

Place: Lurgan Baptist 6:3:2012

THE CHURCH ABLAZE

Readings: Acts 26:1-12 26:1-8 22-32

36. PAUL THE DEFENDER

In the early morning of the 4th October 1980, a young student nurse was brutally murdered in the Chicago suburb of Oak Park, Illinois. Following the advice of a well meaning friend, Steve Linscott, a student at the Emmaus Bible College told the police about a dream he had the night of the crime. The Oak Park police later arrested him, interpreting his dream account as the round about confession of a psychopathic killer. Later a jury found Linscott guilty and he was sentenced to 40 years in prison. **There was just one problem, Linscott was innocent.** Only after time in prison and numerous legal appeals, a process that lasted 12 years, was Linscott vindicated and set free. Those were very difficult years for the innocent Linscott, being separated from his wife and children, during his incarceration, wondering if he had brought this trouble upon himself. But he would later say that it was a time of deep spiritual growth and growing awareness of the goodness of God. Though our life's circumstances may not be as extreme as Linscott's none of us likes to be falsely accused.

To do what is right and be charged with doing wrong, to work hard to maintain a good job record, or reputation and have someone smear it. My such injustice can easily crush the human spirit, even in a follower of the Lord Jesus. I mean, we know the truth, we know who we are in Christ but slander hurts. Now here was the apostle Paul, the most devoted servant of the Lord Jesus and he was hated, persecuted, and falsely accused. Paul was a Jew whose countrymen wanted to kill him, and he was a Roman whose government did not know what to do with him. Now in these chapters we see Paul as a prisoner. He was a prisoner first in Jerusalem, then in Caesarea and finally in Rome, where tradition says he was executed. Now consider what Paul had already endured. There was.

1. The Mob in Jerusalem:

Do you recall that the mob in Jerusalem tried to kill Paul ? Then the Romans rescued him and allowed him to give his first defense to the Jewish crowd that tried to kill him. (21:31)

2. The Mayhem in the Sanhedrin:

The Romans did not know what to do with Paul so they decided to try him in front of the Sanhedrin, which was the Jewish high court. Paul now gave his second defense to the Sanhedrin and left them in chaos, arguing with each other. (23:6-7)

3. The Meeting in Caesarea:

Do you recall that the Romans decided that Paul should be taken to Caesarea and stand before Felix who was then the governor of the Roman province of Judea ? Here Paul was given an opportunity to bring the third phase of his defense. (24:12) And now we see,

4. The Matter before Festus:

Now we have already seen accusations against Paul three times, and now the Holy Spirit describes the same accusations in this passage as Paul is being charged before Festus the new governor who replaced Felix. Finally, there was,

5. The Message before Agrippa:

For Paul also makes his defense here before King Agrippa the Second. So from chapter 21 to chapter 28 Paul is defending himself in the various trials against him. Now why has the Holy Spirit chosen to go to great lengths to describe the trials and defenses of the apostle Paul ? I mean when you look at this section of the book of Acts there is very little if any doctrine, there is no missionary enterprise, no church founded and no great salvation story. *Now why ? Why is the Lord showing us trial after trial and defense after defense ?* Is it not simply to illustrate to us the power of a blameless life. You see, every time Paul was tried before a human court he was always found innocent. That shows the power of a blameless Christian testimony, and the impact of a totally consecrated life. Have you ever wondered what you can do for the Lord ? My look at what Paul did. He

affected people from the simplest person on the street to the very leaders of Rome. *Isn't it amazing to see the impact of a man totally given over to the Lord ?* Now here is Paul having spent two years imprisoned in Caesarea under the Roman governor Felix, who is now replaced by Porcius Festus. The question is, how will this new governor handle the case he has inherited from his predecessor ? Now I want to try and deal this with two chapters in one study and use three words to summarize this passage. The first word is **Conciliation**, the second word is **Consultation**, and the final word is **Confrontation**.

(1) CONCILIATION

Now let me give you a little background. You see, the Romans could look back into Jewish history and see the hatred of the Jews against their oppressors. There was hatred against,

1. Antiochus Epiphanes:

If you study the intertestamental period, that is the four hundred year period between the Old and the New Testaments, you'll discover that Israel was dominated largely by Syria. Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes who liked to call himself Theos Epiphanes which means "*God manifest*," was enamored with Greek culture and tried to impose it on the Jews. However, the Jews called him Epimanes which means "*the maniac*." They finally revolted in a movement led Judas Maccabaeus and his sons and started a revolution that led to liberation from

Syrian rule. Now the Romans knew the revolutionary power the Jews had, and if they could ever mount a charge, the Roman Empire would be in a battle. You see, every Roman governor was walking a tightrope. 1.

2. Pilate:

The first thing Pilate did when he arrived in Judea was ride into Jerusalem with idols all over his armour, intending to place them all over the area. They were idols in the image of Caesar which made the Jews extremely upset. Pilate refused to take the idols down, so the Jewish leaders reported him to Rome, who ordered him to take them down. My from the beginning of his reign Pilate was under the thumbs of the Jewish leaders who were masters of blackmail and when they came to crucify Christ they had Pilate where they wanted him.

3. Felix:

That's why he was afraid to do what was right concerning the apostle Paul, because if he had the Jews would have been upset and would have reported him to Rome. You see, Felix was unable to handle them. Now does that background not give you some insight into (25:1) ? The first thing Festus did was to go to Jerusalem to conciliate the Jewish population. Like most government leaders he is very anxious to curry the favour of his subjects. But he quickly discovered that their number one priority was dealing with Paul. For can you see,

(a) THE ASSASSINATION THAT WAS PLOTTED:

Look if you will at (25:2) It was a planned ambush. The Jews were trying to take advantage of the new governor. They knew Festus realized the mistakes Felix had made and that he wanted to appease them. So they were ready to trap Festus from the beginning of his reign. It's amazing to note that Paul had been in prison for two years and instead of the Jewish leaders being free to love they were slaves to hate. As Dr. McMillan has said, "*It's not what you eat it's what eats you.*" One of the greatest evils is hate or bitterness. My do you realise that you will self-destruct if you continue to feel hatred or bitterness toward someone ? Do you recall that it was hate that motivated Joseph's brothers ? "*His (Joseph's) brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed have dominion over us ? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams and for his words.*" (Gen 37:8) Hate caused the sons of Joseph to sell their brother into slavery. Do you remember that it was hatred that motivated Saul ? "*The women spoke to one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands and David his ten thousands. And Saul was angry and the saying displeased him.*" (1 Sam 18:7) My are you angry at the Lord, the church, your fellow believer ?

Fortunately, Festus, had the good sense not to agree with the plan proposed by the Jewish leaders and so they had to accompany him to Caesarea and there we notice,

(b) THE ACCUSATION THAT WAS PRESENTED:

Look if you will at (25:7) It's the same old story. Do you recall that two years previous Paul was accused of sedition (Caesar) he was accused of Sectarianism (the law) and he was accused of Sacrilege (temple) ? You see, according to the Jewish leaders Paul had offended Rome, Israel and God. But all three accusations were lies. Of course Paul was not the first of God's servants to be falsely accused. We just mentioned Joseph. Sold into slavery by jealous brothers, accused of a crime he did not commit, imprisoned and even forgotten by a fellow prisoner he had helped, Joseph could have become bitter toward man and God. Instead he kept a heavenly focus. " *But as for you ye thought evil against me but God meant it unto good.*" (Gen 50:20)

Do you ever wonder if Joseph counted the passing days with slash marks on the wall of his prison cell ? Or do you think he gave up worrying about how long he had been there ? Do you think he gave up hoping the cupbearer would keep his promise ? Joseph knew his interpretation had been correct, and he knew that every day the cupbearer stood in a position of power and influence. Maybe one day that man would remember his promise. But then again, maybe not. How long can a person cling to a dusty promise ?
(Gary Mayes)

As long as he hangs on to the Lord Jesus for dear life, that's how long. Think of Daniel considered a criminal and thrown into a pit of hungry lions. His crime ? Praying to the only true God. (Dan 6:10) How dare he. Why, Daniel must have been as wicked as William Tyndale,

who actually dared to translate the Bible into English, or the ten Boom family, who dared to hide Jews rather than let the Nazis take them away to concentration camps. You see, to defy the authority of man in order to obey God, is in the eyes of human government improper but the Lord is pleased and honoured with such obedience to him. In the words of John Calvin.

Christ's servants must be all the more courageous to carry on through good and evil reports. They should not think it remarkable that evil is spoken of them when they have done good. At the same time they must easily defend themselves before men when the opportunity arises.

Now how do God's servants not only survive but thrive in such circumstances ? *By trusting the Lord, to reveal His purposes.* Do you recall the night Paul was nearly torn in two by the Sanhedrin ? That night the Lord brought a reassuring word to him, " *Be of good cheer Paul, for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem so must thou bear witness also at Rome.*" (23:11) Paul always wanted to go to Rome as a preacher. He didn't ask to go as a prisoner but he accepted as God's will for his life and just kept doing what he always did, witnessed to God's grace in Christ. My are you being falsely accused ? Is your good being spoken of as evil ? Are you trusting God to reveal His purposes ? Did you notice Paul's response to the charges leveled against him ? (25:8-10) Do you see here,

(c) *THE APPEAL THAT WAS PROPOSED:*

This was one of the rights of a Roman citizen and Paul exercised it. You see, if a Roman citizen did not receive fair treatment in any of the provinces of the Roman Empire, they could appeal to Rome, and this appeal took priority over any other decision. Paul's case would now be heard and handled by Caesar. *Now why did Paul appeal to Caesar ?* Well, for one thing he knew the intentions of the Jews. Either death by ambush or death by judgment awaited him. Another reason was that Paul was afraid that Festus would be manipulated by the Jewish leaders. A third reason was Paul's understanding of the Lord's will. I mean the Lord had promised him, "*as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.*" (23:11) The fastest way to get there was to appeal to Rome. Now some Christians might criticize Paul here saying, he should have waited on the Lord and allowed the Lord to direct his circumstances. But by putting himself in the hands of the government Paul set a pattern for all believers to follow. The reason is that government is an institution of God. Paul says, "*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God for the powers that be are ordained of God.*" (Rom 13:1)

Just think of what the Lord has done through His servants who have used that which the Lord made available to them. *For example, have you ever heard of William Wilberforce ?* He was a committed Christian and a member of parliament in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Using all the legitimate political resources at his disposal he was used by God to bring an end to slavery in the British Empire. Now can you see

Paul now ? He must have been exhilarated. His long-time desire to visit Rome was about to be fulfilled. (19:21 Rom 15:24) (1)

(2) CONSULTATION

You see, Festus had solved one problem only to be confronted by another. When he sent Paul to Rome he needed to include a specific charge which had been leveled against Paul. Festus was not sure what to write, but he was saved from his dilemma by King Agrippa. Indeed,

(a) *THE VISIT OF THE KING:*

Seemed to be opportune. Look if you will at (25:13)
Now have a look,

1. At Him:

Herod Agrippa the Second was the last of the Herodian kings of the Jews. *He ruled the northern part of Palestine during the Roman occupation and the Romans considered him an expert in Jewish affairs as did Paul.* (26:3) He belonged to a wicked family of kings. His father Agrippa the First was the Herod who killed James and arrested Peter. (Acts 12:2) His great uncle Herod Antipas was the ruler who executed John the Baptist (Mk 6:28) His great grand father was Herod the Great, who killed all the babies in Bethlehem at the time of Christ's birth. (Matt 2:16) I mean this man belonged to a disastrous family. He was Roman in allegiance although he was part Jewish. As king he was in charge of the appointment of

priests and the operation of the ceremonies of Jewish worship. So he was very familiar with the Jewish religion.

2. At Her:

You see, Bernice was Agrippa's sister. They had one of the most infamous relationships in all history because they lived in incest. It was common knowledge. Every now and then she would have an interlude with a lover but she would always come back to Agrippa. Did you notice that how the Holy Spirit keeps adding the phrase " *And Bernice,* " ? Look at (25:13, 25:23 26:30) She is attached to Agrippa like an ugly disease. Every time that man appears Bernice is with him. Dr. Harry Ironside says,

If Agrippa died unsaved, we may be sure God links Bernice with him still and when Agrippa stands eventually at the judgment of the Great White Throne, Bernice will stand there with him. In other words Bernice represents that sin, that evil thing in the life of a man and woman from which they can never be separated in time or in eternity if they do not judge the sin and get right before God. Surely there is something intensely solemn here. Oh the awfulness of sin. How it clings to one.

My Agrippa was decadent and immoral and the descendant of a terrible family, but he did know about Judaism so he was a welcome guest. Festus could now receive expert advice on what to write to Rome about his prisoner, for,

(b) THE VEXATION OF THE GOVERNOR:

Was apparent. Did you notice that Festus was vexed about three things.

1. The Age of the Case:

Look if you will at (25:14) Do you remember why Felix left Paul in prison ? (24:27) To do a favour for the Jews. That's the only reason Paul was still in prison. He was innocent. And now Festus is stuck with this vexing case.

2. The Accusations in the Case:

And they were not about Roman law but about Jewish religion. As Festus reviews the case to Agrippa do you see what he says ? (25:19-20) Festus could not understand about the resurrection of Christ because he was ignorant of Christ's life, ministry and death and also of Scripture. That an intellectual like Paul would claim that a dead man would come alive baffled Festus. And does it not baffle many people today ? *Yet it is the issue of the resurrection of Jesus Christ that clearly set Christianity apart from Judaism and was and is the cornerstone of the gospel.* My more people stumble over the resurrection than any other doctrine, That's why we need to preach it. My Do you believe Christ is alive ? Do you testify to it ? Do you preach it ? Do you exalt a once crucified but now risen Saviour ? 1.2. But notice,

3. The Appeal in the Case:

Look at (25:21) Paul had appealed his case to Caesar and that put Festus on the hot seat and he was looking to Agrippa to help him out of this problem. Now that sets the scene for the third word that summarizes this passage.

(3) CONFRONTATION

My this is one of the most dramatic scenes in all of the Word of God and in all of human history. What would seem to some an obstacle was to Paul an opportunity. This was an opportunity to win an influential man to Christ. Can you see,

(a) *The CIRCUMSTANCES of Paul's Testimony:*

Do you see that word “ *pomp*,” ? It means “ *fantasia*,” Agrippa appeared with his entire entourage with great pomp. Can you imagine Agrippa and Bernice dressed in purple robes ? The soldiers that served as a ceremonial guard would have been in their best uniforms. And all the important dignitaries would have been there. What a contrast to Paul, for if we can believe tradition Paul was not very imposing physically. With all the glitter in the banquet hall in walked a little bandy legged, bald headed Jewish man who might not have seen to well. He was shackled by a chain as he stood in the middle of the hall. You can imagine people saying, “ *Did we come to hear him ?*” Now Paul didn't have to show up at this hearing. He could have argued, “ *You can't take me in there. I've had my trial. I've been judged innocent and I have pleaded my case to Rome.*” But he didn't. Do you know why ? It was another opportunity to preach Christ. My ...

is this not our objective ? Was this not the commission that was given by the Risen Lord ? “ *Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*” (Mk 16:15) Tell me, are using the opportunities that the Lord gives you to make Christ known ? (a)

(b) *The COMMENCEMENT of Paul's Testimony:*

Did you notice how *courteous* he was ? As he addressed Agrippa the key figure in the room. Did you notice how *informative* he was ? As he spoke to them about his past conduct. He tells them about his *fame*, (26:4) his *faith* (26:6) his *fanaticism* (26:9) In effect Paul says, “ *I am being accused of believing in the resurrection of a man named Jesus Christ. Why is that so strange ? All Jews have believed in the promise of the resurrection from the dead as promised by God to our forefathers through the prophets, Daniel for instance.*” (Dan 12:1-3) Do you see what Paul was doing ? The Jews have accused him of something that was a central tenet of Judaism. This was a brilliant “ *courtroom*,” strategy by the apostle. Sure Paul was courteous and Paul was informative but Paul was ready. That's what Peter meant when he said, “ *Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*” (1 Pet 3:15) Are you ready ? Do you have a reservoir of knowledge of the Word of God ? Can you turn your circumstances into an opportunity for presenting Christ ?

A woman at the well needed water. Christ told her that He was the water of life and that she could have a well of water in her springing up to eternal life. (Jn 4:14) Many

people needed food so He fed them bread and said, “ *I am the bread of life.*” (Jn 6:35) A great candelabra was in the middle of the temple when the Lord Jesus walked in and said, “ *I am the light of the world.*” (Jn 8:12) Christ was the master of turning every occasion to Himself and Paul was exactly the same. Is this not one of the marks of successful evangelism ? To turn your circumstances into an opportunity to present Christ ? How do you do it ? *Just by being ready and bold.* Martin Niemoller was a German pastor who was arrested by the Nazis and spent nine years in prison. At the end of World War II, he went to America when he was released. There was much interest in his arrival, so he traveled across America and spoke about the horrors of nine years in a Nazi prison. Two reporters commented on Niemoller and his speech in one city. “ *Imagine,*” said one reporter disgustedly “ *Nine years in a Nazi prison and all he can talk about is Jesus Christ.*”

Isn't that a great testimony ? Paul spent two years in confinement in Caesarea and all he could talk about was Jesus Christ. There was a man of God who was a great soul winner. Someone asked him what made him so fruitful in winning people to Christ. He said, “ *One day I prayed a prayer that changed my life. I asked God to give me the opportunity, that every time I'm able to introduce the topic of conversation, it would always be Jesus Christ.*” That's what changed his life. The Lord only knows how many people he won to the Saviour. What about you ? Is the topic of your conversation Jesus Christ ? Are you seeking to speak of Him at every opportunity ? (a) (b)

(c) *The CENTRE of Paul's Testimony:*

That's brought before us here in (26:12-18) Notice Paul

1. Discussed his Conversion:

Paul's constant focus was on the Damascus road experience because that event changed his life and moved in a new direction. What happened on the Damascus road ? Paul met the resurrected Christ. He was given a new perspective, a new purpose, and a new power. 1.

2. Discussed his Commission:

For, when Christ, saved Paul he gave him a task. Paul was to take the message of God's redeeming love to the Gentiles. Look at (26:17) This was Paul's commissioning as an apostle. You see, an apostle had to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (1:21-22) and Paul was. (1 Cor 9:1 15:8) He was called to proclaim the good news of salvation from judgment through the work of Christ. The Lord says, “ *Delivering thee from the Gentiles unto whom now I send thee.*” Do you see the cycle we are to follow ? We were saved out of the world to go back into the world. Do you look at your job that way ? When you go to work on Monday morning do you recognize yourself as being commissioned by the Lord ? As one sent to expose that group of people to the gospel and to turn them from darkness to light ? Do you realise that you may touch the world in a way others cannot ? How did Paul finish off ? Well, look at,

(d) The CULMINATION of Paul's Testimony:

In (26:19-23) Paul recognized that the primary ingredient in a committed life is **obedience**. I mean some Christians do what is convenient. Others do what is expedient. Still others do what is profitable. But Paul was committed to obeying God's will, even when it was not convenient, even when it was not expedient and even when it was not profitable. My Paul's life was characterized by a classic prayer, "*Dear God, may your will be done in my life, nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else. Amen.*" To what was Paul committed ? He was committed to proclaiming this truth about the Lord Jesus "*That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should light unto the people and to the Gentiles.*" (26:23) This is essentially what Paul said to Agrippa. "**I have been changed. I've been turned into a minister of Jesus Christ by a sovereign act of the living Christ. I submitted myself to Him and now I am proclaiming Him. People have tried to shut my mouth by attempts on my life, but they haven't succeeded. Here I am two years later saying the same thing that I said then and saying it just as boldly today. There is an equal salvation to both Jew and Gentile.**"

My did that not take courage ? And is that not what we are lacking today ? Will you ask the Lord to give you some boldness as you approach folk with the gospel ? Do you see how this great spectacle ended ? There was,

(e) The CONSEQUENCE of Paul's Testimony:

Indeed it was a three fold consequence.

1. There was an Interruption:

Look at (26:24) What made Festus say that ? Because of what Paul says in (26:23) that Christ should rise from the dead. Festus could not understand the concept of the resurrection. He thought only one kind of man babbled about visions, revelations, and resurrections and that was a crazy man. Subsequent Paul's have suffered the same stigma. In 1913 when William Borden age twenty six, a graduate of Yale and Princeton left his palatial near Chicago's Lake Shore Drive, giving away over \$500,000 to become a missionary to the Muslim world many of his contemporaries thought he had lost it. *And when he died six months later from cerebral meningitis amidst the flies and heat of a Cairo hospital, some were sure he was mentally unbalanced.* But God did not share their opinion. In 1855 when the Cambridge Seven including C.T. Studd England's most famous athlete left for China they were ridiculed for their "*enthusiasm,*" a polite way of saying, "*mad fanaticism.*" But is it not the world that is insane ? Is it not mad to live as the majority does, as though reality resides in what we can see, taste and touch ?

As Paul puts it so aptly "*While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal but the things which are not seen are eternal.*" (2 Co4 4:18) Tell me, are you like Festus or Paul ? 1.

2. There was an Invitation:

Oh for a passionate passion for souls
Oh for a pity that yearns
Oh for a love that loves unto death
Oh for a fire that burns

Paul's Perseverance:

I mean they didn't accept Christ but that did not discourage him. When he made it to Rome the first thing he did was to preach Christ. People say, "*I've tried to share Christ but there doesn't seem to be any response.*" But that's all right for the Lord did not call you to save souls he called you to preach Christ. All He asks you to do is be faithful. Paul continued to be faithful ? Will you ?

Paul denied that he was mad and then presented the gospel to Agrippa and forced him to come to a conclusion that he probably would not have made on his own. Look at what he says in (26:27) Paul was telling Agrippa that if he believed the prophets he would have to believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah. Now he was in a fix and so he says, "*Almost Be a Christian.*" "*Paul do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian ?*" "*And Paul said I would to God*" Paul looked at all those people in fancy dress and told them he wished they were like he was. They had everything in the world but they really had nothing. For Christ said, "*What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul ? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ?*" (Mk 8:36-37) 1, 2,

3. There was an Impact:

Do you see how it ends ? (26:28-30) Paul was innocent. That's why the Lord included this passage. To show that the king of Palestine and the governor from Rome both agreed that Paul was innocent. Well, why then did they let the case go to Rome ? Because the most important things to them were popularity and their immoral life style. But what a man Paul was. I wonder, do we have something of,

Paul's Passion:

For in spite of the fact that he lived for two years under the attacks of Jewish leaders he never lost his burden for his people. What about you ?

