

A Dead Man Named Jesus

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[0 : 00] Please take your Bibles and turn to Acts chapter 26. Acts chapter 26, we're going to read the entire chapter. Then Agrippa said to Paul,!

So, because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently. 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 lived as a Pharisee.

And now it is because of my hope and what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today. This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night.

O King, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead? I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

[1 : 29] And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priest, I put many of the saints in prison. And when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.

Many a time, I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished. And I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them. On one of these journeys, I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priest. And about noon, O King, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions.

We all fell to the ground. And I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.

Then I asked, who are you, Lord? I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, the Lord replied. Now get up and stand on your feet.

[2 : 32] I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles.

I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

So then King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and all Judea and to the Gentiles also.

I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me.

But I have had God's help to this very day. And so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen, that the Christ would suffer and as the first to rise from the dead would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.

[3 : 51] At this point, Festus interrupted Paul's defense. You are out of your mind, Paul, he shouted. Your great learning is driving you insane.

I'm not insane, most excellent Festus, Paul replied. What I'm saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things and I can speak freely to him.

I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice because it was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.

Then Agrippa said to Paul, do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian? Paul replied, short time or long.

I pray God that not only you, but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains. The king rose and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. [4 : 55] They left the room and while talking with one another, they said, this man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment. Agrippa said to Festus, this man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.

Are Christians insane? Are they out of their mind? Are they out of touch with reality?

I mean, to believe such inconceivable things such as that a dead man named Jesus is alive.

These things simply don't happen in the world and those who believe that they do are at best weak minded and gullible. And at worst, they're mentally ill and insane.

Now, that was the conclusion of Governor Festus after listening to Paul's defense. You are insane. You are out of your mind. Now, King Agrippa and Bernice have come to congratulate Festus on being appointed as governor over this region of Palestine.

[6 : 06] And they're staying for several days. And Festus tells them of this interesting case that he has inherited from the previous governor, Felix, a man named Paul whom the Jews wanted dead, but who had done nothing worthy of death or imprisonment.

In fact, his only crimes, if you could call them that, had to do with the Jewish religion and about a dead man named Jesus whom Paul claimed was alive.

And when refusing to be transferred to Jerusalem for the trial, Paul appealed to Caesar to be tried by the emperor himself in Rome. Now, I've got a problem, Agrippa.

Festus says, I don't know what to write in the letter that we send along with Paul as to why the emperor should waste his time trying such a case as this.

But I'm hoping you, who are well acquainted with the Jewish religion and controversies, Agrippa, will be able to help me write this letter. So, in his defense before Festus and Agrippa, we get to hear Paul's testimony of conversion for the third time in the book of Acts.

[7 : 26] We've heard it twice. This is the last time, and it's the fullest account that we have. We've been over the ground before, so I want to go through it rather quickly. And I want you to especially notice this time through the central place of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in Paul's defense.

It's not a periphery thing. It's right at the heart, right at the center of his defense. And then we're going to look at the responses of Governor Festus and King Agrippa. Two men who, before they met the judge and maker of them, had the privilege of hearing the saving gospel that could redeem them from hell and bring them into the family of God.

What was their response that day to the gospel they heard? Well, as Paul stands before this pompous court, he begins by saying how glad he is to be giving his defense to King Agrippa.

And that because he's well acquainted with the Jewish religion and controversies. You see, at the very center of his defense will be to show that what he believes and what he preaches about Jesus Christ is nothing more than the proper fulfillment of Judaism.

All that the Old Testament says, I am just preaching. It has happened in Jesus Christ. Now, in verses 4 to 8, he talks about his well-known past life as a Pharisee.

[8 : 55] The strictest group of Jews. And now here I am on trial for my hope in the resurrection. There it is, right away. But this is something that every Pharisee believed.

That death was not the end. But that there is a future resurrection of the body. Indeed, all the 12 tribes of Israel believe this and are presently expecting to see it fulfilled since this hope of the resurrection was promised to our fathers, to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob.

This is nothing new. This is Old Testament religion. How strange, then, that I should be accused by the Jews of all people for preaching that which is and has ever been the hope of the Jews for over 2,000 years.

And then Paul says something that these pompous leaders were not used to hearing. He gets down and personal with them. Verse 8. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

Now, here he is. And though he's defending himself, he turns the tables and he places his hearers in the hot seat. His defense has morphed into a personal inquisition of his judges.

[10 : 12] Why should any of you? Yes, yes, you, King Agrippa. Why should you, being a Jew and knowing the Jewish scriptures, consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

It's just what he promised to do throughout the Old Testament scriptures. And why is that so inconceivable and hard for you to believe?

That that has happened in Jesus of Nazareth. He has raised him from the dead. And why should you, Festus, think it far-fetched and inconceivable for a dead man named Jesus to be alive? We're not talking about what man can do, but rather about what God can do. After all, if he formed Adam from the dust of the earth and then breathed into him the breath of life and he became a living being, if he can originally give life, it's nothing for him to restore it. And if he can raise up a universe out of nothing, then he has no difficulty raising up the dead. And if by his great power and mighty strength he can bring out the starry host one by one so that not one is missing, why then when he returns, he will surely be able to bring out from the dead every single person so that not one is missing?

[11 : 40] So why should any of you, any of you, as he looks around at them, why should any of you consider it absurd when I say that what God promised our fathers he has now done in raising Jesus from the dead?

In other words, Jesus' resurrection is not inconceivable. It was rather to be expected. To be expected. And it proves that indeed all the dead are raised. But then Paul says, I understand them though. I understand these Jews though. I understand them because I was once just like them. Just like them. I too was convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was a false Messiah. That he had never risen from the dead, but that was an empty claim of his enthusiastic followers who wanted to believe that it was so. And therefore it was my duty to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus, to remove this cancer from the body of Judaism. And so I did what they're doing.

[12 : 51] I persecuted Christians. I even made them try to blaspheme. To curse Jesus. And I killed them. I imprisoned them.

And I was even more zealous than they are because I would track Christians down to foreign cities. It was such an obsession with me that I would go as far as Damascus, Syria to get them. But it all came to a sudden end when I met him. Or rather, he met me. He stopped me in my tracks. There on the road to Damascus where I was going to persecute his followers, there was something both seen and heard that made it impossible for me to no longer believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

First I saw a light from heaven that knocked me to the ground. And then I heard his voice as he called to me by name, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And he told me his name. I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It was him. And he was alive and well.

[14 : 06] And at that moment, I could no longer disbelieve that the dead man Jesus was indeed alive. And he knew that I had been kicking against the goads of conscience.

And he told me, Saul, it's hard for you to kick against the goads. Now this is a scene right off the farm. And we won't tell PETA about it. But when an ox was stubborn, what they would do is take a prod, a cattle prod, a stick with a sharp point on the end just to make them willing to move along. And of course, if an ox was obstinate and kicked against the goad, why? It would just poke him all the deeper and inflict greater pain upon himself. And that's the picture the Lord Jesus used. And he says, Saul, you're kicking against the pricks. And it's hard to kick against the pricks.

[15 : 06] Now, Paul was having a hard time with the pricks of conscience. He had been there when Stephen was stoned. And he heard Stephen's testimony.

And he saw how he died. And how he lifted up his eyes and saw the Lord Jesus. And how he said, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. And the forgiveness that he showed toward those that were killing him. He had to live with that. He found that a hard thing to push out of his mind. Pricks of conscience, you see. But he kicked against them. No doubt there were words from others that he had persecuted. And he had seen how they received it and the testimony they gave and the refusal to curse Jesus but to declare he is Lord and Savior. And he's kicking against that. He's trying to crowd it out of his mind not having to deal with it. But he can get no relief from his guilt. For it is hard to kick against the goads.

[16:13] I wonder, are you kicking this morning? Are you kicking? Has Jesus been poking your conscience with truth?

And rather than submitting to him, you're kicking against it. And you're just going on your way and stubbornly refusing to submit to him in faith and repentance. Oh, it's hard to kick against the goads. And why should you when he is bringing to you the offer of forgiveness of all your sin and guilt through his own sacrifice on the cross? Well, Paul says it was there that I received my commission from Jesus.

And just as our president was told to stand up for the oath of office, Jesus said to me, stand up, Paul. I've got a commission for you. And I got up from the ground and he commissioned me. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and witness of what you have seen of me right here, right now, and of what I will show you.

[17:24] In other words, he's to go and to tell people of having met the risen Christ. And indeed, that's something he did do. And he is doing, even right now, as he's giving his defense before this king and governor.

To take the gospel of Christ to Jews and Gentiles by which their eyes would be opened and that he would turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to the power of God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins by faith in me.

Now here, according to Jesus, there's just two kinds of people and they're variously described, aren't they, for us? There are those in darkness. They're spiritually blind to spiritual realities. They can't see them. And then there are people whom God has given eyes to see. And they see unseen things. They're able to perceive them as real as things they can see and touch here below. Just two kinds. Those who can't see and those who can. And then there's those who are under the power of Satan. They're in bondage to him. They're serving him.

[18:39] They're doing the things that he wants them to do. He's got his hook through their nose. And then there are those who are under God's power, who have been set free from Satan's power. And so they are serving their new master and doing the things that he wants to be done.

And then there are those who are guilty and condemned before God because of their sin. And then there are those who are forgiven of their sins through faith in Jesus.

They're no longer counted against them. Their sins are no longer counted against them for they were counted against their substitute Jesus. So they're now forgiven them. Condemned men, guilty men, and forgiven men.

And from this moment, that was his task. To go in the power of Christ and to turn men from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to the power of God and to bring forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ.

And from that moment on, Paul had a new master. And he began to march under his new orders. And he took the gospel first right there in Damascus. He began at once to preach Christ as the Messiah.

[19:48] And then into Jerusalem and throughout Judea. And then to the Gentiles and beyond Palestine. Calling on them to repent and to turn to God and to prove their repentance by their deeds.

And this is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. This is it. I'm putting my finger on it right now, Agrippa and Festus.

It's because I have been doing just what Jesus told me to do. Calling all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, to repent, to stop going that rebellious way against God and to find free forgiveness of their sins by trusting in the living, resurrected Jesus of Nazareth.

That's why they want me dead. Number one, they don't want me proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah, as a risen and living Savior.

Because they still think he's a false Messiah and is dead as dead can be. And secondly, they don't like me telling Gentiles that they can have the same blessings as the Jews if they will just come and believe on Jesus Christ.

[20:59] They don't have to keep all the Old Testament laws of the Jews. They don't have to become a Jew in order to become a Christian. But as Gentiles, they can repent and trust in Jesus and receive on equal footing a place in God's family, forgiven children of God.

Well, this is why they want me dead. I'm just obeying the commission I was given and God has helped me to this very day to fulfill this commission. And in fact, that's what I'm doing here today,

testifying to small and great alike like you kings and governors and all your courts.

And I'm not saying anything beyond what Moses and the prophets said would happen. You see, it keeps rooting in Old Testament Judaism. I'm not saying anything that doesn't agree with what Moses and the prophets said.

that the Christ would suffer and would be the first to rise from the dead and that he would proclaim light not only to his own people, the Jews, but to the Gentiles as well. He's a risen Savior and he's the only Savior for Jew and Gentile alike.

So there's his defense and I wonder, did you see the central role of the resurrection in it? He's saying that that is why I'm on trial, that's why I was arrested, that's why I'm hated, because of my hope in the resurrection.

[22 : 25] It's front and center, not only in his defense, but in his preaching and we don't have time to show that in the book of Acts when we've seen his preaching, whether it's in Athens or at Antioch, Pisidian, Antioch, he's preaching a risen Christ, Christ who died for our sins and was raised again according to the scriptures.

And it's seen in all of his epistles, isn't it? You can't get very far in his letters without bumping into the resurrection of Jesus.

It's central to the gospel. Indeed, he says to us in 1 Corinthians 15 that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures.

And he says, this is something of first importance. Would you understand what Christianity is about? Here's the first importance. These are not peripheral things that you can take or leave that are optional.

This is the first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. He was buried and he rose again the third day according to the scriptures. And he was seen by many, appearing to many, lastly by me.

[23 : 38] Christ's resurrection of first importance. And it's the same Paul that tells us that you can't be a Christian if you deny the resurrection of Jesus. You remember those words in Romans 10, 9 and 10.

If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart what? That God has raised him from the dead. You will be saved.

So to be a Christian means, as a very foundational matter, that you believe believe in Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

It's with your heart that you believe and are justified. And it's with your mouth that you confess and are saved. And it's not believing in some vague Jesus of your own imagination.

No, no. It's the Jesus of Nazareth revealed in scripture. It's this Jesus. The despised and rejected and crucified Jesus. It's that Jesus.

[24 : 40] And it's belief in his deity, his humanity, his perfect life, his sacrificial death, and his resurrection from the dead. And it's a belief that entrusts yourself to him as your Lord and Savior.

It's not just a belief of historical fact that yes, Jesus lived and died and is coming again. No, it's a surrender. It's an entrusting of your whole self to this Jesus to be your Lord and your Savior.

But he can only save us if he's a living Savior. No wonder the resurrection was such a central, had such a central place in the preaching of the apostle and in the preaching of all the apostles as seen in Acts and their letters.

But we come now. And so, let me just pause and say, so do you believe that Jesus is alive from the dead? And is he your living Savior?

Are you trusting in him as the living Savior to save you? Well, here we come to the responses of these two men, privileged, during their lifetime to hear the gospel.

[25 : 58] You know, there's a lot of people who are born, live their whole lives and die without hearing of Jesus Christ. Or, if they have heard the name Jesus but they've never heard the message that will save them, the true gospel.

They have heard a false gospel of which there are aplenty. These two men were privileged to hear the true gospel from such a spokesman as the apostle Paul.

What's their response? Let's look at Governor Festus first. Now, you know, it's because of him that we don't know what else Paul was going to say in his defense. He wasn't done, you know. He was interrupted right in the middle of it by this Governor Festus who had had enough.

He couldn't take any more of it and so he just shouted in the court proceedings, you're out of your mind, Paul. Your great learning is driving you insane. I'll hand it to you. You're a learned man. You understand and are quoting the Old Testament script but you're just one of those guys whose learning has made you mad. Isn't it interesting that when Paul was talking about his earlier obsession of persecuting and killing Christians nobody shouted, you're insane! [27 : 08] But let him say, I believe that Jesus of Nazareth was dead and is alive again and he can't sit still but must shout, you're insane!

You're insane! You're insane! Now before we jump all over Governor Festus, let's remember that this is what we should expect from a man who is dead in sin and spiritually blind to spiritual realities. He's still in the dark, you see, so we would expect him to say, you guys are insane! You believe in Jesus dead and alive again? Let's remember that he's still under the power of Satan and believing his lies rather than under the power of God and believing the truth.

So before we hop on his case, let's remember who he is. He's a blind, enslaved sinner. And let's remember as well, Paul himself did not believe this.

The one who's giving testimony has just told us that he didn't believe it and wouldn't believe it and still wouldn't believe it if he'd not met the risen, living Jesus himself. It took that Damascus Road encounter to convince him.

[28 : 29] And yes, let's remember that the eleven disciples of Jesus didn't believe it either the first time they heard it. But when the ladies came from the tomb and said, it's empty, and an angel told us that he is not here but he's risen just as he said, Luke records, they did not believe the women because their words seemed to them like nonsense, like an insane woman would speak, like one touched in the mind.

Oh, that's what Governor Festus is saying as well. And you remember Thomas, he wouldn't even believe those other ten disciples whom he'd lived with for three years told him, we saw him, we met with him, he was with us.

And he says, no, no, unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where his nails were in my hand into his side, I will not believe it. You remember a week later, Jesus appears again to the twelve and this time he is there and Jesus says, come and put your fingers where my nail prints are and put your hand into my side and stop your unbelief and start believing.

And down on the ground he went, my Lord and my God. And Jesus said to him, blessed, you believe because you have seen me.

But blessed are those who have not seen me and yet have believed. That would be you and I, wouldn't it? We've not seen him and yet you love him. You've not seen him and yet you believe in him and you believe that he is a living savior.

[30 : 17] Because only a living savior can save us. Isn't that what Hebrews 7.25 says? That he is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Jesus.

Why? Because he always lives to make intercession for us. Why is it that we are saved? It's because we have a living savior. Why do we have a living hope? It's because our savior is alive and therefore he's always pleading for us.

If he's not risen as he said he was, as he would, then he's a liar and he cannot be a son of God. If he's not risen, then we're still in our sins. There's no salvation and we are of all men most miserable and without hope.

No, the resurrection is proof of who he is. He is God's appointed Messiah, the son of God. And it's proof that God was satisfied with his atonement for our sins and raised him from the dead.

And the living savior means that he can come back for us. He can not only care for us now, but he can come back for us and take us to be with himself in the new heavens and the new earth where there's only righteousness and only peace and only love forever and ever.

[31 : 30] So yes, we're remembering that this was not an easy believe, was it? To believe that a dead man named Jesus was alive. And so Paul doesn't hop all over him, but he does correct him.

He says, I'm not insane, most excellent Festus. What I'm saying is true and reasonable. You see, it's not madness to believe what God has said.

It's not madness to proclaim what God has promised to do. and what has happened in the events of history, that forgiveness of sins is only found through Jesus of Nazareth who did die and rose again for our justification.

It's not insanity to believe the things that have happened and have been well attested to by eyewitnesses just 20 years earlier. It's just been 20 years ago.

I mean, you and I believe things about Abraham Lincoln that's been more than 20 years ago and on the strength of a few witnesses. Well, well, Jesus, it was just 20 years earlier that he had lived and died and risen and Paul says these things were not done in a corner, not some little hidden away place in the world, but on the crossroads of the world in Jerusalem in Palestine, right out in public, on the stage.

[32 : 52] and these are well-known matters of public record with eyewitnesses of even more than 500 who saw him at the same time and most of them are still alive and you can go and verify.

Did you see Jesus? Tell me about it. And then go over and see this guy. Did you see? Tell me. Where were you? What did he look like? What happened? And you can corroborate the story. These guys are still around.

Go check it out. And it was checked out. And it checked true. That's why we still have a Bible. It's without error. It's inspired by the Holy Spirit.

And we can believe it not as something inconceivable but as true and reasonable and well-attested to that Jesus is alive from the dead.

It's not as far out as it might sound to your ears, Festus. It's true and reasonable and anyone who knows the Old Testament predictions cannot help but see that they're fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

[33 : 55] The king over here, he's familiar with these things. If you aren't, he's familiar with these things. These things have not escaped his notice. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?

I know you do. So what's the response? Well, Festus just writes it off as fanaticism and insanity. Christianity, a risen Christ, it's a farce. Sadly, his followers are many today who write us off as insane.

But we are not insane. Could I tell you what is insane? To live as if you would never die.

That's insane. To live as if there's no final judgment. That's insane. To live as if there's no hell for sinners forever.

[34 : 55] Is it not insane to reject the only Savior God sent from heaven to save you from your sins? Is that not insanity? To cling to your load of sin and to push away Christ, the one who would bear your burden and pay for your sin and set you free from its guilt?

Is that not insanity? To push him away? To gamble with your eternity? And to go on living every day one breath away from everlasting torments?

To play Russian roulette with your life every day? Is that not proof of the insanity of sin in every Christ rejecter?

Oh, come to your senses, wake up! to reality, to these unseen things that are real that Jesus, though dead, is alive and salvation is found in him and he welcomes all who will come and trust in his blood.

Festus writes it off as insane. King Agrippa, what does he do? So, King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?

[36 : 05] I know you do. He's a Jew. He's become a Jew. He's one of these Gentiles that became a Jew. And so, he's embraced the Old Testament scriptures.

I know you do. How will he answer? Well, he does not flat out deny believing the prophets. Again, after all, he is a Jew and is an expert in Judaism and he couldn't deny believing the prophets if he wanted to go on maintaining a credible profession of being a Jew and being an expert on the Jewish religion.

But neither does he want to align himself with someone that his friend Festus thinks is out of his mind for believing what he believes. What will Festus, if I say, yes, I do believe the prophets and I believe this has been fulfilled in Jesus, what will Festus think of me?

And besides, to openly admit that I believe the prophets will mean that Paul will then expect me to come to the obvious conclusion that these Old Testament passages are fulfilled in Jesus' resurrection and he will put the onus on me, then why aren't you trusting in this Jesus?

And he's not ready for that. So Agrippa does what so many man-fearers do when brought face to face with the truth. He dodges the issue.

[37 : 28] He sidesteps the question. He leaves it unanswered. Do you believe the prophets, Agrippa? I know you do. Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?

You didn't answer the question, sir. Do you believe the prophets? And can you see the obvious fulfillment of them in Jesus of Nazareth being raised from the dead?

Do you think you can persuade me in such a short time to be a Christian? Short time or long, Paul says, I pray, God, that not only you, but all who are listening to me today may become what I am except for these chains.

A believer in the risen Christ, forgiven of sins, right with God. I want all of you to be like me. Now, Agrippa was right about the Apostle Paul.

He was not just defending himself, was he? He's not just dumping facts about Christianity so that they'll all know better about what Christianity is about. No, he's out to convert these people.

[38 : 41] He's out to convert Festus and Agrippa. He's trying to persuade them to repent and believe on Christ because they too are lost and going to an eternal hell without him.

You see, Paul can't just dump religious information and leave it as if it doesn't matter to him what they do with this gospel. No, his heart goes out to them and so he's out to persuade them to trust in Christ, to turn from their Christ-rejecting ways and to receive the Lord Jesus.

He's out to persuade them and this was his habitual aim. We read when he came into Corinth in Acts 18, every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue trying to persuade the Jews and the Greeks, trying to persuade them.

Kids, you know what it means to try to persuade. You ever tried to persuade your mom and dad to do something? You know what it's like to persuade and you give all the reasons.

You're not just dumping information and don't care what they do. No, everything you're saying is meant to be a prod, to get them over to your side, to do what you want them to do.

[39 : 56] And that's what Paul's doing. He's a prisoner, he's giving his defense, but what he's doing is he's trying to pry them, persuade them, to come over to his side and to see their sin, their need for Christ, how he fully meets their needs as a Savior who died in the place of sinners and rose again and is living.

Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we try to persuade men. That was Paul. People who heard the young Robert Murray McShane would say of his preaching, he preached as if he were dying to have you converted.

Believers, are you trying to persuade anyone to receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord?

Does anyone know that you want them to become a Christian? Is it leading you to persuade them, to urge them, and to pray to God? As Paul says, I pray to God that all of you would be as I am except for these chains, persuading men and pleading with God for them.

What an opportunity this King Agrippa had. We don't know how many opportunities these very important people had, these political high figures, how many opportunities some of these men had to hear the gospel, but this man did, to hear of the one Savior that could save him from endless torments, and to hear it from one who was dying to have him converted, was trying to persuade him.

[41 : 44] What's his response? The old King James says, almost persuaded. That was the first sermon George Whitfield ever preached, almost persuaded.

Do you think to persuade me to become a Christian in such a short time? Well, he felt the prods, he knew what Paul was after, he found his argument convincing, but in the end, he was not persuaded. Don't anyone rest in being almost persuaded to become a Christian? To be almost saved is to remain altogether lost.

Almost saved is altogether lost for eternity. To be almost persuaded will only add to your misery at last. Somewhere in hell today, if this King Agrippa never later repented, of which we read nothing, somewhere in hell today is a king who once sat before Paul and heard the truth of Jesus Christ that would have saved him.

And he felt the powerful pull, and he felt the pressure, and the persuasion, but he suppressed the truth and he refused to repent and believe it. And so for him, the memory of that day in that Caesarean court will haunt him forever in hell.

[43 : 08] He wishes he could forget it. How close he was to believing. I saw it. He had a good argument. It was the Old Testament scriptures.

Jesus sure fulfilled those prophecies, but no. Was it just to save face in front of Festus? I'll tell you what, it doesn't matter at all to Agrippa now what Festus thinks.

And it doesn't matter what your friends will think of you. If you believe the gospel and follow Jesus, it won't matter anything to you in the day of judgment and in all eternity.

Almost persuaded. Harvest is past. Almost persuaded. Doom comes at last. Almost cannot avail.

Almost is but to fail. Sad, sad, that bitter wail.

Almost, lost. And so once more the gospel has come and Jesus has brought it near to you. Just as he brought it near to Governor Festus and Agrippa.

[44 : 15] And as always, God's truth brings you to a moment of decision. What will you do? It's dumped in your lap now. You must deal with it. Will you just flat out deny it like Festus?

Or will you just sidestep the issue with King Agrippa? Or will you humble yourself and confess yourself the sinner that you know you are and trust in this risen Savior who died a sacrificial death in the place of sinners to be your substitute and to pay the price for your sins and receive the forgiveness and the peace with God that he promises?

Then seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord and he will pardon him and to our God for he will forgive him.

Believers, let's rejoice in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord, that on the cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied as every sin was on him laid.

There in the ground his body lay, light of the world by darkness slain. Then bursting forth in glorious day up from the grave he rose again.

[45 : 38] And because Jesus lives we will live. And because Jesus lives our hope is alive. No guilt in life and no fear in death. This is the power of Christ in me.

How blessed if we are among those who know that the man, Jesus, who died is alive. Blessed by God to know that he's our Lord and Savior and he's alive forevermore.

That he lives for us. That he has everything that we need. Forgiveness, righteousness, cleansing, comfort to settle us down, encouragement to lift us up, conviction to spur us on, wisdom to guide us, faith and hope to inspire us, love to warm us, grace to enable us.

All that I need and want is in Jesus. It is in this living Jesus, in Christ alone. Stand and sing with me. Grab your grace hymns and turn to number 15 as we sing of this Savior who died and rose again and lives for us.

Number 15 in your grace hymns. We thank you, Father, for sending your Son. We thank you, Lord Jesus, for laying down your life as a substitute for sinners, for all who would repent and put their trust in you.

[47 : 15] And we thank you, Holy Spirit, for raising our Savior from the dead, that we can know that God's justice was satisfied, that our sins have been paid for in full, that there's no more fear and no more guilt for us who are in Christ Jesus.

Thank you that we have a living Savior who's able to save us completely because he always lives to intercede for us. Send us forth in the joy of it. Send us forth to persuade others of it and bring into your grace and your salvation those who are yet outside.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.