

Commentary on Acts chapter 26 by Chuck Smith 7.16.23

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July memory verse Proverbs 30:5 (NKJV) Every word of God *is* pure; He *is* a shield to those who put their trust in Him.

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Paul was rescued by Lysias, the captain of the Roman guard from the mob that was attempting to beat him to death in Jerusalem on the temple mount. He was taken into protective custody by the Roman government and sent under special guard to Caesarea for his protection, where he appeared before the governor Felix who held Paul a prisoner for two years, more or less, as a political pawn. When Festus became the governor in Felix's place, who had been replaced by the Roman Empire because of his corruption, Festus served Paul's case and began to give Paul the run-around saying, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and answer these charges?" Paul said, "I appeal to Caesar." Being a Roman citizen, Festus was obliged to send him to Caesar, but he had a problem. The problem was this: he could not really send him to Caesar without legitimate charges being made against him, and there were no legitimate charges. And so, he explained his problem to Herod Agrippa who came to pay a courtesy visit, and Herod Agrippa said, "Well, I will hear his case." The whole idea now of Herod Agrippa hearing Paul's case is that there might be made formal charges to send with Paul as he made his appeal unto Caesar.

And so, as we get into Chapter 26, we find that Herod Agrippa, who is the great-grandson of Herod the Great, who ordered the murder of the children at the time of the birth of Christ, who was the grand-nephew of Herod Antipas, who had ordered the death of John the Baptist, the son of Herod Agrippa I, who had put James to death and had imprisoned Peter. Herod Agrippa II, and Paul is now standing before him there in Caesarea to declare his cause, and the idea is that they might formulate charges against him to send with him as he goes to Rome.

Then Agrippa said unto Paul [after Festus announced the whole thing, Agrippa said unto Paul,] You are permitted to speak for yourself. Then Paul stretched forth his hand and answered for himself ([Act 26:1](#)).

So now, appearing before Agrippa, Paul said, "I count it a privilege, Agrippa." So he stretched forth his hand to answer for himself. He said,

I am really happy, king Agrippa, to be able to explain to you today the things that I'm accused of by the Jews: Especially because I know that you are an expert in all of the

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customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to listen to me patiently ([Act 26:2-3](#)).

And so it was true that Herod Agrippa had become a real student of Jewish law and of Jewish custom, and he was noted for his vast understanding of the Jewish religion. Having read the scriptures and studied the prophets, he knew them well. Paul said, "I'm really very happy to be able to explain to you my case, because I know that you have a background in these things." He said,

My manner of life from my youth, which was first among my own nation at Jerusalem, all of the Jews know. And those which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, would tell you that after the straightest sect of the religion, I was a Pharisee ([Act 26:4-5](#)).

And the Pharisees were indeed the most orthodox of the orthodox; they were the radicals. They were the ones who went the second mile in a sense to be very exacting as far as the religious practices worked, because everything had to be just perfect for the Pharisees. They had their traditions and their customs. And now he said,

I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers ([Act 26:6](#)).

He is referring to the promise of the Messiah.

And Paul said, "It is because of the promises that were made to our fathers, because I hoped in these promises that I stand here to be judged." Interesting, knowing that Herod Agrippa knew the prophecies. He brings him right to these promises that God had made.

Unto which promise are twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, are hoping to come. [All of the Jews are hoping for the Messiah,] for which hope sake, king Agrippa, I have been accused of the Jews. Now why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? ([Act 26:7-8](#))

Now, Paul the apostle, I am certain, was praying and hoping that somehow, some way, he could convert King Agrippa to the faith in Jesus Christ. I'm sure that Paul was thinking, "If this guy would just get turned on for the Lord, being the king over this territory, what an influence he could be." Paul's whole defense has one real purpose, and that is to convert Agrippa. And so he begins right away drawing Agrippa in saying, "Why should you think it a thing incredible that God should raise the dead?"

Most of the problems that people have today is with their concept of God. Most of the problems that people have with scriptures today is because of their concept of God. J.B. Phillips wrote a book, "Your God is Too Small," and that is true of many people. Their concept of God is too small; it's too limited. They have what they call the

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anthropomorphic concept of God. Man's concepts of God, man's idea of God or man creating God, and whenever a man creates a god, he creates Him too small.

There are people who are concerned today with many problems in the Bible. The parting of the Red Sea, the preservation of Jonah in the belly of the whale; things of this nature. They bring these up as troubling, difficult scriptures to deal with, only because their concept of God is too small. God could have actually made a trident submarine to surface and take Jonah in, then people wouldn't have so much of a problem with it. But surely, if He can make the universe, He can make a fish large enough to house Jonah. God prepared a great fish. It wasn't just any old shark or whale or whatever, it was a fish that God had prepared. So, if your concept of God is all that it should be, why should you think it a thing incredible that God could create a fish large enough to keep Jonah for three days? Why should you think it a thing incredible that God should raise the dead?

Difficulty must always be measured by the capacity of the agent doing the work. Now we look at this structure in which we worship tonight. You say, "Oh, this must have been a hard building to make." No, it wasn't. We had skilled workmen doing the job. We had men who knew what they were doing; skilled men on the job. It was a very easy task for them, for they had the proper skills and proper equipment. Now, to look at this building and say that we hired a bunch of trained dogs to put it up, then indeed it would have been difficult, because of the capacity of the agents that we've called upon to do the work. "Go grab the board, Rover, and bring it over to me. I want to nail it down here." Well, you could have great difficulty because of the agent you called upon to do the work. But when God is the agent doing the work, any talk of difficulty is absurd. So the idea of resurrection from the dead, "Oh, that's hard to take; that's hard to believe." And, of course, it was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead which was the thing that was really troubling; it was the stumbling block.

So Paul zeros right in on that area of difficulty, and he shows the inconsistency of the difficulty because God was the one who raised Him from the dead. "Why should you think it a thing incredible that God should raise the dead?" The Bible begins with these words, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" ([Genesis 1:1](#)). If you can swallow that, you should have no problem with Jonah. If you can believe the first verse of the Bible, you should have no difficulty with the rest of it. A God who is big enough to create the heaven and the earth is big enough to do anything and everything else that the Bible says that He did. "Why should you think it a thing incredible that God should raise the dead?" I think that our lack of faith is always demonstrated by our great surprise when God has done something in response to our prayers. And we, so many times, even when we see the work of God, can hardly believe it. Our concept is so limiting. God help us, and God free us from a narrow concept, that we might see in Him the fullness of His glory and power and majesty and abilities. "Now, unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or think" ([Ephesians 3:20](#)). Oh, God help us to get a correct concept of God. God free us from our narrow limited concepts.

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Now, Paul begins with his own testimony.

I really thought within myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, which I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the Saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priest, and when they were put to death I gave my voice against them ([Act 26:9-10](#)).

Again, Paul, no doubt, was a member of the Sanhedrin. He's talking about the voice in the Sanhedrin, the vote against the Christians, putting them to death. He said he consented to the death of Stephen and those other early Christian martyrs. Paul consented to their deaths. "I gave my voice against them."

And I punished them often in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme ([Act 26:11](#));

Don't you know that must have troubled Paul in his later Christian years when he thought of what a havoc he had wrecked upon the church before his conversion? I imagine he thought about those people that he had forced to blaspheme God, or to blaspheme Jesus Christ. I imagine it just really cut Paul deeply.

It is interesting how that here we have seen God do such a marvelous work, especially among those people who were drug-oriented. We've seen the glorious hand of God working in their lives, delivering them from hard drugs and setting them free from bondage and from addiction and all, and in many cases we've had people come to the Lord here who were once dealers. In fact, some of the major dealers in Southern California are now pastoring Calvary Chapels. But it was interesting to me, that so often when these fellows were converted who were dealers, we had several of them who immediately went to all of those that they were dealing drugs to and tell them that they weren't going to be dealing any more, but to tell them that they had something better than drugs now that they wanted to share with them. And they sought to undo the evil that they had done by sharing Christ with these, that before they had dealt the drugs to, because it bothered them that they were guilty of helping to destroy lives.

I imagine such was the case with Paul. It probably really bothered him that he had actually forced Christians to blaspheme the name of Jesus. He said,

Whereupon as I went to Damascus with the authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw in the path a light from heaven, that was brighter than the brightness of the sun. It was shining all around me and those which were journeying with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks or the goads ([Act 26:12-14](#)).

In those days, when they would put the yoke on a young ox, the young ox wouldn't like that yoke and often it would begin to kick. And so, the fellow with the plow, if he had a

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single plow, would have this pole with a sharp point on it, and every time the ox would kick, he would hold that goad there at the back of the heel of the ox, so the ox soon learned not to kick. You go ahead and object, but it's going to hurt, and the Lord said, "It's been hard for you, Paul, to kick against the goads."

The Spirit of God was no doubt dealing with Paul before his conversion experience. I believe that watching Stephen's death, no doubt, had a tremendous affect upon Paul. The Bible said that Stephen's face was shining like an angel and as they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Oh Father, don't lay this sin to their charge. Into thy hands I commend my spirit." I'm certain that this had a powerful affect; it was a goad. Paul found himself kicking against it, but somehow there was a conviction there that, "Hey, I've never seen anybody quite like that. I've never felt anything quite like what I felt when he was speaking."

And Paul answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Arise, and stand upon your feet: for I have appeared unto you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of these things which you have seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto you; delivering you from the people [that is, from a ministry to the Jews], and from the Gentiles, unto whom I will send thee ([Act 26:15-17](#)),

So his commission, basically from the beginning, was to go to the Gentiles.

Now his purpose or the purpose of the gospel, of the gospel itself entailed the opening of their eyes. That implies blindness. Paul, later writing to the Ephesian church said, "The god of this world has blinded their eyes that they cannot see." A man who does not know Jesus Christ is blind to the truth many times. It's worse when he's not blind to the truth, but still does not believe. But the god of this world has blinded men's eyes that they cannot see the truth. So Paul was to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God.

There are two kingdoms in the world to date, two spheres of government: the government of God, and the government of Satan. They are mutually exclusive and antagonistic. Every man exists in one of these two kingdoms. You tonight are living in the kingdom of light or the kingdom of darkness. You're living under the control of Satan or under the control of God. There are only two governing spheres of the universe. In the beginning there was just one, the kingdom of God. All things in obedience and in subjection unto him; God created angelic beings. One special being known as Lucifer, the anointed cherub, rebelled against the authority of God and formed a second government, the government of death and darkness. Ultimately, Satan's kingdom is going to come down. In fact, it is close to the end of Satan's reign now.

When Jesus returns, and I believe it will be very soon, to establish God's kingdom upon the earth, at that time Satan will be bound and cast into the abusso. After a thousand years he will receive a short reprieve from the abusso, and at the end of that short

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period he will then be cast into gehenna, into outer darkness, the kingdom of darkness, cast into outer darkness.

The kingdom of darkness will one day be in the blackness of darkness forever, and in the universe there will be only one kingdom again, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of light and life, and all of those within it subject unto God and to His authority, and what a beautiful universe that will be. How I long for that day, when every rebellious act and thought is put out and God reigns supreme.

So Paul's ministry was to deliver people from this kingdom of darkness and bring them into the kingdom of light, to free them from the power of Satan that they might come unto God in order that they might receive the forgiveness of their sins, which is the affect of the gospel and the inheritance among those that are set apart by faith in Jesus Christ. So we who have come to believe in Jesus Christ have an inheritance. The Bible speaks about the inheritance of the saints in light. Sons of God if sons, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. As Jesus said, "In that day I will say unto them, Come ye blessed of the Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundations of the world" ([Matthew 25:34](#)).

And it's so easy to become a part of that kingdom; just by believing in Jesus Christ, those who believe in Him, who have submitted to His Lordship. It is a kingdom. You believe that Jesus is King. You bow to His authority, and by that bowing to his authority, yielding yourself to the authority of Jesus, you become a subject of His kingdom.

And so, Paul said,

Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but I showed first unto them of Damascus, and then in Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then unto the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do the works that demonstrate repentance ([Act 26:19-20](#)).

So Paul was calling upon people, even as John the Baptist, and even as Jesus did, to change, to turn, to turn from a life dominated by the flesh to the life dominated by the Spirit.

The word *repent* means actually, to change, and it isn't a true repentance unless there is a change. There are many people who confuse sorrow with repentance. Now, I would imagine that if you would take a poll at San Quentin of the inmates there, and if you asked them, "Are you sorry for..." Well, if you just ask them if you're sorry, I'm sure you would get the answer, "Yes." If they were honest, "Are you sorry for your crime that brought you here?" I don't think that the answer would automatically be, "Yes." If you'd say, "Are you sorry you got caught?" "Yes."

So there is a difference between sorrow over what you've done and sorrow over being caught at what you've done. There are a lot of people who are sorry for their sins. They

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say, "I repent." No, you didn't. You haven't changed. You're still doing the same thing. That isn't repentance. Repentance means to change. So Paul was calling on people to change for a life lived after the flesh to a life living after the Spirit.

And for these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and they were trying to kill me. Now having therefore obtained the help of God, I'm here today ([Act 26:21-22](#)),

I mean if God hadn't helped, I wouldn't be here today. But you know... and it's interesting having obtained the help of God. Now, God uses human instruments. Actually, it was the Roman soldiers that came and rescued Paul from that angry mob. Again, we need to recognize the supernatural in the natural. God works in natural ways.

We are looking always, it seems, for some ethereal hocus-pocus kind of a thing. And yes, now God is, you know, I feel chills, I feel tinglings; God is here! But we need to recognize God more in the natural. It is a spiritually insensitive person who can only recognize God in the violent you might say, only if there's a great shaking or a great fire or a great movement of some kind. Oh, God is here! But you need to recognize the work of God in very natural ways.

There is the farmer who in the midst of this heavy storm was warned by the sheriff at ten o'clock in the morning that he'd better leave his farm, that they were expecting a flood in that area. And the farmer says, "Thank you, sheriff, but I've lived here for all my life, and so I'll just, you know, stay here. I've never seen any flood come up to the house yet." It continued to rain and the river started to rise, and at two o'clock in the afternoon a highway patrolman came by. The water was beginning to get up close to the house and he called to the farmer, and he said, "We're evacuating this area. You better leave!" The farmer's sitting there on his porch says, "Well, I've lived here all my life and I'm not really worried. I know the river and I'll be alright. Thank you for your warning." The water continued to rise; came up three feet in the house, and so the farmer climbed up on the roof, and the coastguard sent a helicopter over, and they shined the light down on the farmer, and they said, "We're here to evacuate you!" He said, "No, that's not necessary. I've lived here all my life, and I'm not worried about it." So the river continued to rise until the farmhouse was swept from its foundation and went tumbling down and the farmer drowned. He said, "Lord, I don't understand. I trusted You all my life. Why would You let me drown in the flood when I was trusting You? I don't understand that, Lord. It seems when I trusted You that You would've rescued me from drowning." The Lord says, "Well, let me look at the record here a minute. According to my records, I sent the sheriff by at ten o'clock in the morning. Then I sent the highway patrol by in the afternoon, and I even sent the coastguard in the evening."

But you see, we don't recognize God in the natural things, which we need to do. We need to recognize God in the natural things. So Paul, talking about the fact that the Roman soldiers actually came and rescued him from the mob, he is saying that, "I obtained the help of God. God helped me and delivered me from them who were trying to beat me to death, and thus God has sustained me to this day." Recognizing that God

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uses human instruments to accomplish his purposes and his work. But seeing God in it, that's our problem. We don't see God in the everyday commonplace things. God make me more conscious of Him. We're prone to take so many things for granted.

And Paul said,

I have been witnessing both to the small and to the great, and I've not said any other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come ([Act 26:22](#)):

I haven't added to the scripture, I've only been preaching the scripture, the things the prophets and Moses said would come,

That Christ should suffer ([Act 26:23](#)),

That is, that the Messiah should suffer. Now, this was something that was foreign to Jewish thought. This was the thing that offended the Jews concerning Christ. They had in their minds the concept that the Messiah was going to set up a political kingdom, and to run the Romans out, and to establish a kingdom over the earth with Jerusalem as its center. And those scriptures that prophesied the Messiah being despised and rejected, those scriptures that prophesied the Messiah being cut off and receive nothing for himself, they spiritualized those scriptures.

Now, we find today a sequel, in that many people spiritualize the scriptures of the coming again of Jesus Christ. "Well actually, He's coming in us, you see, and we are to be manifested. And the church in its glorified state upon the earth will be the second coming of Jesus. We are the body of Christ." And they spiritualized the actual coming again of Jesus Christ, even as the Jews were spiritualizing those prophecies that related to His suffering, and only accepting those prophecies that related to His kingdom, His glory, His power.

So Paul said, "I was only telling them what their scriptures told them, that Christ was going to suffer."

and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles. As Paul was speaking, Festus [the Roman governor broke in and he] said with a loud voice, Paul, you're beside yourself; your much learning has made you mad ([Act 26:23-24](#)).

Now, a man beside himself was the man who talked to himself. You know, when a person gets in conversation with himself he's usually in serious trouble, and many times this is a sign of mental incompetence, when a person, you see them talking to themselves and answering themselves, and arguing with themselves and all. You're beside yourself. "Your much learning has made you mad." He was probably able to observe Paul's tremendous study habits. Paul was an avid student; read all the time. He

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said, "Timothy, please come and bring me the parchments when you come." You know he was looking for study material.

But Paul said, I'm not mad, O noble Festus; but I speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knows of these things, of which I am speaking freely: for I'm persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner ([Act 26:25-26](#)).

Now I'm sure that King Agrippa is aware of these things. He's aware of Jesus Christ, he's aware of the crucifixion, he's aware of the prophets, the scriptures. These things weren't done in a corner. And now Paul turns to nail him.

King Agrippa you believe the prophets? I know you believe the prophets ([Act 26:27](#)).

This is known as the presumptive close. You know, you show them the various colors that they can buy these towels in. They have all these lovely shades of color. Now the presumptive close, you say, "Now, let's see, which color did you want to order?" You know, you don't say, "Do you want to buy these towels?" You presume they're going to buy and you say, "Which color now did you want, or which color did you like? Oh, the purple. Alright. How many of those did you want?" Paul is using this presumptive close. "Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? Oh, I know you believe the prophets."

Agrippa says, [Wait a minute. Hold on, hold on, hold on.] Almost thou persuadest me to become a Christian ([Act 26:28](#)).

And Paul said, I would to God, that not only you, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and all together ([Act 26:29](#))

Now, Paul's answer seems to indicate that he was just really saying, "Hey Paul, almost thou persuadest me." That there was actually a real persuasion of Agrippa. Paul said, "I wish it wasn't almost, but all together."

I wish you were just like I am, except [I would have wished] these bonds [on you] ([Act 26:29](#)).

Not almost, I wish it was altogether.

I think the tragedy of Agrippa so close. I think the tragedy of many lives today, so close. You see a person who comes very close to the kingdom, almost persuaded. But just somehow, they don't take that final step in, and you think, "Oh, how tragic to be so close to eternal life, so close to the kingdom of God, so close to freedom from sin." "Oh, would to God it was not just almost, but all together persuaded."

And so when Paul had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice ([Act 26:30](#)),

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Who had been married twice before she moved in with her brother. And Bernice and King Agrippa were brother and sister. Later on she was to become the mistress of a couple of Roman emperors. Having heard this witness and the story of Jesus Christ, they now rose up,

And when they were gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, This man has done nothing worthy of death or imprisonment. And Agrippa said to Festus, This man might have been set at liberty if he had not appealed to Caesar ([Act 26:31-32](#)).

You could have set him free. God had plans, though, for Paul in Rome. And so, to Rome we go.