.k.a. Roman appointed leaders") and 3) The People of Israel.
 - i) What the prediction does not say is how successful Paul would be. Now that we are close to wrapping up Acts, we see that Paul was very successful in the conversion of the Gentiles, but has accomplished very little in converting of "kings" or even the "people of Israel". So the natural question arises: "Why would God say Paul is "my chosen instrument" to be his witness for these groups, but there is no major success in his conversion?
 - a) The answer is that God wants to give as many people as possible an opportunity to hear the Gospel message. That same principal applies today. God does not give us "points" for every person we convert. That is God's business, not ours. Ours is just to be a witness.
 - b) This same question and pattern could be asked of most, if not all the prophets in the Old Testament. God constantly sent prophets to Israel, and for the most part, were rejected.
 - c) The same thing is happening here. God is giving people every chance to hear the gospel message and repent. The reason is that people can't claim "ignorance" on judgement day.
 - (1) I know what you're thinking. Yes there are people who will never hear the Gospel. God judges all people fairly. Romans 1 discusses the issue of those who never hear the Gospel message!

- ii) Again, back to the question of "Why does God bother to have people like Paul give the Gospel, when God knows in advance they will not listen?"
 - a) I also believe the bigger reason, is that these events are recorded for our learning. God predicted over and over again how the people refused to hear the message of his prophets. You can read in many places where the nation of Israel was judged severely for their rejection.
 - b) The same holds true today. While Paul's message is being rejected by his audience, that same message is being accepted by those who read the Bible and those who hear the message. I think the farthest thing from Paul's mind was that his sermons were going to be recorded in history for millions of people to read and learn about Jesus.
 - (1) Paul probably thought of himself as a failure at this point for the Jewish and Roman leaders who would not believe his message. Yet these same messages are loved by millions of people over the past 2,000 years.
 - (2) The point is we don't know how God is going to use us! What we may see as rejection, God has greater plans.
 - iii) OK, a lot of verses today. I better get going! ☺
- 3. Chapter 25, Verse 13: A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus.
 - a) In this verse we get introduced to King Agrippa. His full name in history is King Herod Agrippa II.
 - i) This is the family that killed the babies in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth. His grandfather had John the Baptist killed. When Jesus stood trial in front of that Herod, Jesus wouldn't even say a word (Luke 23:9). "This" Herod's father had James the apostle (Apostle-John's brother) killed earlier in Acts. So, this guy does not exactly come from a great family heritage!
 - ii) His wife Bernice is the sister of Druscilla, the wife of Felix from Chapter 24. Bernice is also a half-sister of Agrippa. Therefore, Agrippa is having a martial relationship with his half sister. Like Felix and Druscilla, the couple of Agrippa and Bernice were known then and now for their immorality. To me, any guy who would marry his half-sister is a little strange to begin with! ☺
 - iii) Agrippa was a "ceremonial king" with limited power in the Roman Empire. He was an Edomite, which is a cousin-tribe to the Israelites (The descendants of Esau). His main power was over the High Priests in Israel. He is the last of the Herod Dynasty.
 - a) An interesting side note in history is that his wife Bernice eventually marries a Roman General Titus, who was responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Millions of people were killed.
 - b) In the Roman Government Agrippa was considered an expert in the Jewish religion and was politically consulted on this issue. Most of the local Jews also knew that Rome looked to Agrippa as a consultant. Therefore, Paul's opportunity to preach Jesus to Agrippa was a gigantic opportunity. If Agrippa was converted, it would lead a greater acceptance of Christianity in Jerusalem as well as Rome. This was a major opportunity for Paul.
 - c) Remember that Festus is the "new governor" in town. Agrippa, who is a ceremonial king with limited power, comes down to pay his respect.

4. Verse 14: Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. He said: "There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner. ¹⁵ When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and elders of the Jews brought charges against him and asked that he be condemned. ¹⁶ "I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over any man before he has faced his accusers and has had an opportunity to defend himself against their charges. ¹⁷ When they came here with me, I did not delay the case, but convened the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in. ¹⁸ When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. ¹⁹ Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive. ²⁰ I was at a loss how to investigate such matters; so I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. ²¹ When Paul made his appeal to be held over for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him held until I could send him to Caesar."
- a) OK, we've got a lot of verses here. Let me re-cap the situation for you.
 - b) Agrippa comes to Caesarea to meet the new Roman appointed Governor Festus. I can see these two guys talking politics for a few days. Agrippa gives Festus a discussion of local issues. He probably explains Jewish customs and their way of thinking. He probably even mentions "this growing Jesus movement".
 - c) The conversation then drifts to "oh, yeah, speaking of Christians, hey Agrippa, have you heard about the guy Paul in jail here? He is a big controversial figure between the Jews and those who believe in Jesus. The guy is a Roman Citizen. He was brought up here by the Jewish leaders on some dispute over their religion. The charges are nothing worthy of death. I'd release the guy, except he has appealed to Caesar.
 - i) The problem for Festus is he does not know what formal charges to send to Rome along with Paul. If Festus can't think of anything good, He will look bad to his superiors for not handing this case properly himself.
 - ii) Agrippa, wanting to impress Festus probably said, "Don't worry Festus, I know all about Jewish religion. Let me hear him speak and I'll help you out". Thus Paul's trial in front of Festus and Agrippa was a chance for Agrippa to "get some points" with the new territorial governor Festus.
 - d) In summary, all Festus really cares about is 1) keeping the peace between the Jewish leaders, the Jewish people and Rome and 2) what charges do I send up to Rome with Paul so I don't get into trouble.
 - i) From these verses, it appears that Festus himself has no serious interest in Christianity. This is all about his job. Although Festus and Agrippa think the solution is to put Paul on trial one more time, what they are going to learn is that they themselves are the ones on trial! God does not allow neutrality with Jesus. They themselves must be forced to make a decision about what to do about Jesus in their own lives and beliefs.
5. With that, here is Verse 22: Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear this man myself." He (Festus) replied, "Tomorrow you will hear him." ²³ The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high ranking officers and the leading men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in.
- a) This verse reads like a scene from a movie. Can't you just picture a large theatre, and then, the trumpets blow, the formal introductions of Agrippa and "other leading men". Then comes a parade, as they enter in with their official uniforms.
 - i) The "entertainment of the day" is Paul's trial.
 - b) Archeologists have found the ruins of a large outdoor amphitheater in Caesarea. It is a popular tourist attraction when touring Israel. Most likely, this is the place where the trial was held.

6. Verse 24: Festus said: "King Agrippa, and all who are present with us, you see this man! The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him in Jerusalem and here in Caesarea, shouting that he ought not to live any longer.²⁵ I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor I decided to send him to Rome.²⁶ But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write.²⁷ For I think it is unreasonable to send on a prisoner without specifying the charges against him."
- a) This is part of the "pomp and ceremony". The formal charges are announced out loud for everyone to hear. This whole speech appears to be designed to build up the ego of Agrippa. (Re-read this paragraph and notice all the compliments paid to Agrippa!)
 - b) The other reason for this "formal announcement" was to try to please the local crowd. Festus was trying to show how "fair" Rome is, in dealing with prisoners. Rome was known for fair-justice. This demonstration was also a public statement to the local Jewish leaders the evidence supporting their charges were not enough to warrant the death penalty.
7. Chapter 26, Verse 1: Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense:
- a) Isn't this a great visual scene? Here are all these Roman officials in their military uniforms and Herod and Bernice in their best royal "garb". The rest of the amphitheater was filled with local Jews and Greeks, coming to watch the spectacle. Now they bring in Paul, to the center of the stage. Paul is bound in chains, as we will learn in Verse 29.
 - i) I can just imagine the loud chorus of boo's (or whatever "booming" was in those days) as Paul entered the theater. I can imagine the Jewish leaders in the crowd yelling out things like "blasphemer" and "he's not fit to live". Paul motions for silence so he could speak.
8. Paul begins, Verse 2: "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews,³ and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.
- a) This is a good thing to remember when witnessing to somebody or any persuasive speech for that matter: "Give somebody a standard to live up to". Paul humbled himself and said, "please listen patiently" to my defense.
9. Verse 4: "The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem.⁵ They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee.⁶ And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today.
- a) I'm guessing Paul knows that this trial is ceremonial and won't make much of a difference about getting released. Paul focuses most of his time on trying to persuade Agrippa to Christianity.
 - i) Remember that Agrippa knew the difference between a Pharisee and a Sadducee. The new Roman Governor Festus probably didn't know the difference yet. This simple statement just shows that the speech is personally geared toward Agrippa and not the Roman Governor.
 - b) Paul opens this section by letting Agrippa know "he is a good religious Jew". He is also stating facts that can be verified by outside witnesses.

10. Verse 7: This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me.
- a) Paul is going to focus his argument on the "hope" of eternal salvation. Paul is stating he is spending his time "working-for-eternity" as opposed to living for the pleasures of this life. That is what Paul is emphasizing in the early verses of being a "Good Jew".
 - i) In a nutshell, that is a good definition of religion. "Trying to do things to please God". It is something everybody can relate to. It is what all of Israel is trying to do by obeying the law. Looking forward to a coming Messiah was part of being a good Jew.
 - b) On a side note, notice Paul mentions "the 12 tribes of Israel". Some cults and groups believe that 10 of the 12 tribes were permanently lost. Others claim that "they" are one, or all, of the "lost tribes of Israel. This is nonsense. Here is what actually happened to those 10 tribes:
 - i) After King Solomon, Israel split into 2 countries. The Northern Kingdom was 10 of the 12 tribes, and the Southern Kingdom was 2 of the 12 tribes. Eventually the King of Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel that consisted of those 10 tribes.
 - ii) When the Assyrian Empire conquered the Northern Kingdom, the Assyrians relocated the families of those 10 tribes all over that empire. (That was how they prevented rebellion, by splitting up families and groups into different territories).
 - iii) Eventually the Babylonians conquered the Assyrians and they "inherited" the 10 tribes. This territory was eventually conquered by the Persians, and later, the Greeks. Many Jews within the 10 tribes moved back to "Israel" and many stayed planted all over the greater territory. The point is that there are no "lost" tribes as many cults claim they are.
 - iv) OK, enough said. Back to Paul and his speech.
11. Verse 8: Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?
- a) Whenever I hear somebody tell me "How can a whale swallow Jonah?" or "How can a flood cover the whole earth", I have them turn to the first verse of the Bible.
 - i) In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1 NIV)
 - ii) I have a very simple statement: If you can handle the first verse of the Bible, you can handle the rest of the book. Those who can't handle that first statement can't handle the rest of the book.
 - a) To put it another way: Too often, our concept of God is too small!
 - b) A God who can create life in the first place, can raise life from the dead.
 - c) That is point Paul is making in this verse.
12. Now Paul recounts his days of persecuting Christians, Verse 9: "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.
- a) For the 3rd time in the Book of Acts, we are going to get told of Paul's conversation.
 - i) The first time was in Chapter 9, the 2nd time in Chapter 22, and now here.
 - ii) In each case, certain details are added and omitted. The 3 versions are not contradictory; we simply learn new details with each version.

- b) Paul states in verse 10 that "I cast my vote against them". This is the proof-verse that Paul was a member of the Jewish High Council (Sanhedrin) at one time. The interesting thing is that we know from history that a membership requirement is that you must be married. It is not known whatever happened to Paul's wife. Possibly, she couldn't handle Paul's conversion and left at that time. It is all speculation.
 - c) Read these verses, and note the anger coming off the paragraph. This paragraph is great material for an actor. It is almost as if Paul was speaking to his enemies in the crowd and saying "I know what you're feeling, I was there at one time".
 - i) This is a good application to those who were saved later in life. One can approach their old friends and say, "I know what you're going through. I was there myself at one time".
 - ii) Next will come the conversion. As I've stated many times, nobody can dispute a personal testimony. A changed life is the greatest witness one can be.
13. Paul continues, verse 12: "On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³ About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. ¹⁴ We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'
- a) When you read "a voice saying to me in Aramaic", it can also be correctly translated Hebrew. They are cousin-languages.
 - b) All right, it's time for a bible trivia question. What is a "goad"? ☺
 - c) A "goad" is a spike object, often on the end of stick. It was used to get mules to move, the same way a cowboy has spurs. On chariots, they had goads behind the horses to prevent them from back-kicking the passenger.
 - i) "To kick against the goads" is a painful thing for an animal. If the horse or mule is stubborn, and doesn't want to cooperate, the animal back kicks and "gets the goad".
 - ii) The expression "kick against the goad" may have been a popular idiom of the day. That expression is recorded in one of Homer's plays, which was written earlier. Some people have accused Paul of plagiarism. My response is "why can't God use an idiom that people understand and can relate to? Like I said earlier, a God who can create heaven and earth can do anything!
 - iii) Some translations only have the "goad" reference in this verse and not in the same story in Acts 9, with the theory that a copyist added this phrase sometime later. In the big picture, it doesn't mean much of anything. Without getting into a big Bible Version debate, just know that some translations don't have it in Chapter 9.
 - d) We know from the earlier versions of this text that the companions heard the voice but didn't understand it. They all saw the light, but only Paul comprehended the voice.
14. Paul continues his personal conversion story, Verse 15: "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' " 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. ¹⁶ 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you.
- a) Let me quote you something Jesus said: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. (Luke 12:48b NIV)

- i) Paul falls under this category of believers of: "to much has been given, and much will be required". Much was given to Paul in terms of 1) forgiveness for murdering Christians (try explaining that away without asking for forgiveness!) and 2) much authority to be Jesus witness.
 - b) Verse 16 applies to all Christians in some way shape or form. Re-read verse 16 and pray "What has God appointed me to do and "what has/will God show me for my life? Remember that we are servants of the most high God. Good masters teach their servants what is expected of them. By prayer, regular time in the Word, and simply living the life God has called for us we can usually find the answers to those great questions.
- 15. Verse 17: I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them (this sentence is finished in Verse 18).
 - a) Paul got this promise from God roughly 20 years ago: The promise that God will rescue Paul from his own people and from the Gentiles. Look how literal that promise has come true. In the last few chapters, some Jews have planned 2 ambushes trying to kill him. On Paul's missionary journeys, he had to deal with life threatening situations. The point for you and me is that we can count on the promises God makes to us.
 - b) The second promise God made in this verse is that he will "rescue" Paul from the Gentiles, to whom God is sending Paul to preach. The point is God made an unconditional promise to God that he will give Paul the opportunity to preach to the Gentiles, and no harm will come until Paul until God says otherwise.
 - c) Listen to how Paul summarizes his trials in his 1st letter to the Corinthians: " I...been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked." (2 Corinthians 11:23-27, NIV),
 - i) And you thought your job was tough! ☺ To Paul, I don't think any of thus stuff mattered. Paul looked at all of his pain and suffering as insignificant in compared to the glory of eternity with Christ.
 - ii) What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ (Philippians 3:8 NIV)
- 16. Back to the text. Why did God send Paul to the Gentiles? Verse 18: to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'
 - a) There is as good a summary of the Gospel message as you'll ever see in a single verse. (Yes, that means, this verse is important. Better read it again! ☺)
 - b) Let's stand back and look at the big picture for a second. Every aspect of Jesus' life can be found somewhere in the Old Testament. His ministry, his purpose, his suffering, his miracles, his resurrection, are all found in direct prophecy's and "patterns" all over the Old Testament. There is only one unique aspect of the New Testament in terms of God's grand scheme: "The Church".

- i) In Ephesians Chapter 5, Paul lays out a discourse about how husbands and wives should treat each other. Then Paul ends this discourse with a strange verse: "This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5:32 NIV)
 - a) Paul's point is that the ideal relationship between a husband and a wife is a "model" of the relationship between Christ and the church.
 - b) But I mention this verse for another reason. The word "mystery". The Greek word for mystery implies "something unrevealed until now." Just like when you read a mystery novel or play, the culprit is not revealed until the end. Paul is saying the concept of "the church" was not revealed in the Old Testament. It was a mystery, until now.
- c) So why I am getting into all this? Glad you asked! ☺
- d) Let's re-read verse 18: Paul was sent to the Gentiles "to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'
 - i) In Old-Testament times, salvation for the Jews came from looking forward to the promise of the Messiah and out of gratitude, being obedient to what God called the Jews to do. For Gentiles in Old-Testament times, God judged people fairly based on the amount of knowledge revealed to them.
 - ii) In the New Testament times, the Gospel message was supposed to be preached first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. (See Matthew 10:5-7). It was only after the corporate rejection by the Jews, that Jesus turned to the Gentiles. This was all part of God's redemptive plan. God knows all things. God knew that the Jews corporately would reject Jesus. Thus, God then turned his message to the Gentiles for the purpose of building a church for himself
 - a) "Corporate" rejection means that individual Jews will accept Jesus, but as a whole, i.e. corporately, they rejected him. This is what Romans Chapter 10 is all about. Here is a sample:
 - (1) And did they [Jews] understand (that God would give his salvation to others [Gentiles] if they refused to take it)? Yes, for even back in the time of Moses, God had said that he would make his people jealous and try to wake them up by giving his salvation to the foolish heathen nations. (Rom. 10:19 TLB) [my insertion]
 - b) There is "Biblical history in a nutshell" God has been "building up" the Gentile church over the past 2,000 years 1) to a build up a church for himself and 2) for the Jews corporately to realize their error of rejection.
 - c) Think about it this way: One of the requirements of the Messiah is he will be a "light to the Gentiles" (Isaiah 42:6). After 2,000 years, I don't see any other Jewish person who has been a light to billions of people! ☺ This is all about evidence to point to Jesus as the Messiah.
- e) Let's wrap up verse 18 or we'll never make it! ☺ The last part of the verse says "a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' In the end, God will (future) gather all people together to love that love him.
 - i) Let's look at the end of Bible, after the whole tribulation period, and I believe after the 1,000 year millenium:

- ii) (The Apostle John was speaking) And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:3-4 NIV)
 - a) Do you want to know why God bothered with all of history? Your answer is right there in those 2 verses. God is a God-of-Love. A God-of-Love wants to show that love to someone. A perfect God requires us to be perfect in order to spend eternity with God.
 - b) Therefore, a perfect sacrifice has to be made on our behalf. Once that is completed, then God can spend eternity showing us that love. That is God's "grand scheme" of all of history. To gather up a people to himself so that He can spend eternity demonstrating his love for us!
 - f) Meanwhile while I'm busy trying to explain God's purpose for mankind, Paul was still busy trying to convince King Agrippa about Jesus. ☺ In other words, let's get back to the text.
17. Verse 19: So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. ²⁰ First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.
- a) Paul is outlining the last 20 years of his life.
 - i) He got converted in Damascus, and there he started preaching in Damascus. (I always liked the Biblical expression: "bloom where you are planted and plant where you bloom!")
 - ii) Then 3 years later (we know this from Galatians 1:18) Paul returned to Jerusalem and preached there. We're not sure when Paul preached "in all of Judea" as Acts is not clear on this. We get a clue from Galatians:
 - a) I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." (Gal. 1:22-23)
 - iii) "To the Gentiles" was Paul's 3 missionary journeys, which is the majority of the Book of acts.
 - b) Paul preached "1) they should repent, 2) turn to God and 3) prove their repentance by their deeds.
 - i) There is a great American cliché that Christians need to practice more. It goes as follows: "Put your money where your mouth is". I think that is what Paul is getting at. If you believe the Gospel, then you will act upon it.
 - a) I may believe an elevator will hold my weight. Until I actually get in the elevator is when I am proving my faith in the elevator. That is the point Paul is getting at here. It is a classic lesson for all Christians.
 - ii) There are millions of people who "say" they are Christians, but the question becomes "Have they ever acted upon their faith?"
 - iii) I think that is what Jesus meant with this warning:
 - a) Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. (Matthew 7:22-24 NIV)

18. Verse 21: That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. ²² But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen-- ²³ that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles."
- a) Paul is preaching the message of the Gospel. He states that the Jews oppose him.
 - i) Let me sum up the Jews' hatred of Paul in Jesus' own words: "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. (John 15:18-19 NIV)
 - b) Again Paul emphasizes that Jesus "The Christ" would suffer and rise from the dead as predicted by the prophets and Moses. Remember that Paul was speaking to Agrippa, who had detailed knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures.
 - i) I'm running long, so I'll make this brief: Where does the Bible say the Messiah must "suffer" and "rise from the dead"? There are lots of places, but here is a good summary spot:
 - a) Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him (Jesus) and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life guilt offering, he will see his offspring (us!) and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53:10-11 NIV)
19. Verse 24: At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane."
- a) I love this verse. Paul was addressing his speech to Agrippa. Agrippa knew the Old Testament Scriptures. Festus was a Roman Governor, and only familiar with Roman laws. This was all new to him.
 - b) The point is sometimes when we are sharing Jesus with someone, that "someone" is not interested, and no matter what we say, they will not change their ways. However, there is often someone else listening to the conversation that is convicted by the Gospel message. It has happened many times in history that way.
 - c) Here was Festus. I'm convinced Festus was being convicted by the logic of Paul's message. However, Satan planted this thought into Festus "Hey, Festus, this guy is loony-tunes, he's nuts. You' don't have to believe him. Where did he get all of this stuff anyway?" In order to appease Festus' conviction, Festus stood up and said, "you are out of your mind Paul!"
 - d) I think Paul was as shocked as anybody at this outburst, and turned to address Festus.
20. Verse 25: "I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. ²⁶ The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."
- a) Paul turns back to Agrippa. Paul wants Agrippa to nod his head that all the things about a suffering Messiah were written in the Prophets. Remember that Paul was witnessing to Agrippa, and focuses his speech on that matter.
 - b) Notice how Paul is trying to close in on Agrippa by using persuasive speech. Paul sounds like a salesman at this point. To paraphrase "Hey Agrippa. I know you believe the prophets. You do believe the prophets, don't you Agrippa? I just know you do!" It is the type of argument where you put someone on the spot and appeal to their ego that your assumptions are correct.

21. Verse 28: Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"
- a) In the Greek, this response comes off very sarcastic. I don't think Agrippa was convicted by the speech. Many a sermon through the years has been preached on Agrippa's failure to be turned.
 - b) A lot of commentators think that his wife Bernice is part of the reason why Agrippa was not convicted. She is mentioned several times in this passage. Bernice is a young, ambitious, immoral woman like her sister Drucilla. Many people think Agrippa looked over at Bernice and refused to give up his lifestyle.
22. Paul's response to Agrippa's remark, Verse 29: Paul replied, "Short time or long--I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."
- a) Paul understood his purpose for living. It wasn't about the chains. It wasn't about the perils he suffered. It was to convince any and all who would listen about the truth of Jesus. He wants all to "become what I am", a follower of Jesus.
 - b) There are some wonderful sermons that are preached how Paul was in chains, but he was really free, and it was the audience who were "chained" to their sins.
23. Now, the epilogue. Verse 30: The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. ³¹ They left the room, and while talking with one another, they said, "This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment." ³² Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."
- a) Their closing comment paraphrased "You know, this guy Paul is not that bad. He just has some religious views that the Jews disagree with. It is nothing worth killing him over. If he didn't formally appeal his case could have been dropped".
 - b) You are reading how much of the world around us views Christianity. "Let's just ignore them. It's just religious stuff. You know, you shouldn't discuss these things in public anyway. It's not polite you know". The world wants to go about its business, and ignore the truth. It is ignored because people are more interested in serving their own interests than God's interest. What they fail to see is that life is worth living only after we have turned our interest over to God. Pride stands in the way. The Roman audience ignored Paul, and they will pay the price for it eternally. They now have no excuse on judgement day.
 - c) Pontius Pilate once asked the question ""What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" (Matthew 27:22 NIV). The answer was rejection. That same answer was given by this Roman crowd. Tragically, that same answer is repeated by many through out history.
 - d) The good news for us is that we continually are putting our trust in God. We are not part of this world. We are to be a witness to this world and pray for those to turn their hearts to God. That is what Paul did in this chapter. Although Paul was unsuccessful in terms of converting people, Paul was very successful in that he did what God called him to do, "be" his witness. That is all God asks of us.
24. Let's pray: Father, we thank you, that you have taken off our chains, and that we walk in the freedom that Christ has provided for us. Help us to be examples, that we may show the world how they are the ones bound in the chains of their sins. Let us use our freedom as witnesses for your kingdom. Help us to remember that the results of our labor is your business and not ours. We are called to simply follow and obey. For all of the glory, privileges, and honor you have freely bestowed upon us, simply out of love, we will spend eternity in gratitude. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.