

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 02 July 2023
Services: *Across the Diocese*
Series: Saved by grace (Acts 10-28)
Passage: Acts 26
Title: Hope and trial
Outline:

Three key questions

1. **Paul to Agrippa:** Why do you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?
 2. **Paul to Agrippa:** Do you believe the prophets?
 3. **Agrippa to Paul:** Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?
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- I want you to note that as we move into the last three weeks of our series from Acts, that the **message** of the text, the **passion** portrayed in the text, the **desire** to proclaim the **resurrection**, the desire to urge **repentance** and **faith** – **just never lets up**...
- this passage – and the final two – are as **intense** and as **vibrant** as we've seen anywhere throughout the book! //
- Now – we've had to skip **over** a couple of chapters since last week... so let me briefly fill you in...
- After Paul defends his faith before the Jewish council, a group of more than forty Jews conspire to **kill Paul**, vowing not to eat or drink until they succeed!
- Paul's **nephew** learns of the plot and reports it to the Roman commander in Jerusalem who arranges for a large group of soldiers to escort Paul to **Caesarea** for his safety.
- In **Caesarea**, Paul appears before the Roman governor, **Felix**, who despite a lack of evidence, keeps Paul in custody for **two years**, hoping for a **bribe**!
- Felix is replaced by **Festus** as governor, and Paul exercises his right as a Roman citizen and appeals to Caesar, which Festus grants.
- ...but not before King **Agrippa** visits **Festus**, who arranges for Paul to present his case before **Agrippa**...
- But let's just note who this is... the Herods were **Jews** appointed by the **Romans** to **govern**.... But they were totally **corrupt**.... And tried to curry favour with their Roman masters, by making life difficult for the Jews.

Their founder, **Herod the Great** – had tried to destroy the infant **Jesus**;
his son **Antipas**, beheaded John the **Baptist**;
his grandson **Agrippa I**, slew **James** the son of **Zebedee** with the **sword**... and now Paul stands before **Agrippa's son**! //
- ...and that is where **this** chapter – ch 26, begins. ///
- I want us to explore the chapter by looking at **three key questions** which are asked in the passage:
 1. **Paul to Agrippa:** Why do you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?
 2. Again, **Paul to Agrippa:** Do you believe the prophets?
 3. **Agrippa to Paul:** Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?
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1. **PAUL TO AGRIPPA:** Why do you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?
 - In his defence before Agrippa, Paul leads up to that important **question**
 - He knows (v3), that Agrippa is well acquainted with the **Jews** – including their **customs** and **controversies**.
 - His aim is show that his **own life** – right from the beginning – has been completely **aligned** with Jewish teaching – v4
 - ...he was a **Pharisee** for goodness sake! – can't get much more in line with Jewish teaching than **that!**
 - And then he moves to point out, that what he is on trial for, is **that hope** to which Jewish elders have **long held...**
 - ...namely that God would send his **Messiah** (as foreshadowed and told in the Old Testament)... to **rescue** and **redeem** his **people!**
 - **THEY** eagerly **await** that rescue... Paul believed it had already **ARRIVED** in **JESUS!**
 - ...in **Jesus** whom God had **raised** from the **dead!**
 - ...and **THAT RESURRECTION**, was the absolute **proof** that Jesus **WAS** in fact the promised **Messiah...** sent from **God. //**
 - So – why should anyone find it **incredible** that God raises the **dead!?**
 - It was **totally in line with everything promised in the Old Testament...** and the **fulfilment** of all **that God had promised! ///**
 - I wonder if there some **here** today who doubts Jesus was raised from **death**.
 - Maybe you wonder whether God could **do** this.
 - Or maybe you question the accuracy of the **New Testament documents**.
 - But friends, the God who **spoke** and everything came into being, is more than **capable** of **raising** the **dead!**
 - The God who saved **Noah** through the **flood** – is more than capable of raising the **dead**
 - The God who redeemed his people from Egypt; who saw them through the Red Sea; who established his people in the promised land; who saw Israel through one disaster after another... who spoke through the prophets... who banished his people from the promised land for their rebellion – and then led a remnant back...
 - The God who took on human flesh via the willing obedience of a young virgin and became one of us...
 - ...and then opened blind eyes, and caused the lame to walk, and calmed storms and multiplied food...
 - The God who did all this – is **more** than capable of raising the **dead!!**
 - Why do you consider it incredible that God raises the dead? //
 - If the **resurrection** did not **happen** – everything **falls over** –
creation,
every miracle,
every intervention of God –
let alone our **forgiveness** and new **life...**

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it's all **lost**... all **gone**... all **irrelevant** – if Jesus was not raised from the **dead**!

- **Why** do you consider it **incredible** that God raises the **dead**? ////
- Now let's look now at Paul's **second** question to Agrippa:
- 2. **PAUL TO AGRIPPA:** Do you believe the prophets?
- That question comes in v27...
- In the **intervening verses** – since that **first question** – Paul has laid out more of his **credentials** by way of **defence**...
- He tells the story - as he had earlier in Jerusalem – that he had been opposing the name of Jesus and arresting people who followed Jesus...
- ...right up to the day when he himself arrested by Jesus!!
- You will have heard the account before.... //
- Paul is dramatically and wonderfully turned around....
- ...and sent to the Gentiles v18 –
*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.'*
- Isn't that the most **beautiful job description** you could **imagine**? //
- Isn't that what you **long** for – for those in your **family** and your **town**....?
- ...or perhaps I should put it this way – **IS** that what you **long** for?? **Pray** for?? – /
 - for people's **eyes** to be **opened**
 - for people to turn from **darkness** to **light**
 - to turn 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 **God**. /// - that is – a place among the **family of God** – **NOW** and for eternity!!
- Oh friends – this is why we **share** Jesus for **life**...!!
- This **must** be what we are on about as **church**! ///
- Well, Paul reports that he got on and did just what he'd been commissioned to do – v20 He went to the Gentiles and *preached that they should **repent** and **turn** to God... and **demonstrate** their **repentance** by their **deeds**.*
- **That's** our **work** – our **challenge too** – to **urge** people to **repent** and **turn** to **God**! That's how people receive forgiveness of sins and a place among the sanctified!
- Then Paul makes it absolutely clear – that all of this – **EVERYTHING HE'S SAID** – is all **completely** in line with the **Old Testament**....

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-part way through v22 – have a look with me – *I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen*²³ *that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.*
 - The coming of Jesus on the **scene**, his birth, life, teaching, miracles, suffering, death, resurrection and the promise of his return... it is **entirely consistent with the Old Testament**.... That is why **Jesus** in Luke **24** - after his **resurrection** - says that he opened the Old Testament to his disciples – explaining all that it said concerning **himself!**
 - Well this comment from Paul – about all that he was saying being entirely in line with the message of the Old Testament, did **Festus’ head** in... he **wasn’t** a **Jew** of course – so most of this would have gone over his **head**...
 - Have a look with me at v24 - *At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defence. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.”*
 - And Paul responds by saying... I am not insane, most excellent Festus... the **King** is familiar with these things... and turning to Agrippa – asks our question – **King Agrippa, Do you believe the prophets? I know you do. //**
 - What he’s challenging Agrippa to **acknowledge**, is that if he **does** believe the prophets... and remember – he is a **Jew** – than he should be able to see that his claims about **Jesus** are entirely **consistent!**
 - But you see – here’s the **modern-day issue** – if people don’t **want** to believe – because they don’t want to surrender their lives to Jesus as Lord – than it won’t matter **how good** your **arguments** are – how **logical** – how **consistent** they are with what people **already claim to believe**... they will just **hold off** – because – their **hearts** are **hard** and their **wills** are **stubborn. //**
 - Agrippa was a Jew //
 - He believed the Old Testament – the **prophets**
 - He could no doubt see that Paul was saying about Jesus was consistent... EXCEPT – there was this barrier there... called the **stubbornness** of the **human will**....
 - What did we see **earlier?**
 - That people need their **eyes open**, they need to be turned from **death to life**; **rescued** from the **power** of **Satan**; that they may receive **forgiveness** and **new life**... //
 - So – Agrippa firmly pushes **back** with a question of his **own**....
- 3. AGRIPPA TO PAUL:** Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?
- I imagine this was asked with a **wry smile** and a **cheeky grin!**
 - The question reflects a mixture of **scepticism**, **curiosity**, and perhaps even a touch of **amusement**.
 - You see – he saw **exactly** what Paul was **attempting**...
 - Because in demonstrating that what he is saying about Jesus was consistent with what Agrippa **already** claimed to **believe**, he would be left without **excuse!**
 - Two things I want you to note...
 - His response is not an outright ‘**no**’ or ‘**get lost!**’ //
 - Despite his apparent **scepticism**, he doesn't dismiss Paul **outright** and engages with him in **dialogue**.

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- This indicates that he is open to considering the **possibility** of becoming a **Christian**, albeit with some **reservations** and the need for further **convincing**.
- That's a great **encouragement**...!
- Now – we have **no idea** what happened with Agrippa after this... but at this point, he seems a at least a little bit **open**! ///
- The **second** thing to say is – His question – around '*do you think in such a **short time**... you can make me a Christian?*' suggests that Agrippa needed more deliberation and contemplation, rather than make a spontaneous **decision**!
- I agree with **Agrippa**: – sometimes – a **longer time** of **examining** the **evidence** for **belief** is required...
- **Often** times, it will take people **years** to come to a **convinced position**... sometimes merely due to their own **stubbornness**, but sometimes... because they really **do** need more time to take **everything** on **board**.
- ... and many Australians **today**... are starting a lot further **back** than was **Agrippa**... that is – he had a fair amount of **background** as a **Jew**... many **Australians today**... haven't even **heard** of **Jesus**... or have only ever had a **year or two** of **SRE**...! //
- But that doesn't mean we **give up**... As **Agrippa** could see that Paul was trying to **persuade** him to be a Christian... I wonder if there is **any one** in **your** life who reckons that **YOU'RE** persuading **them** to be a **Christian**... that's a **challenging** thought... and I want to say – I don't think there would be **ANY ONE** in my life who would be thinking that at the **moment**!
- But surely that should be on our radar... there ought to be people we love and care about – that we are trying to persuade about the reality and beauty and majesty and mercy of Jesus!
- //
- Let me bring things to a **close**... by pointing us back to v18
- Paul sent to the Gentiles v18 –
*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**.'*
- Is **that** what you're praying will happen to those people you dearly love who at the moment do not follow Jesus??
- Paul said that **because** of **this is what he's been called to do**, then he's going to urge people to **repent** and turn to **God**.
- Are you **praying** that **people** will do that?
- And are you in any way **persuading** people to just **that**?
- Both **PRAYER** and that **PERSUADING** – are both **vital aspects** of **SHARING JESUS FOR LIFE!**