

Tried and True - Acts 26:1-32

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[0 : 00] All right, Acts 26. So I was realizing that we've been on trial with Paul since Acts 21. It was before the captain in the Antonia Fortress.

There was Felix, Festus, and now Agrippa. That's four different authorities, Roman authorities, that Paul will have essentially been on trial before.

Therefore, the message for tonight is tried and true. As Paul enters another, yet another, another trial in more ways than one, right?

So the outline, kind of that theme of a trial, trial proceedings, legal proceedings. Verses 1 through 3 is opening statements in the trial where Paul will make his opening statements.

Verses 4 through 11, we hear Paul's past wrongs. Verses 12 through 18, we hear of his arrest on the road to Damascus, arrested by Jesus. Verses 19 through 23 is time served.

[1 : 03] How did he serve with his time after that? Verses 24 through 29 is a mistrial. Kind of this whole thing just falls apart once again for the Romans.

And then verses 30 through 32, it's a hung jury. We don't get any satisfaction from the world system in this. But the message being, you know, the title being tried and true.

I was thinking that the truth never changes. It never changes. But it's always relevant. Paul has, this is going to be like we said, his fourth time. If you don't even count the time you talk to the Jews.

And he tells the exact same thing every time. It never changes. It's not like he's like this time. You know what? I'm going to tell you a different story. I'm getting bored of this. It's not having any effect on you.

Or, well, my goal is to get out of here. So what can I say to get me out of this situation? To get me at liberty? But it's always the same. The truth never changes. And yet, it's always relevant.

[2 : 01] I mean, this thing doesn't change. It's the same. Next time we come back through the whole entire Bible to study Acts, it'll still be the same. We won't be.

Right? It's the same, but it's always relevant to every situation that we find ourselves. And we see Paul leaning heavily into what Jesus promised his disciples, and then all of those who would follow him.

In Mark 13, 11, Jesus said, When they shall lead you and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what you shall speak. Neither do you premeditate, but whatsoever you shall be given you in that hour, that speak you.

For it's not you that speak, but the Holy Spirit. Paul leans really heavily into that. He's just kind of going into this. You don't see him nervous. You don't see him fumbling over his words. He realizes that this isn't about him.

This is about what the Lord wants to do with these people. If you remember, we saw last time that Festus was just another Felix at the core. He was like Felix with a veneer, right?

[3 : 02] He seemed nicer. He was gentler. But he's really Felix. He was unwilling to take responsibility for the truth that God had placed before him. He needed to get rid of Paul. Proverbs 17, 15.

Oh, I still have that background on. Isn't that pretty for you? There we go. Sorry. There we go. Proverbs 17, 15. He that justifies the wicked and he that condemns the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord.

No matter which way you approach it, right? If you're someone who is going to seem like, oh, really nice guy. He's for everybody. Yeah, you're just justifying the wicked. Or someone who condemns the just.

You come down on the side of coming down on the just. Either one's an abomination. And so we pick up in verse one. Paul has just given his account to Felix.

He kind of says, okay, okay. I don't quite understand what's going on here. I'm sorry, Festus. And then Agrippa comes down to, with Bernice, his half-sister, to greet Festus.

[4 : 04] And in the process of all this, Festus says, hey, can you come help me with this case? I know this is like your bag. The Jewish customs and religion.

I don't quite get it. I've got this guy, Paul. In verse one, then Agrippa said unto Paul, thou art permitted to speak for thyself. So Festus has just given his account.

He's got all the pomp and ceremony there. Paul is there. Festus says, this is what's happened. And then Agrippa turns to Paul, who's here just patiently waiting and listening, and says, you are permitted to speak for yourself.

Then Paul stretched forth the hand and answered for himself. And that's just one of those things. Why did that? Why is that in scripture? Why doesn't it just say Paul answered for himself? Paul stretched forth the hand. I was thinking, what does that say about Paul?

And I think it says a few things. I think it says Paul was engaged. Like he was like, this is my moment. Yes, I am engaged. I am enthusiastic about this. He was excited.

[5 : 01] He was excited to have another opportunity to preach the word, to share the truth. And he was an active participant. He wasn't just like, well, Lord, you deliver me. You told me I'm going to go to Rome. Whatever.

So just the fact the scripture says, and he stretched forth his hand. It's like, Paul's like, all right, are you ready for this, guys? And then he just unloads. He was very confident in who he was. He was not arrogant.

He wasn't confident in himself, but he was confident in who he was. And who he was was who God declared him to be. And Paul says, with his hand stretched out. The other thing is, if you look at the end of the chapter, when Agrippa kind of says, Paul, you persuade me to be a Christian?

Look what it says in verse 29 at the end of there. It says, and I wish that you all were as I was, altogether, such as I am, except these bonds.

So as Paul stretches out his hands, a bunch of chains go clangity clangity clang, you know, kind of emphasizing, yeah. All right.

[6 : 06] Let's talk. Paul was always happy for an opportunity of the gospel, even if that opportunity was because of bonds, right? And so he says, I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before you, touching all the things, wherever I am accused of the Jews.

Accusations are not always actual. Just because he was accused doesn't mean it's true. Just because someone levels an accusation doesn't mean it's an actual fact, right?

Satan, as we looked at last time in Revelation 12, the accuser of the brethren, night and day he's accusing us. But he's also the father of lies, right? So it's not like he's going, that was a sin and you know it, Lord.

There's that, but he twists it, right? Look at that. Jared denied you again. You know what that shows? That shows a heart that's not really committed. That shows that his motives are, there's a twist there. These are false accusations mixed with some truth.

Not all accusations, or accusations do not always mean that it's true. It's not always actual. And Paul says, especially because I know you to be an expert.

[7 : 16] Literally that means a connoisseur. And a connoisseur means like, you know, it's something that Agrippa, he's interested in. He knows all about. He knows the different pieces and parts. He is a connoisseur, an expert in all the customs or the rituals and questions.

Questions literally means about the law. Which are among the Jews. Wherefore, I beseech you to hear me patiently. He says, King Agrippa, I know this is kind of your thing.

You are a connoisseur in this. But please hear me patiently. The word patiently there means long temper. To hear me with a long temper. Why would he have to say that? Why is he asking him to hear him patiently?

Well, I think because what Paul's going to say, tell him is the truth. And truth cuts right across the familiar rituals and reasons that make up our religion. Right? Agrippa's very familiar with the rituals and the arguments.

The reason behind the Jewish religion. And Paul's about to tell him something that's going to cut right across all of that. It's kind of going to take everything that Agrippa has been gaining knowledge in and almost turn it on its head.

[8 : 23] So Paul's like, just be patient. Be very long tempered with me. Get to the end here, Agrippa. My manner of life from my youth. Did I skip a verse or no? No, I beseech you to hear me patiently.

Here Paul now gives his past. My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among my own nation at Jerusalem. Know all the Jews. Which knew me from the beginning. If they would testify.

That after the most straightest sect of our religion. I lived. A Pharisees. A Pharisees. If the Jews would only testify to the truth. Well, they would also be able to prove this.

Or they would also give veracity to this. The proof is there. Paul's pretty much saying, find anyone. And they know this. Why wouldn't they testify? Because they knew it would incriminate themselves. They can't come in and say, yes, this is the real situation.

Because that would lead then to incrimination of themselves. So Paul says that after the most straightest sect of our religion. The most right way. The most confined.

[9 : 24] Remember it says, broad is the way that leads them to destruction. Many there be that go therein. But straight. Narrow. Confined. Is the way that leads into life. It's the same idea here. The straight.

Very narrow. The religion that Paul lived out of the Jews. He said, hey, I was a Pharisee. A Pharisee is just religion plus precision.

Right? It's someone who takes this religion. And they are super precise. This isn't like, you know, it's like that person you meet on the street. And they say, hey, I'm a Catholic. Like, oh, yeah. Do you follow any of the practices, rituals?

I just go to Mass on Christmas and Easter. You know, I'm Catholic. Okay. Then you meet people that are Catholic. And it's like, they follow the whole thing to a T. A religion.

The religion plus precision is a Pharisee. Pharisee. Let's see if I can say this word. Phariseeism. Phariseeism is a rigid observance of the forms of religion or conduct without genuine piety.

[10 : 25] So it's observing the religious forms and conduct outwardly. But there's nothing genuine about it. Religion leads to Phariseeism. So Paul here, he's going to follow this religion to a T.

Well, it naturally progresses him to be a Pharisee. Pharisees end up being those that are the most opposed to Jesus when he's here. They're the least likely to receive him.

The wonderful thing about the Pharisees, it seems like many of them believe, we're told that in Acts. And we don't really hear anything bad about the Pharisees, again, in Acts. It's God's redemption, right? But why would religion lead to Phariseeism?

Why would it lead to this external form of conduct but without an internal reality? Well, because religion justifies men before men. Well, no, wait, wait.

Religion justifies me before God. No, it doesn't. Religion doesn't justify anyone before God. Religion justifies me before you. You now can justify that, oh, yes, he's a religious person.

[11 : 26] He's a good guy. God will accept him. So I'm justified before men. I'm not justified before God. And anytime I have to justify myself before men, that's going to lead to this precision, this idea that I have to keep this law perfectly, whether it's genuine or not, because I don't want the mask to slip and you to see that I'm just a Pharisee.

See, that rhymed. And now I stand. And so Paul says, this is who I was. I was the best at what I did, but there was nothing genuine there.

And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers. What promise was that? What is it that he's saying this hope was of this promise?

Well, this is one we looked at a long time ago in Genesis 12, the same promise given to Abraham, where he said to Abraham, and in you all families of the earth shall be blessed. That's the Messiah, that through Jesus, all families shall be blessed.

Paul is saying he is judged for this hope. He's judged for speaking the truth that nobody wanted to acknowledge. He's speaking a truth that nobody wants to acknowledge. In Romans 3.23, he says, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

[12 : 41] That's the truth nobody wants to acknowledge. They're happy with justifying themselves and their religion. But don't tell me I'm a sinner. Don't tell me that before God I have no standing, that I'm a sinner, that I've come short of God's glory.

They can't handle that. All the effort and work these Pharisees have put into, and the Sadducees, their religion and their justification. And Paul just comes with a simple truth and says, nope, didn't

work out.

Paul's argument makes the Jews look very foolish. Why? Because he's saying, I'm not being judged for who I am. I'm being judged because of what someone else has said. I'm being judged by this promise.

Paul's argument made the Jews look foolish because Paul was simply declaring what someone else has done. It wasn't about him. So it makes them look very foolish because ultimately they are standing against God.

But for the Jews, it was much easier to judge Paul than to judge God or themselves. So they judge Paul. Paul says, unto which promise, that promise that all nations would be blessed, that all families of the earth would be blessed through the promised seed.

[13:52] Unto which promise are 12 tribes, instantly serving God, that just means earnestly serving God, day and night, hope to come. They hope to come unto this promise.

For which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. What is that hope? What is the hope that all families of the earth would be blessed in Messiah? What is our hope? We say, well, it's salvation.

It's redemption. All have come short of the glory of God. All have sinned. Right? So it must be our hope is salvation. But what is salvation? Salvation is resurrection. Our hope is resurrection.

Without resurrection, you know, Paul would say, we are of all men most miserable if there's no resurrection. Salvation is resurrection. It's nothing else.

These men were hoping. They were hoping to make it to the resurrection. That was their hope. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, Paul says, For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first.

[15:02] And we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so shall he ever be with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words. If that doesn't exist, then we've got nothing.

If that resurrection doesn't happen, say, well, oh, you're talking about the rapture. Well, you know, that was proven false. And really, you know, that came about in the 1800s and some guy. And it's not really true. Well, look it.

You can call it whatever you want. If this event doesn't happen, you don't have salvation. You're lost. You've got nothing. Jesus rose out from among the dead. And the hope he gives is not just, oh, your sins are forgiven and you can have a good life.

And I'm going to come and rule and reign on the earth. It's resurrection. It's that we also are going to be raised out from among the dead. Paul says then in verse 8 here, Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?

Why is that something that if God can create life and God can hold life together, why don't people like this idea of resurrection from the dead? Thought incredible means judged or condemned impossible.

[16:12] Why do you judge this impossible? Why do you condemn the resurrection as an impossibility? Why is the gathering together of the saints such a taboo thing? It's our hope.

And the word dead there, I like that. It means breathless, that God should raise the breathless. I mean, if he breathed life into Adam in the beginning, if he breathed life into a baby in the womb, then why can't he breathe life into the dead?

And I think the reason that these Jews and Agrippa and so many kind of pull back against resurrection, we want to bring God down to our level, right?

We place limitations on God. Because we want to identify God with our limitations. You know, Jesus says in Matthew 5, 48, he says, Be you therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

God's desire is to raise us up into the completeness and the perfection of Christ. But that is so foreign to me, I want to bring God down. I want to bring him down to something I'm familiar with.

[17:18] That I can identify God with my limitations. So if I can put a limitation on God, then I can more easily identify with him. But if God is just able to raise the dead, then I have to acknowledge that this world, with all its limitations, the thing I'm most comfortable with, this is going to pass in a moment.

This is not the final place for the saint. But God does have some impossibilities. There are some limitations upon God. Do you know what God's limitation is?

In Hebrews 6, 18, we're told that by two immutable things, that means two things that cannot be changed. It's God's word and God's promise. In which it was impossible for God to lie.

The thing that's an impossibility for God is he can't lie. He cannot go against his word. He can't alter the truth. It's impossible for God to lie so that we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.

What is the hope set before us that we hold on to? It's resurrection. That we will be raised. The dead will be raised first. We think, man, you know, he tells someone, if you accept Jesus Christ, if you put your faith in him, he will forgive your sins.

[18 : 32] As far as the east is from the west, he will forget them. And then if you die, when you die, you will go to be with the Lord. That's true. But that's not the end. That's short of resurrection.

That stops short. To be absent with the body is to be present with the Lord. But that person present with the Lord, their promise is that they will receive a new body, that there will be resurrection. We stop short of the fullness of the gospel when we don't preach resurrection.

In Mark 9.23, we're told, Jesus said unto them, If thou believest, if you can believe, all things are possible to him that believes. So God has no impossibilities, except he can't lie.

And then we are welcomed into the same possibilities of the Lord. And so Paul says, I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things, contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

So he says, Why would it be thought incredible to you that God raises the dead? I also had crazy ideas at one time, King Agrippa. I thought within myself that I ought to do many things, contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

[19 : 42] The name of Jesus means a limitless God to whom we are accountable and who will resurrect all men for the purpose of giving account. The name of Jesus encompasses who Jesus is.

He is a limitless God to whom we are accountable. He will resurrect all men for the purpose of giving account. And that's the name that many people will do things contrary to.

They don't want to be accountable. In Matthew 25, Jesus is talking about the sheep and the goats' judgments. Those will be separated out.

And he says that those that will say, they will answer him at that time saying, Lord, when saw we hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not minister unto you?

Then shall he answer them saying, Truly I say unto you, inasmuch as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.

[20 : 44] It's one or the other. We will all give account. Nobody's going to stop short of that. Romans 14, 11 through 12. I think we looked at this one last time.

For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. And the name of Jesus is the name we give account to.

The limitless God to whom we are accountable, who will resurrect all men for the purpose of giving account. All men will be resurrected. Paul says, Then which thing I also did.

All these contrary things in the name of Jesus. I also did this in Jerusalem. And many of the saints that I shot up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests. And when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

I think for Paul's, the entirety of Paul's life, I think Stephen's face was always before him. And Stephen's voice saying, Father, forgive them.

[21 : 47] They know not what they do. As he says here, I gave assent. When we stoned Stephen, I said, yes. The first martyr. Let's do it. And then he went on to try and silence many others.

You know, he says, I had authority from the chief priests. I had authority from those who I thought had the authority to do this. But man does not have the authority to approve or absolve sin.

I can't absolve you of your sin. Say, oh, pastor, absolve me. I can't absolve anyone of their sins.

Nobody has the authority to say, you know what? Go and do that. You won't be held accountable. Even if the authority says you can go and do that, the higher authority of God will hold us

accountable. And no man has the authority to approve sin. I mean, wait, absolve sin or approve it.

I just said absolve. This is approve it. No man has the authority to approve it. They can't say that's no longer a sin. It's okay now. And Paul says, I thought because I had this authority from the chief priests, I thought I was doing the right thing.

[22 : 54] But it was contrary to the name of Jesus. And I punish them, the Christians. I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme.

Compelled means to drive them. He drove them to blaspheme, to the very edge of their sanity and pain and torture until they would blaspheme.

And being exceedingly mad, exceedingly mad means with an uncontrollable rage against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

You see, sin is never satisfied while truth exists. So Paul might have persecuted them in Jerusalem, but that wasn't enough. He had to eradicate truth because sin is never going to be satisfied as long as truth exists.

But I think it's interesting if you see there in verse 11, and I punish them often in every synagogue. Where did Paul always go after his conversion when he's preaching the gospel? He always started in the synagogue.

[23 : 52] I think for him, it was like, I have done so much damage. I'm going to spend the rest of my life making sure that the truth is going into these synagogues. Where once I went in as one who was a destroyer, now I go in as one who brings life.

Paul here just really declares his past to these men. You know, he could have made it out to sound a little better. He could have tried to maybe whitewash it.

But he doesn't appear to be afraid of his past. He's very honest about it. I think that's because his past had no bearing upon his present any longer, nor his future.

His future was assured. His past was under the blood. It did not have any bearing any longer on his present. You could bring up to Paul. Remember Paul, when you used to do this? Yeah. Yep. But he was a new man.

It no longer had any bearing. Those whose past still haunt them, man, they'll do anything to avoid that. Anything to avoid talking about that. But in Christ, we don't have a past.

[24 : 57] In Christ, our past is the cross, right? I think we looked at this one last time. Paul's been on trial so much. So many of these verses apply over and over.

In John 3.20, it says, For everyone that does evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deed should be reproved. Nobody wants to see or have anyone else see his evil deeds because he knows the light will simply reprove him.

But he that does truth comes to the light. There's a desire when we're in the truth to actually come to the light. We don't hide from it. We desire it. It's not just like, well, if the light shines on me, I have nothing to hide.

No, we actively seek it out that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God. I am excited about coming into the light so that I can see, oh my word, my past is gone.

Look at this, the things that I'm doing now. God's stamp of approval is upon it. This is a wonderful, wonderful thing to come in the light. What else happens when we're in the light? Well, 1 John tells us that the, 1 John 5, 7 tells us that if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from our sin.

[26 : 05] So Paul is very free with his past. He says, this is, this is who I was and what I was. And then he says, whereupon, in verse 12, as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, I had these guys stamp of approval.

And if you look over the annals of history, you'll see that religion approves the most ridiculous of enterprises. That religion gives its stamp of approval to the silliest of things, you know, like the Crusades and all kinds of things like that.

And at midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun shining round about me and also them which journeyed with me and them which journeyed with me.

So he says, I'm heading to Damascus, O king. Here's this bright light. And it almost seems like happenstance, like, whoa, it's just, it's like I was going to Damascus and little did I know Jesus was on the road to Damascus and there he was.

I wasn't expecting that. But God's intervention, it's never by chance. God's intervention was not a chance. Neither the time, the place, or the meeting, right?

[27 : 15] God knew the perfect time for Paul. Whatever was going on in Paul's heart at this moment, as he's maybe thinking over, as he's heading to Damascus, it's quiet, right? It's just those with him as they're just walking to Damascus, there's time to think.

And maybe Stephen is coming back to mind. Maybe others who he's thinking they died with such peace and bravery and courage. God knew the perfect time to reach Paul.

The place was not by chance either. He met him on the road to Damascus. He knew where he wanted to meet Paul, where he was vulnerable. And the meeting wasn't by chance either.

It wasn't just like the Lord was like, well, what do you want to do today? Well, there's Paul going to Damascus. Let's just go see what happens. And Paul says, and when we were fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. Literally, it's harsh. This is very harsh for you, Paul. Isn't that interesting? Jesus coming to Paul and saying, Paul, I see, this is very harsh.

[28 : 21] The life you're living, Paul. Man, it breaks my heart to see that. It's so harsh. Why are you persecuting me? All it's doing is hurting you. Kick against the pricks, right?

That's the ox goads. When you'd be plowing with the ox or you're driving your ox, you'd have like a long stick with a point on the end and the ox would try and kick or would stop and you'd just goad it. You'd poke, poke, poke it, right?

So Paul's constantly kicking against. What's he kicking against? He's knowingly resisting God's influence. He's knowingly kicking against as God continues to try and influence and push into his life.

And I said, who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutes. And here in this moment, we see Paul's choice to believe by saying, who art thou, Lord?

He acknowledges Jesus as Lord and he acknowledges himself as a sinner. And Jesus says, but rise and stand upon your feet for I have appeared unto you for this purpose to make you a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen and of those things in which I will appear unto thee.

[29 : 29] So the Lord promises Paul that he has a purpose for him is to be a minister to the things which he has seen. Well, that would be what? The testimony of all these believers that he has witnessed firsthand going to martyrdom.

The things that he has seen, he's seen Jesus on the road and the things in which he will appear unto him. Many more things. We know Paul will go to Arabia and meet with the Lord. And he'll meet with him throughout his ministry.

He'll have that vision in Corinth where the Lord will come to him. But what's his part right now? That Paul's relaying this. All this is happening and the Lord says, but arise and stand upon your feet. Right? When God gives a command, our part is to obey using what strength and ability we have. Right? God didn't ask Paul to do anything he couldn't do. He said, Paul, arise, stand on your feet. God's plan, purpose, and promise, they would all unfold according to his time and his timing. Right now, Paul's part was just to obey. And he said, I will deliver you from the people and from the Gentiles unto whom I'm now sending you.

[30 : 37] To deliver means to pluck or select or choose. Paul, I will pluck you out. I have chosen you. I am going to select you to go to the Gentiles. God sends his people into the impossible for the purpose of deliverance.

God is telling Paul, I'm going to send you into an impossible situation. But the reason I'm going to do that is because I want to deliver you. And not just you. Not just your deliverance. But others. And we know, we looked at this before. Paul would write that all these things that have befallen me have fallen out for the furtherance of the gospel. One of God's greatest things that he does is to purposely, knowingly send his people into impossible situations so that he can then deliver. God wasn't surprised by, you know, sin when Adam fell. That was, he knew he created man without the ability to sustain righteousness, to sustain that state of innocence.

And he knew that when he created him. And so he purposely created him so that he could show his deliverance and his redemption. Paul, I'm sending you to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

[31 : 58] Paul, you have a purpose. There's darkness, they need light. They're blind, they need their eyes open. They need to be turned to God. Ephesians 2.8 says, For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves.

It is the gift of God to them which are sanctified by faith that is in me, as Jesus says to Paul. The gospel opens our eyes and it turns us around, but there still must be an act of faith to believe. Whereupon King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision. So you think, well, the gospel here, it opened his eyes, it turned them from darkness to light, and the power of Satan to God, it gave an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in me, the faith that's in Christ, even our faith comes from Christ.

Well, maybe there is something to this whole predestination thing like Reformed theology teaches. But then Paul, in verse 19, says, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.

To not be disobedient implies that you could have been disobedient. Paul says, I wasn't. I chose not to disobey, which indicates he could have chosen the opposite.

[33 : 17] And as Paul obeys this heavenly vision, it cost him much in his earthly reality. In verse 20, but the Lord showed first unto them, or I showed first unto them at Damascus and at Jerusalem and throughout all the coasts of Judea and then to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance.

So as the Lord gives Paul this commission, Paul says, I wasn't disobedient. I went and I showed them first at Damascus and Jerusalem and throughout all the coasts of Judea and the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance.

Before all these ands, there's always a first, isn't there? But showed first unto them at Damascus. God had this huge plan and purpose for Paul, but he had something that he wanted them to do first. Before every and, there's a first. And it's interesting, the first work is the same as the last. Paul says, well, at first, I showed them at Damascus and at the very end, I showed them the same thing that they should repent and turn to God.

Remember, truth doesn't change. It's always the same. And our first work and our end works, they're the same. So our part is really so simple.

[34 : 37] God gives us a work. It's not like it's hard. It's the same work that's been done at the beginning that will be done at the end and we just obey in the next thing he gives us.

The rest of it's up to him. And for these causes, Paul testifies, the Jews, they caught me in the temple. Guys, you got me. They went about to kill me.

They caught Paul. They constrained him. Why? Why were they so against Paul? What was the cause for the Jews' constraint? Well, Paul did three things. He renounced their religion.

He kind of pretty much said your religion is invalid. He turned to the truth. Remember, the truth cuts across their nature and their religion. And then, the preaching of the gospel, he advanced accountability.

He renounced religion, turned to truth, and advanced accountability. You know, he put forth this idea that they are accountable. And having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day.

[35 : 41] Obtained means to hit the mark. Sin is, we miss the mark? Well, with God's help, Paul says, hey, I obtained help of God. I hit the mark. I continue unto this day, witnessing both to the small and great, saying, none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.

Paul was pointing the same direction as the prophets and Moses. And that direction was Jesus. In verse 23, that Christ should suffer and that he should be the first.

First is protos in the Greek. Prototype. Protos, the first. That he should be the first that should rise from the dead and should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles.

It's interesting there where he says that Christ should suffer. The idea is that Christ must suffer. There's no way around this. Suffering is a spiritual necessity.

That's not a very nice thing to say, but it's true. Jesus was our protos, our prototype, the first. In John 12, 24, beginning in verse 24, Jesus says, truly, truly, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone.

[36 : 59] But if it die, it brings forth much fruit. He's not just giving a lesson in agriculture. He's giving a spiritual principle here that for spiritual fruit, it's a necessity for death.

It's a necessity for suffering that life may come out of it. But if it die, it brings forth much fruit. He that loves his life shall lose it, and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it unto eternal life.

If any man serve me, let him follow me, and where I am, there shall also my servant be. If any man serve me, he will, him will my father, honor. Serving the Lord, will result in giving our lives in suffering so that fruit might come from it.

And as he thus spake for himself, Festus speaks out now. Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself. Much learning does make thee mad.

Spake for himself. You know, Paul is speaking for himself, and Festus is just like, this guy is nuts. I mean, nobody else here is on your side, Paul. You're the only one saying this.

[38 : 09] Beside himself means to be betrayed by speech. Paul, your speech betrays you that you're a nut. Paul was fully identified with who God called him to be.

As he's speaking for himself, he is fully identifying with who God called him to be. He didn't care what that made him look like, even though this guy thought he was crazy. But it says here, what? That he spake with a loud voice. Why would he speak with a loud voice? Well, one, I think Paul's probably like just fully on into his story. Remember, his hands are going, the chains are clanging, and he's just like, and then the Lord did this, and then he starts preaching the gospel, and I think Festus is also, he's getting it, ooh, ooh, right into the heart, right into the soul, over and over. And so he kind of yells out, hoping that volume will be a substitute for his lack of substance. He has absolutely nothing to say. Volume is never a substitute for substance.

I was going to show the little video, you've probably seen the gif or the video or meme, whatever, when Trump was elected the first time, and the girl, she's wearing like green, and she's got glasses and like a knit hat on, and she's just screaming out, no, no, over and over and over, just really loud. [39 : 23] And it's like, there's no substance to this person. It's just volume. You know, I've never actually watched the whole little video, just that part. Ah, it's like the gif or whatever of it. But then it shows where she's talking.

I mean, she seems like she's demon possessed. She's like, just incoherent and like jittery and just, just fomenting nonsensical hate, right?

But the idea that, well, I can just drown out the truth here. And here Festus, he says in a loud voice, he tries to paint Paul in this light of being crazy.

And then Paul says, I love this. And you know, he just says it super calmly. I'm not mad, most noble Festus, but I speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

Soberness means being sound and self-controlled. As Paul says this, perfectly sound and perfectly self-controlled. And he says to him, most noble Festus.

[40 : 23] He kind of traps him the same way the Jews that one time trapped Felix. If I'm mad, that means what I'm saying is mad and I'm saying you're noble. Is that a crazy thing to say? Oh, noble Festus?

Oh, well, no, that part's good. Truth is true in any circumstance. Paul is just relaying the truth.

It doesn't matter his circumstance. It doesn't matter if they think he's a nut. He doesn't need to alter the truth. Paul says, for the king knows these things before whom also I speak freely.

And now he turns to Agrippa and Agrippa's probably like, no, no, keep talking to Festus. For I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him. For this thing was not done in a corner or literally was not done in secret.

This isn't secret, right? Gnosticism is secret knowledge. There's secret knowledge and only you can attain the secret knowledge if you pass the seven layers of the candy cane forest and, you know, then I can give you the secret knowledge.

[41 : 24] Truth is never a secret. Any attempt to keep truth hidden, what is that? It's a lie. Whenever someone attempts to hide truth, it's lying.

Now, that doesn't mean, well, we're going to have a surprise birthday so don't tell anybody. Right? This is truth. God's revealed truth. If there's a reason to hide what is true, that person then has to lie.

The truth is never a secret. There's never any attempt by God to keep the truth hidden. Do you realize that? He never attempts to withhold anything. Everything is given us.

The problem is we just won't ingest it and won't read it and won't believe it. But the truth is always there in every situation. King Agrippa, now all of a sudden, Paul is no longer on trial.

And Agrippa is. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe. King Agrippa did believe. He believed in truth.

[42 : 30] But he had no interest in receiving that truth. He had no interest in that truth being any part of him. Agrippa said unto Paul, Paul, you almost persuade me to be a Christian.

Almost means a little bit or a few things. Paul, I'm a little bit thinking of me. I'm a little bit Christian here, Paul. You're persuading me. You're inducing me by words to believe.

And we know that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word. But we also know that there's more to being saved than just a little bit.

Paul said, He then uses the same phrasing.

King Agrippa, I wish today that all that were here were both a little bit and altogether much in many things as I am.

[43 : 30] You see, nobody can be a little bit saved. Either saved or not saved. There's not being a little bit saved. But we are much saved by only a little faith. We can be saved very much with just a little bit of faith.

And Jesus said, except, I mean, if you have faith the size of a grain of mustard seed, you can say unto this tree, be plucked up by the root, be planted in the sea, and it should obey you.

And that was in the response to the disciples saying, Lord, increase our faith. We say that because it's a term that we've heard and used, you know, they've really, you know, they've got a big faith or we need more faith.

We don't. You're not going to find in scripture where it's told we need a lot of faith. We grow in our understanding and grace and the knowledge of him. But our faith, our faith is our trust in God.

It's that God is big no matter the size of our faith. And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up and the governor and Bernice and they there were with them. And so the king decides, I'm not going to be a lot saved, Paul.

[44 : 35] I'm getting a little close. And he decides to walk out. Unfortunately, his decision did not just affect himself. Everybody then goes with him. When they were gone aside, they talked between themselves saying, this man has done nothing worthy of death or of bonds.

Then why don't you release him? Why is he? They keep coming to the same conclusion. So I mean, the hung jury. Again and again, it doesn't matter who Paul's before. They keep coming to the same conclusion.

Why is that? Because truth always leads to the same conclusion. Truth always brings us back to Christ. Always brings us back to reality. Truth will always bring us back to the conclusion that I am accountable to God and I am not right with God and I have a responsibility to respond to the truth of the gospel.

The fact that Paul was in this situation by the will of God and for the glory of God did not diminish the responsibility of these authorities. It was their responsibility to enact justice.

Yes, it was God's will that Paul was here in bonds. Yes, it was for God's glory, but it did not diminish their responsibility. Then said Agrippa Undephestus, this man might have been set at liberty if he had not appealed unto Caesar.

[45 : 50] Paul might have been set at liberty if it was God's will. Right? Nothing to do with Caesar. In Romans 1, verse 1, Paul would start this chapter of the Romans and say, Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, that's a bondservant, a slave, one in bonds, called to be an apostle, separated under the gospel of God.

Paul is saying, this is God's will. This is who I am in Christ. This has nothing to do with these authorities. In Acts 20, if you remember, Paul would say to the, when he was being brought on his way to Jerusalem, he said, I go bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me, except that the Holy Spirit witnesses in every city, saying bonds and afflictions abide me. This is part of my calling, this to be in bonds. And then we also know when the Lord stood by him in Acts 23, verse 11, the Lord said, be of good cheer, Paul, for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so thou must be witness also at Rome.

Paul might have been set at liberty, but this was God's will, and this was God's purpose to get Paul to Rome. And for you and I, there are no might have beens with God.

There's no such thing as a might have been. Well, it might have been different. Well, it might have. Romans 8, 28, and we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.

[47 : 23] God has a purpose, a plan, and everything in our life falls out according to that. In Acts 14, 22, Paul says, confirming the souls, or Luke writes, that they went on their way, confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God.

Our tribulation is not a might have been, but that we must, through much tribulation, enter the kingdom. This was after Paul was stoned to death at Lystra, was raised again, and then he says to

them, hey guys, this wasn't a one-off.

This is something that's going to happen to all of us. We must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom. It's not a might have been. In Mark 13, we looked at a scripture at the beginning from Mark 13 about how we should trust the Holy Spirit when we're brought before governors and rulers to give an account.

But Mark 13, verses 6 through 7, says, For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many. And when you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars, be you not troubled, for such things must needs be, but the end shall not be yet.

As we see the world falling apart around us, it's not a might have been. It must needs be. God has a plan and a purpose in that. And as we see the authorities that were put in place here completely being derelict in their duties, persecuting Paul, the Lord doesn't look at that and go, oh dear, there's no might have been.

[49 : 02] It's all part of his plan. If you can't read that, you can turn to Psalm 2. But in Psalm 2, it says, Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing?

The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us. He that sits in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall have them in derision. Why is he laughing? Because they can't cast away his cords. They can't break asunder the bands.

It's not possible. He laughs at them. Because God has a plan and a purpose. And they are not going to thwart it. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion and I will declare the decree the Lord has said unto me, Thou art my son. This day have I begotten thee.

[50 : 05] Ask of me and I shall give thee the heathen for thy inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron. Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Be wise now therefore O you kings. Be instructed you judges of the earth. You have an opportunity here. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the son lest he be angry and you perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little.

Blessed are all they that put their trust in him. With the Lord there is no might have been. He has a purpose and a plan. I love in there in the middle of it in verse 6 yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.

It's not the Jews holy hill. Certainly not the Palestinians. It is God's and God has a plan and a purpose for that. And everything that's taking place in this world right now and in our lives it's not a might have been.

Like Paul we can just stand in every situation and keep saying the same thing. The same truth. God is for me. God has blessed me and I have put my trust in him. And all these things are going to work out for my good.

[51 : 16] Because what is our hope and what is our end? Resurrection. The end is resurrection. Whether we die or whether we go to meet him in the air we're still going to get raised.

That's our hope. This world's not the end. Father thank you Lord that there are no oops in Christ. There's no chance.

there's no mistakes. And Lord there's no might have been. Well things might have been different if I only things might have turned out this way if maybe Lord you've got it all worked out.

Lord when we look at things and go why is this happening to me? Why am I suffering? Oh wait because there's a work for eternity a work that I won't see until resurrection a spiritual work that can only take place through suffering.

But I see the world falling apart around me. I think why is this happening Lord? Good people are suffering. Wicked people seem to be thriving. What is going on?

[52 : 23] And then I read in your word that you're laughing. You're laughing about that. Not because it's you're not caring or it's funny to you but you're laughing at the ridiculousness that man or Satan or principalities and powers think that they are going to alter one one little bit God's plans and purposes.

Thank you Lord for working your will in our lives and yet Lord at the same time that does not free us from our responsibility. We have a responsibility to obey.

