

The Heart of Paul

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[0 : 0 0] Acts chapter 26, and we'll be reading verses 19 through 29, where Paul is addressing Festus and King Agrippa, giving a defense of the gospel, telling of his conversion.

Acts 26, starting at verse 19. You seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.

To this day I have had the help that comes from God. So I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass, that the Christ must suffer, and that by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.

And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, you are out of your mind. Your great learning has driven you out of your mind.

But Paul said, I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly, for I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.

[1 : 5 6] King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe. And Agrippa said to Paul, in a short time would you persuade me to become a Christian?

And Paul said, whether short or long, I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am, except for these chains.

Last Sunday, we considered Jesus as he stood trial before Governor Pilate.

And this evening, we will consider another man on trial, the Apostle Paul. If we want to know what it looks like for someone to have a mind set on things above, if we want to know what it looks like for someone to have a heart for Christ's kingdom and for his gospel, we really don't need to look any further than the Apostle Paul.

His circumstances, his audience, the risk to his own life, Paul didn't let anything stop him from telling anyone, anywhere about his Lord and Savior.

[3 : 1 8] And this story in Acts 26 is a wonderful example of that, though it's only one of many. We could have gone to Romans chapter 1, and I considered it.

In Paul's great theological treatise that is Romans, he doesn't even make it through the letters opening salutation before launching into what amounts to a brief presentation of the gospel.

As soon as he identifies himself in verse 1 and says he was set apart for the gospel of God, he's thinking gospel and immediately jumps back into the Old Testament to show how Jesus was and is both fully human and fully God, therefore fulfilling what the prophecy said about him.

He then states that his mission is to bring about obedience of faith for the sake of Jesus' name among all the nations. And this all comes before he even bothers to say hello to the believers in Rome.

Most salutations simply identify the author, they identify the audience or the original reader, and offer a brief greeting. But Paul's salutation to the Romans is something like 71 words long because he can't help but talk about Christ.

[4 : 3 8] He doesn't want to talk about himself. He wants to talk about Christ everywhere, always. Now, you may find some irony in this.

Paul didn't want to talk about himself, but here we are carrying on about him. But even he said, be imitators of me as I am of Christ.

Hebrews 11. We're all familiar with. It's an entire chapter devoted to examples of faith set by people who went before us. Verse 2 says, for by faith the people of old received their commendation.

Here they are. Consider them. Learn from them. Be encouraged by them. Plus, even Paul used himself as an example at times.

Twice in the book of Acts, we read of Paul sharing his personal testimony as he does here in Acts 26. He talks about the grace of God that stopped him in his tracks when he was on his way to Damascus to persecute more Christians.

[5 : 41] Frequently, as he's writing his letters to the churches, he shares personal details about who he was and who Christ made him. He very often reveals his heart to us.

One of my favorite examples of this is found in Philippians 3. where he says, if anyone else thinks he has a reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.

Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law of Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

But, whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

That's the heart of Paul. Even when he talks about himself, he traces every good thing he could possibly say right back to Christ.

[6 : 58] Yes, he says, I could find things to boast about. I could certainly put confidence in myself. But it's all rubbish. Every bit of it.

All that matters is that I know him. Christ Jesus, my Lord. Nothing else compares with that. Nothing. So, for this reason, I have no apprehension about lifting up Paul as an example for us to learn from and to follow, be imitators of me as I am of Christ.

Now, we're jumping right into the middle of this ongoing saga in Acts 26. So, I want to back up and consider some of the events that led up to this.

Because by this time, Paul has been in custody for two years. It all started two years prior when Paul was in Jerusalem. So, this takes us all the way back to Acts chapter 21.

Now, before Paul even arrived in Jerusalem, he knew something was prone to happen. Maybe he didn't know all of the details, but he knew something might happen.

[8 : 07] Because at the start of Acts 21, the disciples in Tyre, through the Spirit, we're told, were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. Then, when he gets to Caesarea, he's getting closer, the prophet Agabus urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.

He actually took Paul's belt and bound his own hands and feet and said, thus says the Holy Spirit, this is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

Now, this is a fascinating progression of God's providence in Paul's life. The Spirit is leading people to warn Paul about what's to come in Jerusalem.

Yet, Paul previously told the Ephesian elders, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

So, Paul is bound by the Spirit to go. He must go. But as he gets closer and closer to Jerusalem, the Spirit is leading people all around him to warn him about what's in store.

[9 : 30] And if we didn't know better, it almost feels like the Spirit is just adding insult to injury. The Spirit is leading him to his imprisonment, to some sort of affliction, and he makes it a point to remind Paul of this every stop along the way.

Why? Well, to be clear, the Spirit is not contradicting himself. He's not leading Paul to Jerusalem while simultaneously trying to get him to flee in the other direction.

That's not it. No, I believe he's preparing Paul. This is like a loving father saying to his son, you have to do this, but you should know it won't be easy.

But in the midst of this, we also see God putting Paul's resolve to the test. And I would argue that this was as much for everyone around him as it was for Paul himself.

He says in Acts 21, verse 14, Let the will of the Lord be done. Paul was not proving just how stubborn he could be.

[10 : 34] He was showing his faithfulness to the call and command of God. Everyone could see that Paul was willing to obey the Lord's will, even at great personal cost to himself.

I will go where the Spirit leads. I will trust God's plan for me, Paul says. And this had a way of encouraging the believers around him. Look at Paul's faith.

Let us, too, trust God in all things. Well, the warnings proved accurate. When Paul is in Jerusalem, some Jews from Asia Minor, quite possibly Ephesus, they see him.

And they've heard him preach. They believe he teaches against the law of Moses. And perhaps worse yet, pals around with Gentiles. In fact, they accuse him of taking a Gentile into a part of the temple where Gentiles were not allowed.

It never happened, but that was their accusation. And it caused an uproar in the city. We're told, Acts 21, 30, all the city was stirred up and the people ran together.

[11 : 42] They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple. Now, they wanted to kill him right then and there. But the authorities get involved. They formally arrest Paul.

And the two-year saga begins. One commentator writes, More than 40 men swear to neither eat nor drink until they kill Paul.

They are upset with Paul over his teaching concerning Jesus and the Mosaic law. Yet they themselves will not blink to break the law at any point to murder Paul, even going so far as to encourage a miscarriage of justice which the council agrees to pursue.

This is not simply the action of a group of outlying radicals, but an orchestrated assassination attempt with the support and blessing of some, perhaps most, of the Jewish authorities.

Now, before the Jews can carry out their plot to kill Paul, God's providence intervenes. Let's not kid ourselves about who was actually running the show here.

[12 : 51] Paul's nephew goes to one of the Roman tribune and tells him what's happening. So the tribune gathers what appears to be a small army to escort Paul out of the city under the cover of night, taking him to Caesarea.

And there, Governor Felix can decide his fate. Once again, Paul is given an opportunity to plead his case. And it goes something like this.

Paul says, I went to the temple to worship. I wasn't arguing. I wasn't causing trouble. The Jews really have no proof that I did anything wrong.

In fact, my original accusers are gone. I don't know where they are. Yes, I am a follower of the way. But I didn't break any laws.

I didn't break any rules of the temple. Frankly, I am here because... This is my paraphrase, mind you. I am here because I believe the Old Testament.

[13 : 55] And I may have mentioned something about the resurrection of the dead, which seemed to start a bit of an argument among the Jews. In effect, Paul says, I'm on trial because I preach Christ crucified and raised from the dead, which, by the way, is all affirmed in your own scriptures, the law and the prophets.

Now, Felix knows a little something about Christianity. Acts 24, 22 says he has rather accurate knowledge of the way.

In other words, he has a pretty good understanding of the conflict. He's indifferent to it, but he understands it. As we'll see, all of the Roman authorities involved in Paul's case have pretty much the same attitude toward it.

They don't believe Paul is guilty of breaking any laws. They see the entire thing as little more than a religious dispute among some of the Jews. They really don't want anything to do with it.

And they would let Paul go free, but they feel obligated to appease the Jews to keep peace in Israel. So Felix keeps Paul as a prisoner, but he lets Paul have visitors.

[15 : 15] He lets those visitors bring him things. So he has a relative amount of freedom compared to maybe many other prisoners. Meanwhile, though, Paul has not lost sight of his mission.

At his conversion, Jesus said, and you see Paul retell this here in Acts 26, I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

Jesus says, Paul, I'm saving you to send you so that others might be saved as well. So go. Go to the Gentiles and preach the gospel.

When writing to the Corinthians, Paul says, necessity is laid upon me. Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. I think J.B. Phillips paraphrases it something like this.

I would be utterly miserable if I did not preach. I must preach the gospel. I want nothing more than to know Christ and to tell others about him.

[16:49] This was Paul's heart thoroughly. This was his entire life. Philippians 1.21. For to me, to live is Christ. Christ. Nothing more.

Nothing less. Nothing else. Paul says his very life is Christ. Elsewhere he writes, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Now, I have to admit, it's relatively easy to preach Christ in a place like this among fellow believers. But when I read Paul's story, I find myself wondering what I would do if I were in his shoes. What if I were facing imprisonment? Or possibly death? Is my life so consumed by Christ that my first thought when standing before the very men who could either set me free or put me to death be, I must preach the gospel?

I can't answer that. But that was Paul's first thought. Acts 24.24 says, After some days, Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.

[18:17] And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity, I will summon you.

Faith in Jesus, righteousness, self-control, judgment. I'm guessing this is shorthand for saying Paul preached the gospel.

He likely told Felix how he could be reconciled to God. And I get the impression that Paul did not sugarcoat this message because Felix is alarmed.

Get out of here, Paul. I'll call you when I'm ready to see you again. Now, Felix may have been genuinely curious to hear what Paul had to say.

He's not Jewish, but he's married to a Jewish woman. She's the daughter of Herod Agrippa I. Felix is a governor within Judea, so he has a lot of ties to Judaism, and he may have been intrigued by this new sect of Judaism that he's heard so much about.

[19:25] They're calling them Christians now. But he isn't Jewish, and he clearly is not ready to become a Christian yet. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote that Felix exercised the power of a king with the mind of a slave.

Oh, he loved his power. He loved his influence. But he also knew his place within the Roman Empire. Apart from maybe some other form of compensation, maybe Paul would slip him a little money to buy his freedom.

Felix knew he had to keep the peace in Israel, and that's what it came down to, which meant he had to keep Paul in prison. But more to the point, Paul preaches the gospel.

He isn't naive. I mean, he knows the rules of the game as well as anyone. We see him being quite shrewd throughout this entire ordeal, but his primary motivation isn't his freedom.

It's not even his comfort. I think if I were in his position, if I'm being perfectly candid, I would have easily convinced myself that God and his kingdom would be better served if I weren't a prisoner.

[20:41] Maybe I would focus on my freedom first, and then I would have my opportunities to preach the gospel. But as Jesus taught, seek first the kingdom of God.

And that's what Paul does. God has given him an opportunity to preach Christ to some of the most powerful people in the region, and he does not waste it. Well, Felix, he kicks the can down the road. He's a politician. He doesn't want to make the final decision. He really wants nothing to do with it at all. So he simply keeps Paul in prison until another man takes his place, and that man's name is Festus.

It takes the Jews all of three days after Festus arrives, or at least, you know, takes his so-called throne. It takes them three days to run to Festus and beg him, hey, please, send Paul back to Jerusalem.

Why? Well, they plan to ambush him along the way and kill him. They're still thinking about this after so long. So Festus brings Paul in, and he, once again, lets Paul address the charges against him.

[21:57] Paul simply says, I haven't broken any laws, but he also says, if I have, I'm willing to face the consequences, whatever they are. Of course, Festus, he's a newcomer to this whole situation.

As far as he's concerned, the easiest thing he can possibly do is just give the Jews what they want. So he asks Paul in Acts 25.9, do you wish to go to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges? And that's when Paul seals his fate. I appeal to Caesar, he says. You see, Paul senses that Festus is ready to pull a pilot, you know, wash his hands of the whole thing.

But, and this was Paul's right as a Roman citizen, he appeals to Caesar. Paul effectively says, I want to take my case to the highest court.

Don't send me to Jerusalem. I've appealed to Caesar. This is my right. Festus, you are now bound to send me to Rome. It was a stunning gamble on his part from at least a natural standpoint.

[23 : 07] It's like taking your case to the Supreme Court. Once Caesar rules, there are no more appeals. Paul was willing to let his fate be decided by the emperor.

And who was the emperor? Who was Caesar at this time? It was Nero. The same man who would later viciously, needlessly torture and murder Christians.

It was stunning. But it was also a wise move. Do you think Nero feels any pressure at this time to appease the Jews?

No. You see, Paul is removing himself from the context of Israel altogether. He's leaving his Jewish accusers far behind. So while he's off standing in Rome where people give no thought at all to the religious conflicts of the region of Palestine, the Jews will be 1,500 miles away, probably still fuming about Paul getting away.

But technically, technically, this isn't Paul's idea. If you were to turn back to Acts 23, just after Paul is arrested, we're told the Lord stood by him and said, take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.

[24 : 33] So very early in this whole ordeal, the Lord encourages Paul, giving him this additional insight that this whole thing is not a deviation from the plan.

It is the plan. It is the plan. And because Paul is committed to doing whatever Christ has called him to do, he waits. And he waits.

He waits two years until the moment is right. He waits until the prospect of being shipped back to Jerusalem becomes very imminent, it would appear.

Only then does he say, I appeal to Caesar. Which is another way of saying, send me to Rome.

Now, to be clear, Paul is not looking for an easy way out.

He's not trying to manipulate the situation for his own personal advantage. If that were the case, he could have told his friends long ago to bring him some money. He could have bought his freedom from Felix just like that.

[25 : 38] For Paul, this isn't about him. This isn't about what he wants. Well, I should rephrase that. It is about what he wants. But what he wants is to serve Christ, to preach his name to anyone and everyone and to fulfill his commission as the Lord's apostle.

And he's willing to suffer tremendously to do it. Listen to what he writes in 2 Corinthians 6. Behold, now is the favorable time.

Behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in anyone's way so that no fault may be found with our ministry. But as servants of God, we commend ourselves in every way by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger, by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, by truthful speech and the power of God with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise.

We are treated as imposters and yet are true, as unknown and yet well known, as dying and behold, we live, as punished and yet not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing everything.

And I love this next line. He says, we have spoken freely to you, Corinthians. Our heart is wide open. Can we possibly question Paul's sincerity?

[27 : 29] After everything he was willing to endure for the sake of the gospel and for the salvation of sinners, can we possibly question his motives? His heart is wide open for all to see.

Look at the evidence. This former Pharisee, this former persecutor of the church has become poor and misaligned and hated and persecuted.

Why would he do that? And why would he continue putting his life at risk, spending years as a prisoner, enduring numerous beatings, all to preach this message?

For what? For personal gain? What personal gain? I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.

So Paul is on a mission to take the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ straight into the heart of the Roman Empire. It would not be a stretch to say he was going to take it into the heart of the world.

[28 : 36] Now, this may not have been the way he originally planned to get there, but when you think about it, this way will provide him with opportunities he would not have had otherwise.

He may get to stand before Nero himself. He could possibly preach the gospel to some of the most powerful or the most powerful and influential people in the world.

I can almost imagine a slight grin forming across Paul's face when he hears Festus say, to Caesar you have appealed, to Caesar you will go.

But of course we won't follow Paul all the way to Rome, not today. Instead, we'll spend the remainder of our time watching this interaction between Paul and King Agrippa.

By now, I think we've seen where Paul's mind is. His mind is far above his present circumstances or his own human desires. His mind is on things above heavenly, spiritual things.

[29 : 42] We've seen where his heart is. His heart is with Christ. His heart is in the gospel. His heart is for seeing sinners saved for the glory of God. And we'll continue to see that in his appearance before Agrippa.

Now, according to Acts 25, verse 13, Agrippa and his sister, Bernice, they come to town. And this proves to be to the benefit of Festus, who has a bit of a problem here. As he says at the end of the chapter, for it seems to me unreasonable in sending a prisoner not to indicate the charges against him.

In other words, he has to figure out what Paul is being charged with before he can send him to Caesar. And Agrippa, well, he happens to be an ethnic Jew. He has power over parts of Palestine, of course, but he's also Jewish.

He's not religiously or morally Jewish. He's ethnically Jewish. So as far as Festus is concerned, he should be able to provide some insight. So here comes King Agrippa with all of his pomp and show. We're told Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in.

[31 : 01] So this isn't a private meeting between Paul and Agrippa. Paul is standing in the spotlight surrounded by Agrippa and Festus and a whole lot of important people and if I had to guess, there was likely an outer circle of some of the ordinary folks who have trickled in just to see what all of the fuss is about.

So as it happens, Paul has a substantial audience here and at the start of chapter 26, Agrippa gives him the floor. You have permission to speak for yourself, he says.

Well, Paul seizes this moment. He begins with what could almost be mistaken for flattery. He says, I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews.

therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. Now, to be clear, I don't believe that Paul is really flattering Agrippa. He's acknowledging that Agrippa does have an understanding of Jewish law, customs, things that have gone on in their part of the world, something Festus does not have, and he's using that as a foundation for what he is going to say.

You see, Paul knows his audience. That's an important lesson for all of us. He always keeps in mind who he's speaking to. Then, without missing a beat, he launches into his testimony, only this is not just his story.

[32 : 33] It's the gospel story. That's why he tells us it's the story of how the risen Christ met him on the road to Damascus, and in that blinding light, everything changed.

Paul recounts his zealous past, painting a vivid picture of a man consumed by self-righteousness and religious pride, a persecutor of the very Christ he now serves.

He says, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. So he admits that he once had a very fervent, very misguided zeal.

He essentially says, I was the chief of sinners, hunting Christians down, imprisoning them, and approving of their deaths. My, have the tables turned. But here's the pivot, the turning point.

Christ interrupted Paul's blind and violent fury with a grand revelation of truth. Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

[33 : 42] It is hard for you to kick against the goads. Jesus revealed not only Paul's sin, but the futility of what he was doing. The imagery of kicking against the goads, one of those pointed prods used to guide stubborn oxen, it reminds us that rebelling against God is as foolish as it is painful.

And from there, Paul speaks of his new commission. Jesus said to him, I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me. His calling was very clear. Go, tell, proclaim Christ to both Jews and Gentiles so that they may turn from darkness to light, from Satan's power to God's mercy.

Paul was given a new purpose. More than that, he was given a new heart, he was given a new life, and he's on a new mission. He was to be a light to a very, very dark world.

And Paul, he doesn't shy away from the implications of this new life. Here, standing before Agrippa and before this entire audience, he boldly declares that his message, it isn't new.

[34 : 58] It's rooted in the ancient promises of Scripture. He says, to this day, I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass.

And what did they say? That the Christ must suffer, and that by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light to both our people and to the Gentiles.

Now, you'll notice that Paul's defense here isn't about proving his innocence. That's secondary. It's about, once again, proclaiming Christ.

And just when Paul is driving home the fact of the resurrection, this audacious, miraculous centerpiece of our Christian hope, Festus interrupts.

Paul, you are out of your mind. Your great learning is driving you out of your mind. Tell me if that sounds familiar. He can't fathom a man willingly enduring chains, not for personal gain.

[36 : 11] What personal gain could there be, but for the sake of proclaiming a crucified and risen Savior? But Paul's not intimidated.

He's not intimidated by the crowd, their stature, and he's not intimidated by the apparent foolishness of all of this. Doesn't faze him. Completely undeterred, calmly, and very respectfully, mind you, he replies, I am not out of my mind.

Most excellent, Festus. But I am speaking true and rational words. And then he turns to Agrippa. Agrippa. Why? Well, Agrippa, he's the new man.

He's the man Paul wants to speak to. He turns to Agrippa and says, King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? You claim to be Jewish, right?

You claim to be Jewish. Do you believe the prophets? I know you believe. He presses Agrippa, you know, right to the line, calling him to account for the truth that he already knows, which to some degree or another he claims to believe, despite, you know, obvious suppression of it.

[37 : 30] And Agrippa, he's very caught off guard. This is the way I picture this happening. So he deflects. In a short time, would you persuade me to be a Christian? Notice, he didn't deny knowing the truth or believing the prophets.

But a Christian, that's a different thing. I think you can do that in such a short time. And now, Paul's response in verse 29 is truly, it's a powerful moment in Scripture.

Paul's not pleading for his freedom. He's not strategizing his escape. Instead, his singular focus in this moment is on the salvation of the people in that room.

And in his response, we see the depth of his heart. We see the clarity of his mission. And this unshakable hope that just drives him day after day.

He says, whether short or long, I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am.

[38 : 42] Except for these chains. don't forget that Paul is speaking here to a king surrounded by an audience of elites and Roman soldiers and officials and onlookers.

A lot of people who wield tremendous power and influence and prestige in the region. And here's Paul, a prisoner in chains, possibly bruised from some of his last beatings, I don't know, looking anything but impressive in the eyes of the world.

As I understand it, at least history says Paul was not impressive looking to begin with. Kind of a short, balding man. Yet, without a hint of irony, without a hint of self-pity whatsoever, Paul says, I wish you could be like me.

Just imagine King Agrippa looking down from his royal seat. You know, he's draped in his fine robes. Who knows what it looked like up there with all of the pomp and show he brought in with him. He's got every worldly comfort at his fingertips. And hearing Paul say this, you want me to be like you? I mean, that's almost laughable until you remember what Paul means by this.

[40 : 06] What he really means by this. Paul does not want Agrippa to be like him in the sense of sharing his chains. No one would wish for that.

But Paul isn't talking about outward circumstances. He's talking about the life and freedom that Christ has wrought in him.

He's talking about a peace that surpasses all understanding. He's talking about a joy that no prison walls can confine and a hope that transcends even the threat of death.

Paul knows what Agrippa can't quite grasp in this moment. That is, that he, the prisoner, is freer than the king who sits in judgment of him.

And this isn't wishful thinking or some naive optimism. Paul is talking about the truth of Christ in the gospel here. It's the message of freedom in Christ. Freedom from sin.

[41 : 06] Freedom from guilt. Freedom from the power of Satan. Freedom from condemnation of the law. Freedom from the wrath of God. And this is what drives Paul to preach the way he does.

Even in chains. Even before those who have power to make his life far more miserable or ended entirely. He knows their need is the same as anyone else.

He sees past the pomp and the circumstance past Agrippa's royal garb and his stubborn unbelief right down to the real bondage that imprisons every single person apart from Christ.

I would to God, Paul says. I would to God, this is a prayer, this is a pleading before God that all who would hear him, small or great, would come to know the Savior that he met back on the road to Damascus.

Paul is living proof of the gospel's power and he desperately wants everyone in that room to experience what he has, the forgiveness of sins, a new heart, a new purpose, and a promise of eternal life, reconciliation with God.

[42 : 21] And here's the kicker, in this, it strikes me that Paul does not come across in any way bitter. He's not angry about his circumstances.

His greatest desire is not for his chains to be removed. Obviously, he doesn't want them, that's what he implies. But that's not his greatest desire. His greatest desire is for the chains of sin to be removed from others.

Paul isn't preaching here with clenched fists, demanding justice for himself. He's preaching with open hands, offering grace to his enemies.

He's really the living embodiment of Jesus' command to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. He's doing that here. He's not trying to save his own skin.

He's here to proclaim the Savior who saved him and could save them. So my prayer for us is that we see the same heart in ourselves.

[43 : 26] Is our desire to see others come to Christ and to know him so great that it eclipses our own personal comfort or our own sense of justice or our own pride?

Are we willing to lay down our rights and our reputations and even our lives if it means that others might come to know the freedom that we have in Christ? Paul's wish that Agrippa and everyone else would be like him, that extends well beyond that courtroom in Caesarea.

It extends to us right here, right now. Paul's desire is Christ's desire and it should be our desire that the lost would be found, that the blind would see, that sinners would come to know the surpassing worth of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let us not be ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for salvation. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the example of Paul whose heart burned with the desire to see others come to know the saving grace of Christ.

I pray that you would give us the same boldness, that same compassion, that same commitment to the gospel, no matter the cost. Help us to see beyond the temporal, our own circumstances and to focus on the eternal need of those around us.

[44 : 59] Lord, open our hearts wide that we might love others as Paul did with a love that points to Jesus. Strengthen us to be faithful witnesses of your truth and may our lives always reflect the freedom and joy that can be found only in Christ.

and it's in his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.