

Acts 26:19,25,28

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[0 : 00] Now let's turn to the passage we read at chapter 26. I'd like to look at some words in three separate verses.

Words of the Apostle Paul in verse 19. Words of Pistus in verse 25.

And words of Agrippa in verse 28. First of all, verse 19. Words of Paul. So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.

And then, Pistus' words in verse 24. You are out of your mind, Paul, he shouted. Your great learning is driving you insane.

Then in verse 28. Then Agrippa said to Paul, Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?

[1 : 09] Or as it is in the authorized version, How most do you persuade us me to be a Christian? Every time the gospel is preached, it provokes a reaction.

And here tonight, with these three verses, we have three different kinds of reaction to the gospel.

The reaction of the apostle Paul. The reaction of Pistus, the Roman governor.

The reaction of Agrippa, the last king of the Jews. The reaction of Agrippa, the third king of the Jews. And the reason why. I'd like to look with you at those three reactions tonight.

And see what we can learn from it. Because it reminds us that whenever we hear the gospel, we are challenged by it to react and we do react one way or another and it's helpful for us to look and to see what the Bible has to say on this and how various people reacted to it because the Bible is a book above all about people and about how they reacted to God a message comes from God God has worked a great work in Christ and it causes this message to be proclaimed to people and people responded to that message in different ways and we are being taught about the right reaction to the good news by looking at these various reactions of the different people first then if we look at the Apostle Paul in verse 19 he says

[3 : 34] I was not disobedient to the vision of heaven now we know of course that that was his reaction ultimately to the gospel but that was not his first reaction to the gospel and we need to look a little bit at what his background was what led up to this to make sense of it all and to see how this might relate to ourselves first of all if we look in verses 4 and 5 we discover a little bit of his fact today he says 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 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 live as a Pharisee

Paul makes this same kind of statement in various places throughout the New Testament he makes it very clear what his background actually was his background was a very religious one he was not somebody who came new to the Bible and to the Word of God from boyhood from infancy he was steeped in the scriptures of the Old Testament and as he grew older he was schooled in the very best thinking academic teaching of the day in theology in the school of the Pharisees and educated under the professor Gamelia he was someone who had therefore an intimate knowledge of what the Old Testament taught and he was someone who sought to practice in his own life what he believed the Old Testament commanded concerning the law of God you might say well surely here is someone who is prepared for the good news of Jesus Christ here is someone surely who will welcome the good news of Jesus with open arms someone who will see that indeed good news about Jesus is the fulfillment of the very thing that he as a Pharisee looked for the hope that he refers to in the verses just after this the hope that God had promised to them the hope of a great salvation the hope that when the Messiah came he would indeed liberate people from their bondage and their sin well of course as we know that was not the way it worked at all it proved to be no advantage whatsoever that Paul had a very religious background in fact it seemed to prove a disadvantage because he reacted in a very opposite way he reacted he rejected that message concerning

Jesus of Nazareth and he opposed it they might have you no but my point is this we may think wrongly mistakenly that there are certain kinds of people for whom this business about religion or about the gospel really is appropriate and it makes sense for them they're religious kinds of people and they may go in for this business of being converted or becoming a Christian and you may think it's not really for you you're not that kind of person you may think that such people have got an advantage they've got everything going for them to become that type of person but of course that is not the case at all nobody has an advantage as they stand before the challenge of the gospel the gospel comes to every one of us irrespective of who we are and it doesn't matter what background you have it doesn't matter what church you belong to what denominational background you have it doesn't matter whether you're church of

Scotland or it doesn't matter if you're Episcopalian or Roman Catholic it doesn't matter if you're Baptist it doesn't matter if you're free Presbyterian it doesn't matter if you're even free church when you come to that place where you're challenged by the gospel none of these things will be of any advantage to you whatsoever in this challenge of the gospel because the challenge of the gospel comes to every one of us just the same and it challenges us to faith in Christ and there will be no advantage or merit that will replace that faith in Christ no background or seeming religious advantage of any kind will do in the place of faith nothing can substitute for it

Paul had all that going for it yet initially he rejected that gospel and so it is of course today many people who are very religious many people who are very interested in the church even very far from believing that Christ is the only way of salvation and that outside of him there is no hope of heaven or of glory or of any such thing so then Paul's background though seemingly very good proved no advantage you tonight you've got an advantage because you've got a religious background it's not so if you tonight think you've got a disadvantage because you haven't got a religious background not so tonight you hear the gospel you hear the gospel proclaimed from the word of God and what matters tonight is your response to that gospel whether you accept it or whether you pass it by you know then that

[11:07] Paul went on to appall it the name of Jesus in verse 9 he says I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth they went on to seek in a most stringent violent way how he could best destroy this movement which he thought was really a challenge to the very vitals of what he held so dear the religion of Israel he sought in every way to seek to root it out to even try to get these Christians to blaspheme to go against the name of Jesus and to not accept it anymore but he viewed Jesus as an imposter he tried even to do that that was how far he went and how violent he was in his rage against

Jesus of Nazareth whom he saw as an imposter as one who was not at all the one he came to be well you may certainly not have gone as far as Paul went in his pre conversion days in opposing Christianity but tonight if you are not a Christian you have not come to accept Christ as your Savior and Lord you are against him whether you might come out and say it or not you are that is your position if you are not helping him you are hindering him just think in this city of Aberdeen all the people who are not with Jesus they are against him they are making it that much harder for the message of the gospel to be made known in this community and in this society they are making it that much harder for the Christian church to have any impact in this area you are one of those you may think you are sitting on the fence you may think you are standing on the middle ground but you are not you are against him you are opposing his work you are not helping him you are an obstacle to the grace of the gospel of Jesus to spread throughout this area and to proclaim the kingdom of God in every area of life but then the apostle

Paul came to that point where he heard the voice of Jesus when he met with Jesus Christ in verses 14 and 15 he fell to the ground and he heard this voice so why do you persecute hard for you to kick against the ghost that was all about this some months ago the exact words of this verse I'm not going to spend much time on it but just to notice that here the first thing that strikes the apostle Paul and should strike us as well is the concern of Jesus for Paul his concern for this person who was persecuting him who was seeking to root out the very knowledge of the name of

Jesus seeking to destroy the work that Jesus came into this world his gap that Jesus was concerned for he said it's hard Paul it's hard for you to kick against these ghosts remember the ghost pointed stick that people used to hurry the animals along he said it's hard for you to kick against it you're just like an unruly cow that won't go in the direction in which it's supposed to go and you're lashing out against this with your hooves you're getting hurt that's what you're like not very flattering the restriction implied here of course the Bible isn't very flattering about us anyway it tells us as it is it tells us what we're really like and that is what Paul was like he was lashing out against various influences that were being brought to bear on him to push him in the right direction he had the witness of the

Old Testament concerning what the Messiah was going to be like he had the witness of Christians concerning what Jesus really was he had even the witness of other people people in general who knew the events of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who would say these things and try to figure out what it was all about he knew all these things so many influences prodding him pushing him in the right direction he had the voice of conscience surely when he witnessed such travesties of justice as the trial of Stephen and other things like it that he himself was involved in and yet he was lashing out against that he was fighting against it and it was hard Jesus said for him to do so Jesus was concerned for Paul that he was hurting and harming himself he was in a state of tension he was in a state of great struggle now it may come as a surprise to you to know that that is exactly the same that God thinks of you tonight

[17:10] God is concerned for you the Lord Jesus tonight is just as concerned to you as he was for Paul and he's interested in what your condition is for your distinction put away any idea from your mind of Christianity being something hard Christianity being something just to do with condemning people Lord Jesus Christ said he didn't come into the world to condemn people but that they may be saved and Jesus constantly expresses his concern that whatever is bugging me tonight whatever is bothering you whatever your point of tension may be whatever your struggle is whatever you may be kicking against just like Paul was Jesus knows about it and Jesus is concerned about your pain and your sorrow at that particular point and he's speaking to you because he knows there is only one answer to that tension and that struggle that kicking out only one answer and that is to accept it until you see the life and liberty that he came to give and of course

Jesus also had an answer for Paul's question because Paul was there flat on his face on the ground and he was he was just astonished he didn't know what to think he had one question above all that he had to ask this voice was coming from heaven it was the voice of God he knew his scriptures well enough to know that but who was speaking to him who was this talking about persecuting the apostle Paul had thought he wasn't the apostle then of course Paul had thought that he was going about God's business doing God's work and yet here was the voice of God saying you're persecuting me Paul you're persecuting me Paul he thought he knew God so well that he asked the question who are you at?

I can't make sense of you who are you at? now you tonight may think that you know about God you may have your own ideas about God or you may have ideas from the Bible about God you may think that you know him but you may have to come to that point that Paul came to where he had to say I don't know who you are well who are you and the thing that came home like a blinding flash of light to the apostle Paul in these words of Jesus I am Jesus whom we are persecuting and it was at that point that everything began to fall into place for Paul when he realized that this Jesus whom he had been persecuted was indeed the Lord of glory Jesus answered this question you may come to life with questions and doubts and concerns and worries about what the Bible teaches what God what life is all about what's the point of the gospel you can come with these questions never get the idea that Christianity is saying you just believe don't ask any questions

Christianity is saying ask any questions and then believe ask any questions come to the word of God come to the words of Jesus ask any questions you'll find the answers there the answers that will never be found anywhere else you'll find there come and ask any questions and then of course Jesus in speaking to Paul gave him his great purpose in life in verse 16 and what follows he says now get up and stand on your feet I've appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness he goes on to explain what he had in mind for the apostle Paul his working and beginning to do but the point I'd just like to focus on is this he had a purpose for the apostle Paul he thought he had a purpose in life he would running about genetically trying to do the thing that he thought was pleasing to God and he was running round and round and he was getting that way because as soon as he would persecute

Christians in one place they would spring up somewhere else and be out there trying to persecute them there and never could he really root out this one perhaps you might feel a little bit like that you know maybe I'm persecuting Christians maybe your life feels pretty pointless rushing around I'm getting nowhere well one of the things the Christian gospel brings to you is a message of purpose it gives us the greatest purpose of all in living first of all it tells us what our life is all about what is the meaning of it that we're made in the image of God and the ultimate purpose of life is to know God to have an eternal relationship with him that neither life nor death nor any power in earth or in hell can bring and in having that relationship to make known to other people the glory of that relationship that they too can enjoy that's what the apostle called what he told him to go on to do to make known this new grace that he and God have just experienced what a tremendous purpose in life so many people today feeling what's the point of life what's the purpose of where am I going what's the point of doing anything feeling feeling meaning here is the greatest purpose of all a purpose that goes beyond us the few years that we may have in this world going stretching out into eternity serving God and glorifying him and acknowledging and praising him for all that he has done in Jesus

[23 : 48] Christ well Paul what was his reaction to all of this he tells us in these words verse 19 King Agrippa I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven now that's what it all comes down to that was Paul's reaction to meeting with Jesus Christ and to the challenge of Christ what is your reaction tonight to the challenge of the gospel of Jesus Christ because it comes down to one thing to obey or not to obey may not sound very attractive when you talk about obedience we don't like to obey other people we don't like to do what another person tells us to do but my friend that's what it comes down to ultimately because there is only one ruler of this universe there's not two there's not you and God there's only God and ultimately you have either to submit to him willingly or you will submit to him willy-nilly in the end tonight you have been asked to obey the invitation of the gospel to come and to breathe in Jesus

Christ your reaction out of their prophet Paul casting aside all the thoughts of his own merit and all his pharisaical righteousness and saying I was not his allegiance I obey this vision to heaven I obey the voice of Jesus and that is more to me than anything else in the whole world well that is the apostle Paul's reaction and I hope it's used tonight as well but let's look at the reaction of these other two men because they were different reactions and in these reactions we have great warning as to how not to pass up this opportunity of the gospel in verse 24 we have the reaction of testers you're out of your mind Paul he shouted your great learning is driving you insane Festus was the Roman governor of Judea he had lately thus succeeded

Felix the previous governor and in succeeding him he had inherited from him Paul's case and so he was landed with a problem of what to do with the apostle Paul and that's why he was being confronted here with the gospel it's strange you know the way in which God works sometimes if Festus had the chance he would have chosen to have had to deal with this very difficult case and perhaps you know if you have the choice perhaps you wouldn't really want to be confronted and be challenged you may feel awkward by this challenge of the gospel maybe we would want to get away from it but it's strange how God works sometimes he brings us to this kind of position and he's challenging us with the gospel what is our reaction going to be but of course we know that Festus reaction was that he thought

Paul had got off his head he thought that he had flipped his leg completely with all this learning with all this cleverness that Paul obviously demonstrated he had really gone just too far you know sometimes people think you've been just too clever and you haven't got any common sense that kind of thing that's the kind of thing that Festus was saying you're out of your mind but why would Festus have said that what was it particular about what Paul was saying it was so ridiculous we can look at this and see what Paul was saying we can see it's quite straightforward he's developing his argument and describing what happened it all makes sense why did Festus shout out like this that Paul was mad well it seems there were two things in particular that stand out here the first is that the apostle Paul made reference yet again to the resurrection and he made it very clear he said this is what the prophets and those who said would happen verse 23 that the

Christ would suffer and as the first to rise from the dead would proclaim life to his own people and to the Gentiles the first to rise from the dead no mistaking what Paul was talking about Christ actually physically rose from the dead and that is the one thing that of course Festus the educated Roman could not accept could not understand as being a reasonable proposition at all this was the one thing that the whole Greek and Roman world found so difficult to accept about the Christian gospel as we know one of the great Greek writers put it this way he said when a man dies and the earth drinks up his blood there is no resurrection and it's the very same word that is used there as the apostle Paul used of resurrection there is no return journey from death once the body goes down into the dust there is no return that of course not only the view of these educated

[29 : 12] Romans but the view of many new pagans today in the world in which we live the message that has been put to us by many strongly influential humanists in our world today there is nothing beyond death there is no resurrection this was the thing one of the things at least anyway that really rocked Festus back that such an intelligent man as the apostle Paul could really come out with this the resurrection he referred in chapter 25 and verse 19 to it in a preliminary way when he was talking to Agrippa about it that Paul was talking about a dead man named Jesus whom Paul claimed was a lie a dead man that was his view of Jesus of course that's the only alternative isn't it if Jesus didn't rise from the dead he's a dead man very blunt isn't it but you know we've got to be blunt sometime and we should thank

Festus for this at least that he was blunt and straightforward to the point my friend if Jesus did not rise from the dead as some churchmen today are saying then Jesus is a dead man and he's no more used to you or I than any other dead man he's no more used to you or I than any famous person of the past accomplished maybe something in their own life now they're dead and they're not able to help us anymore what's the point of praying to Robert the Bruce or any of these people who lived in the past no point whatsoever they're dead they're gone they have no influence in this world any longer that is the alternative believing that Jesus rose from the dead there is no other way then the question is is that in fact the case is that in fact the case now we'll just take up that one point and the apostle Paul answers this by saying

I'm not insane most excellent Festus what I'm saying is true and reasonable the king is familiar with these things and I can speak freely to him I'm convinced that none of this has escaped his notice because it was not done in a corner the apostle Paul was saying the Christian faith is not just a matter of clever ideas it's not just a matter of me being plausible or eloquent in what I've got to say the Christian faith is a matter fundamentally of history of whether this really happened or not the apostle Paul said the truth is that this really happened and people know it even King Agrippa sitting there he knows he's researched these things he knows that on the third day after Jesus was crucified that grave in which his body was put was empty and no one has been able to satisfactorily explain away what happened the only rational explanation is that

Jesus Christ literally bodily rose from the dead and there was never any body left there to be discovered or to be brought forward by anybody afterwards the apostle Paul makes that fundamental statement about Christianity it's not just a matter of feelings not just a matter of experience not just a matter of doctrines it's a matter of history it's a matter of fact it is a matter that was open to investigation by people even like King Agrippa and that is where the Christian faith still stands today it stands at that point where it says this is a matter of what has happened what God has accomplished in Christ and we can come to the eyewitness accounts of these things in the gospels and discover them for ourselves and discover the truth of what is said there so then the reaction of Festus was to say you're mad Paul coming away with these ideas you're mad now we know as

Christians we get that kind of reaction from people they think we're mad to preach the gospel they think we're mad to try to live a Christian life because they don't believe that something real happened there in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and when you're a Christian you get that kind of opposition to think that you're mad that was the reaction of Festus although Paul was able to answer him and bring forward some arguments as to this being not the case yet that was the reaction that we're left to that Festus had to the gospel of Jesus Christ there's abundant evidence my friend if you'll look at it in the gospels in the scriptures concerning the life and death and resurrection of Jesus are you prepared to do so or are you prepared to just write it off and say these Christians are mad I can't really understand it it's irrational without being prepared to look yourself at what this evidence actually says and to come to a conclusion on the basis of what God's word says actually happened well that was the reaction of Festus what about finally

[34 : 53] Agrippa's reaction to the gospel verse 28 we have his words very famous words again particularly in the authorized version the way it's given there almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian now traditionally that's been understood to mean that Agrippa was really sort of almost becoming a Christian I don't know if we can really go as far as to say that because the words literally mean in a little you persuade me to be a Christian or in a little while you'll be making a Christian of me now that's the kind of flavor to the words that Agrippa actually uses so must bear that in mind as we look at this reaction who was this Agrippa well he was the last of the Herodian family to rule in

Israel therefore he was the last king Jews ever had last king that the Jews ever had in that physical and political world it's interesting definitely to see what his reaction was to the gospel of Jesus we know another item about his life that it's important when we consider what his reaction was we're told here that he came with Bernice now we might wonder well who was this Bernice who was actually his sister but also the sister of Priscilla who was the wife of Felix the previous Roman governor but he was living with her together as if she was his wife that was something that was even considered to be a little bit outrageous even in terms of ancient morality which wasn't all that high here was something in his life something that was wrong and that is a barrier of what his reaction to the gospel actually was well we know first of all that he was very knowledgeable about religion in verses 2 and 3 we have

Paul's estimate of this particularly in verse 3 especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and concuperses therefore I begging for the situation here was a man who really did know the Old Testament he really did know about the Jewish religion he was a Jew himself and he was interested in the gospel he was someone who seemed to be well and proud Paul could appeal to him all these things I'm not escaping you honest this was not done on a corner he can appeal to a gripper because he knows his knowledge and he is actually moved into this now perhaps tonight you may have a little bit of identification with a bigger gripper at least a visible and you may feel that you know quite a bit about the Christian faith quite a bit about the scriptures again let's know that in itself is no advantage that in itself is not enough when it comes to healing the gospel he must respond to that gospel itself and to that invitation itself the gripper seemed to be a very knowledgeable man and why did he brag that he knew what was going on it was only a role in technical issues but he didn't want to hear

Paul who told him chapter 25 verse 22 that Agrippa said to Festus I would like to hear this man himself he was curious he was interested in religion obviously you're interested enough to be here this evening to hear the gospel of Jesus God perhaps you're curious to hear this man I don't know that's not enough to hear this man or hear what the free church has to say he is interested to hear that man Jesus says he is to say to him because not he is living his word is penetrating to him as we read tonight before you read we are hoping the Lord will be hunting for the living God and he heard his word well certainly Agrippa felt a personal appeal of the gospel in the words of

Paul and it seems a bit surprising that he did so because after all Paul had just been inquiring from Agrippa as to his knowledge of the Old Testament prophets he asked him do you believe the prophets I know you do I know you're knowledgeable in these things and I know you believe these Old Testament prophets I know you know all about prophecies concerning the Messiah so that's what Paul was leading up to Agrippa could see right away where he was leading up to Agrippa could see right away that the apostle Paul was wanting him to stand side by side with the apostle Paul and agree with him and say do you right Paul I know that these prophets prophesy that the Messiah was going to be like that and Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled those things to the letter you can see the apostle Paul was there challenging them to standard and to acknowledge the faith of the apostles and the Messiah he could see where it was going to be he stopped it right away he stopped it right away with these words and a little he would be a

[41 : 15] Christian on him in other words he turned it aside with other brothers he felt the appeal of the gospel he knew where Paul was living and he knew that there were powerful reasons that Paul had been bringing home to them that's others concerning this faith but he wouldn't let it go any further he felt the power of it so it was as it's translated in the authorized version you're almost persuading me there is an amount of persuasion here that I recognize you're trying to persuade me I feel the power of it I feel the influence of it I'm not going to have it is that you're feeling tonight you feel the appeal of the gospel of Christ you may feel something of its power something of its relevance you may feel something of its attraction for one reason or another you're saying I'm not wanting no Lord I can respond to this message and so if I pass it off it's kind of a joke of you'll be making a

Christian of me that's maybe you passed off the gospel in that way before when somebody has tried seriously to speak to you concerning your own soul giving salvation you passed it off but my friend you can't always do that as the time comes and that will be the last time you will pass it off tonight perhaps your reaction just now is I just want to pass it by thank you very much who knows this may be the last time you will be privileged to hear this gospel of Christ and so purify refuse to be persuaded you may speculate as to why really refuse there certainly appear to be two reasons that would have been given to his thinking the first is and of course if he was going to stand side by side with Paul in the grieving of all fountably then he was facing the charge of Festus against Paul she had just shouted out you're mad

Paul here was this educated Roman that was his opinion of the gospel how could Agrippa how could Agrippa the king stand side by side with Paul agree with him over against Festus and talk the whole thing with him tonight maybe you feel the power of that if you're going to stand side by side with Christians and say I believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior then you know there's a lot of people maybe clever people maybe not so clever people who are going to say you're mad you're mad you've joined these bunch of Christians you go to church you're done you may feel you don't want that kind of opposition that kind of aggravation you can do without it then there was perhaps another argument that was hammering in or Agrippa's mind as he thought of this what about what he knew to be his sinful relationship with his sister how is he going to deal with that if he was going to become a

Christian he knew the high moral demands of the Christian faith he knew that that would have to go that would have to be given perhaps there's something in your life perhaps not just quite so bad in outward terms anyways this part of Agrippa's experience but perhaps there's something in your life that you know the Bible says is wrong that God forbids and that he says leads to destruction yet we're not prepared to give that up well let's look at these two things fear of being called man fear of being loved that and reluctance to give up a sin put them all together put them on one side so these are the reasons that I'm not going to be persuaded then on the other side you put Jesus Christ and you put all that is offered to you in the gospel you put there eternal life which begins here and now in this world with God's promise that he will never leave you nor forsake you that he will be with you through thick and thin and he will bring you eventually through death itself to the unspeakable glories of heaven now those are the two sides of the bond who in his right mind would take those things that are so transient and passive like the ideas and words of some people you know or a sin which in itself is leading to destruction and you can feel something of its destructive power here and now what comparison these things is to the eternal weight of glory in Jesus

Christ who in his right mind would accept the one accept all that this life has to offer in his poor paltry and sinful terms and reject the riches in Jesus Christ there is the choice what is your reaction tonight is it the reaction of Agrippa to say now I'm not going to be persuaded is it the reaction of bestness who said you're mad Paul what is it the reaction of Paul who ultimately on his face before Jesus Christ said I obey the heavenly bishop let us pray our gracious Lord we thank you for the way in which you communicate your word to us we thank you for how it comes to us in these personal dealings that the Lord Jesus Christ had with men who lived long ago but men just like ourselves of the same kinds of attitudes the same kinds of characters and personalities perhaps as we still have today

[47 : 27] Lord we thank you that we can be confronted and challenged by the gospel in such a living and real way we pray that tonight you would indeed bring home these words to every one of us that if we do not know you you would draw us to yourself that we would be persuaded by your word and that if we do already know you that we would rejoice in the good things that are ours in Christ that we would thank you and bless you for such a great salvation that you would enable us to make known this message more and more as the days pass by that others may hear and be drawn to the Lord Jesus and be drawn to him savingly for their eternal redemption and deliverance we ask it all in the name of Jesus and for his sake Amen