

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Things Aren't Always What They Seem

Acts 25:13–26:32

Let's take our Bibles together and turn to Acts 25. We are studying the life of Paul at the end of the Book of Acts. Let's continue that starting in Acts 25:13.

And in these final chapters of the book of Acts, we are seeing Paul's stalwart commitment to God and to the gospel despite great opposition. And we are seeing the gospel and the power of God prevail despite many evidences to the contrary. And the key phrase that I want to stick in your head as we begin this message is the following: "Things Aren't Always What They Seem."

"Why do you say that, Pastor Tony?" Well, if you didn't have the right perspective on what God is doing in Paul's life, you might mistakenly think, "Paul's life is being wasted. Paul's talent is being wasted. Paul is being bested by these Jewish and Roman leaders."

"Paul has been stuck in prison for two years! He's persecuted everywhere he goes. He's unable to defend himself! People think he's a criminal. Paul is losing this battle for the gospel."

"And also these Roman officials (Festus and Felix) and these Jewish leaders with all of their power and prestige and lavish lifestyles... these guys are winning against Paul. These guys are getting the best of Paul. They are inhibiting the proliferation of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit."

Well, "Things Aren't Always What They Seem." And even though the people around Paul might seem to be the important ones... history would tell us otherwise. And God's Word likewise, if we look below the surface, is telling another story.

Paul may *seem* like he is losing this battle. But God is using his pain and struggles to accomplish a greater purpose. And what the world often portrays as powerful and successful and meaningful is really more worthy of our pity and scorn than imitation. And often what the world dismisses as weakness and foolishness, is instead quite profound.

And by the way, let me give you one piece of evidence that God is controlling these events and bringing about his ultimate purposes. Jesus prophesied concerning his followers that they would be "dragged before governors and kings for [Jesus's] sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles" (Matt 10:18). Also in Luke's gospel, Jesus said, "They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake" (Luke 21:12).¹

That prophecy was true of Peter and John and the other twelve. But it was especially true of the Apostle Paul at the end of the book of Acts. In the last few chapters of this book, Paul appears before high-ranking Jews in the Sanhedrin. He appears before high-ranking Roman officials including Felix, Festus, and King Agrippa. Paul even gets sent to Rome to appear before Caesar!

But before that, he testifies about Christ before King Agrippa.² Let's look at that now.

¹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 498: "The testimony before Agrippa was the fulfillment of Jesus' commission to Paul that he would witness before kings (Acts 9:15) and of his promise to his disciples that he would give them 'words and wisdom' to make that witness a bold one (Luke 21:12–15)."

² Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 709: "This would be Herod Agrippa II (AD 28–100), also known as Marcus Julius Agrippa. He was the only surviving son of Herod Agrippa I, whose death is recorded in Acts 12:23, and great-grandson of Herod the Great, ruler of the region at Jesus's birth. He ruled over the territory Philip originally received from Herod the Great, and in AD 56 he received even more territory,

If you remember from last time, Paul had to defend himself *again* in front of the new governor Festus. Paul had been left in prison for two years. Festus came to town as the new governor, and his first order of business was to settle the matter of Paul.

The Jews were clamoring for a judgment against Paul. And after reviewing the case, Festus can't find any wrongdoing in him. But, according to **verse 9**, wanting to do the Jews a favor, Festus suggests to Paul that he be sent to Jerusalem for trial. Well Paul wants none of that! **He knows that the Jewish leaders won't be happy until he's six-feet-under**, so he invokes the Roman *provocatio*. He appeals to Caesar. And in **verse 12** Festus happily obliges Paul and says, "To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go."

But here's the problem with that. Festus has agreed to send Paul to Rome. Festus *wants* to send Paul to Rome, because then he can wash his hands of this whole troublesome matter. But he's got nothing to charge Paul with. He knows Paul is innocent, and so if he sends an innocent man to Rome without charges, then he'll look like a fool in front of all the Roman higher-ups.³

And so here's how Festus tries to remedy this difficult situation. Look at **verse 13**.

¹³ Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king⁴ and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus.

Now this guy Agrippa, who was a fellow ruler with Festus in Judea, was part of the infamous Herod family. He was the great-grandson of King Herod the Great. Druscilla, the wife of Felix, who we saw earlier in **Acts 24** was his sister.⁵

And if you remember, King Herod, killed all the babies in Bethlehem when Jesus was born in order to eliminate the future King of the Jews (**Matt 2:1–23**). King Herod's son, Antipas, beheaded John the Baptist.⁶ King Herod's grandson, Agrippa I, executed the Apostle James, but was later eaten by worms according to **Acts 12**. These Herods were essentially the archenemies of Christ and all of his followers in the NT. And now King Herod Agrippa II has a chance to do some more damage to the followers of Christ, because Festus is going to look to him to help him render judgment against Paul.

Now this is even more sordid than that, because Bernice, the woman that is with Agrippa is not Agrippa's wife. She is in fact his sister. And they are living out an incestuous relationship with one another in front of the whole world.⁷

This woman Bernice had actually been married twice before her incestuous relationship with her brother, and later she became the mistress of Titus, the future emperor of Rome. And the Roman people actually forced Titus to dismiss her because her morals were so appalling to the *pagan* people of Rome.⁸ **This is like something you would see on daytime TV**. In other words, Agrippa and Bernice were sick, sin-infested people.⁹

so that he ruled over the northeastern portion of Herod the Great's empire (Lebanon and to the east, in modern terms, and over parts of Galilee and some areas east of the Jordan River). Judea, Samaria, and large parts of Galilee, however, remained in Roman control."

³ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 326: "That appeal, though resolving an impasse, presented Festus with a fresh difficulty. As governor he was required to send a report along with Paul to Rome, detailing the charges against him. But in Paul's case, those charges were theological and general in nature. Festus, only two weeks into his term as governor, was unfamiliar with the nuances of Jewish theology. Since he did not understand the charges (cf. vv. 18–19), he could not write a coherent report explaining them to the emperor. Fortunately, aid arrived in the person of Herod Agrippa."

⁴ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 327: "Although he did not rule Judea, Agrippa had been granted control of the temple treasury and the right to appoint the high priest. The Romans considered him an expert on Jewish affairs, as did Paul (26:3). Agrippa tried to prevent the Jewish revolt, but when it broke out in A.D. 66, he sided with the Romans and thus became a traitor to his people."

⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 499: "As the Jewish king, he would be familiar with Jewish customs and points of dispute. He was also a thoroughly Hellenistic king and lived a Roman lifestyle. He was thus in the unique position to give his opinion on both the Jewish and Roman legal aspects of Paul's situation."

⁶ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 327: "Herod Antipas, figured prominently in the gospels (Luke 3:1) as the ruler who executed John the Baptist (Mark 6:14–29), sought Jesus' life (Luke 13:31–33), and later tried Him (Luke 23:7–12)."

⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 493: "She could perhaps be described as a 'Jewish Cleopatra.'" Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 160: "This pair were involved in one of the most infamous incestuous relationships in ancient history. It was a matter of imperial concern and a scandal in Rome. The Emperor Claudius had ordered Bernice to marry (someone besides her brother, obviously), but she almost immediately left her marriage (to a man named Polemo) to go back and live as her brother's queen."

⁸ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 39.

⁹ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 39.

And if that's not crazy enough, Agrippa, despite his incestuous relationship, was considered an expert in Jewish affairs. And he was given authority to appoint the high priest of the temple. And he even had authority over the temple treasury!¹⁰ And that's why Festus is going to turn to him to help him figure out what to do with this troublesome character named Paul.

Look at **verse 14**.

¹⁴ And as they [that's Agrippa and Bernice] stayed [in Caesarea] many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a man left prisoner by Felix,¹⁵ and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him.¹⁶ I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face¹¹ and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him.¹⁷ So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought.¹⁸ When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed.¹⁹ Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive.¹² Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them.¹³ ²¹ But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar."¹⁴

Festus is basically telling Agrippa, **"I've got this real doozy of a problem... this guy named Paul. And I don't know what to do with him. He appealed to the emperor, and so now I've got to figure something out for this guy. Can you help me, Agrippa? You know something about Jewish law."**¹⁵

²² Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear the man myself."

Agrippa is intrigued by this fascinating character, Paul. Paul is fascinating! And he says, **"I want to hear this guy."**¹⁶ **I want to hear straight from the horse's mouth what all this controversy is about."** Maybe there's a little bit of interest here in this "Jesus" who Paul said was alive.

So Festus says in **verse 22**.

"Tomorrow," said he, "you will hear him."

²³ So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp,

With great "pomp." Can you see them now? With great... here's another translation of this Greek word... "pageantry."¹⁷ **Like the king and queen of England, they came.** And everyone was "Oh, so impressed by them."

And Luke writes in **verse 23**.

¹⁰ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 39.

¹¹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 493–4: "Paul's accusers would have to confront him face-to-face, and Paul would be given his due right to answer their charges. This was certainly the Roman standard of justice, and this was perhaps the way Festus saw the situation in retrospect. But this is not the picture conveyed in vv. 1–12. There it was not initially a question of delivering Paul to the Jews without a fair trial—only of where the trial would be held. In fact, Paul's concern about receiving justice and the basis for his appeal was precisely that Festus would yield to the Jewish pressure and compromise his standards of justice (v. 9f.). Festus comes off much better in his own account."

¹² Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 161: "You can almost sense the puzzled tone in his voice as Festus relays this information to Agrippa. This case presents Festus with a perplexing and complicated set of doctrinal disputes which lie outside his realm of expertise."

¹³ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 328–9: "Festus's words put the blame for the present dilemma on Paul; the implication is that had the apostle been willing to go to Jerusalem, the matter could have been settled. Yet it was Festus's obvious desire to do the Jews a favor (25:9) that forced Paul's appeal. Had the governor done what justice demanded and released the obviously innocent apostle, no appeal would have been necessary. In God's providence, Paul was kept in Roman custody as a protection against being assassinated."

¹⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 710: "The concern for a fair trial is slightly different from the portrait of 25:1–12, where Festus was considering handing Paul over to the Jewish leadership. This account may make Festus look more honorable than initially. At least it makes clear that he does not succumb to the pressure to do otherwise."

¹⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 494: "It was an internal Jewish religious discussion which in no way involved Roman law. Why, then, did Festus wish to continue the case by transferring it to Jerusalem (v. 20b) if he already had determined that no Roman law had been broken? Why did he not throw it out of court like Gallio (18:15)? Luke has given us the answer: he wanted 'to do the Jews a favor' (v. 9). Festus was simply not the sterling example of Roman justice he claimed to be (v. 16) and that, at least implicitly, by his own admission. But there it is for everyone to read in Festus's own words—Paul and the Christians were guilty of no crime against the state (v. 18)."

¹⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 712: "Agrippa asks to hear the case. This may indicate that he has longed to hear him, since ἐβουλόμην (*eboulomēn*, I was wanting) is in the imperfect."

¹⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 495n146: "The word φαντασία (cf. our 'fantasy') describes great pomp, a showy parade."

and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city.¹⁸

So just picture this with me here. Agrippa and Bernice come in wearing their purple robes of royalty along with golden crowns on their heads.¹⁹ Festus would have been wearing the scarlet robe that was customary for the governor on such formal occasions.

And all of the military tribunes were there. All of the prominent men of the city were there. All of the socialites and dignitaries and public figures would be there bowing before this incestuous king who by human standards was accorded these great honors. And Paul is going to have to defend himself *again* in front of one of these ridiculously corrupt and self-aggrandizing Roman leaders.²⁰

Speaking of Paul, look at the end of **verse 23**.

*Then at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in.*²¹

Now let's imagine this together. Here's Paul in total contrast to Agrippa and Bernice. Paul would have been clothed in humble garments. He was shackled (see **Acts 26:29**). He had been imprisoned for over two years. He had scars all over his body. One ancient description of Paul depicts him this way: **"Paul was a man little of stature, thin-haired upon the head, crooked in the legs, of good state of body, with eyebrows joining, and nose somewhat hooked."**²² Even in **2 Corinthians 10:10**, the Corinthian church described Paul as weak in bodily presence.

So here's Paul, this tiny, bald, humble and shackled man, who is brought before this audience hall with all these "respectable" and "dignified" and even "pompous" individuals, who for some reason are given the moral authority to determine Paul's fate.²³ [Of course we know, that these dignitaries are nothing but pawns in the hands of a sovereign God.]

And even though they look like the honorable ones in this little scene, I would subscribe to you today that "Things Aren't Always What They Seem."²⁴

Write this down as a first point in your notes. "Things Aren't Always What They Seem."

1) Sometimes the **prisoner** is more **honorable** than the rulers (25:13–27)

Let me just say for the record that godliness isn't determined by prominence, power, or prestige. Truth isn't determined by prominence, power, or prestige. Wisdom isn't determined by prominence, power, or prestige. And neither is honor.

Honor isn't determined by *popularity*. Honor isn't determined by *prosperity*. Honor isn't determined by *pomp and circumstance*. Things Aren't Always What They Seem.

The contrast here between Paul and Agrippa could not be starker. Here's this noble regal great-grandson of Herod the Great, dressed to the nines in his formal apparel. All of the Caesarean bigwigs are bowing before him. All of the female socialites are swooning in his presence. He is the epitome of power and success and respectability.

¹⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 712: "These are probably the five tribunes, officers commanding over one thousand men each, stationed in Caesarea... It is a grand occasion, a meeting of 'royals' with the Romans. Luke 21:12 is fulfilled, as is Acts 9:15."

¹⁹ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 330: "Agrippa would have been decked out in all the trappings of royalty, including a purple robe, golden crown, rings, and perhaps a scepter. Bernice, though not technically Agrippa's queen, would have been similarly attired. The five tribunes would have been wearing their full-dress uniforms, the prominent men of the city wearing their finest clothes. An immaculately dressed honor guard of soldiers undoubtedly escorted the dignitaries into the auditorium."

²⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 710: "There is irony in having such a couple sit in judgment on Paul, who, as Luke makes clear, is innocent. This is a world turned upside down."

²¹ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 164: "The unsuspecting congregation assembles, believing they hold the power and authority. Soon, a man in chains will appear before them. Ironically, it is only that man who is truly free, and he possesses the key which could set the entire room free: not from Roman law but from the wrath of God."

²² This is found in the pseudepigraphal mid-second-century *Acts of Paul*. F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, *NICNT*, 271–2 writes, "It has been felt that a description so vigorous and unconventional must rest on a good local tradition of what Paul looked like. This may be so, but it might well be the product of the writer's lively imagination."

²³ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 330: "The contrast could not have been more striking. Into the midst of the assembly hall, crowded with the most important people in Caesarea, walked a Jew who has been described as short, bald, and physically unimposing (cf. 2 Cor. 10:10)."

²⁴ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 330: "Appearances can be deceiving. History has judged Paul to be one of the most noble and powerful men who ever lived—and the crowd to be a collection of pompous fools."

And then there's Paul, the criminal. The rebel-rouser! The man clothed in humble dress, his body bent over by the weight of the shackles, humbled before these godless men. Which one of these men is truly honorable in the eyes of the Lord?

By the way, church, let me make just one quick point of application. Don't be fooled into thinking that honor in the eyes of men is the same as honor in the eyes of God. It's not. Those are not the same things.

So Paul is brought in. He stands before this "prestigious" crowd. And in **verse 24**, Festus gives the reason for this gathering.

²⁴ And Festus said, "King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. ²⁵ But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. ²⁶ But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. ²⁷ For it seems to me unreasonable, ²⁵ in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him."

Festus basically says, **"I got nothing on this guy... and I can't send him to Rome, as he has requested, without something tangible to attach to him. So you guys got to help me come up with something or I'm going to play the fool in front of the emperor."**²⁶

So after Festus gives his little plea, now it's time for Paul to speak.²⁷ And **Chapter 26:1** says,²⁸
¹ So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand **[Just imagine Paul stretching out his hand, trying to make this motion as his hands were chained]** and made his defense.²⁹

Now some of us in this situation might be tempted to just give up. Especially since Paul has done this before already, what's the point of defending yourself again. But the Bible says this, "Like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked" (**Prov 25:26**). Paul is a righteous man and he is not going to back down even if Caesar himself stands before him. He's going to give a defense.

Now I will say this. Paul's "defense" here is really not all that "defensive." In fact, he barely defends himself at all. Instead of getting "defensive" here, Paul gets "offensive." He goes for the hearts of his listeners.³⁰ Paul's going to preach the gospel. And his utmost desire with this audience isn't to plead his case. It's not to vindicate himself. He wants them to get saved. And with King Agrippa in particular, he doesn't give a rip if he's the king of whatever region or the great-grandson of King Herod... He wants Agrippa to get saved. He wants Bernice and Festus and all these dignitaries to give their lives to Christ.

I get the sense with Paul here that he just doesn't care anymore about anything. He doesn't care. All he cares about is the gospel. All he cares about is telling people about Christ. Festus and Agrippa have the authority to decide Paul's fate! So what! All Paul cares about is preaching the gospel.

²⁵ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 713: "Perhaps they can help him know what to say, given that it is unreasonable (*ἄλογον*, *alogon*) to send a prisoner without charges against him. This Greek term describes something that does not make sense or lacks cause, that is absurd... It appears only three times in the NT (2 Pet. 2:12; Jude 10)." Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 496-7: "There is strong irony in Festus's remark. The whole situation was indeed 'senseless.' He had no charges against Paul because there were none to be found. Paul's need to make the appeal, his continued confinement, the entire situation was 'unreasonable'; and it was very much the procurator's own doing."

²⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 713: "There is irony here as well. Festus has nothing to write because Paul is innocent, as he already knows. The scene shows him fishing for a credible charge."

²⁷ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 713: "This *captatio benevolentiae* is common in rhetorical settings (see 24:2-3). The rest of the speech proceeds according to typical rhetorical form: *exordium* (vv. 2-3), *narratio* (vv. 4-18), *confirmatio* (vv. 19-20), *refutatio* (v. 21), and *peroratio* (vv. 22-23)."

²⁸ Mohler, *Acts 13-28 for You*, 167: "Chapter 26 contains the entirety of Paul's defense before King Agrippa. As has been noted before, writing letters in the ancient world bore a significant cost. Each and every word here, then, has a cost associated with it. For Luke to record this message in full means he viewed it as a significant moment in his narrative and necessary for the health of the church."

²⁹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 499: "Paul was not defending himself before charges but rather offering his *apologia*, his personal testimony for his life as a Christian."

³⁰ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 332: "The primary goal of Paul's testimony was not to exonerate himself, but to convert Agrippa (cf. 26:28)."

Paul writes about this mentality later in the NT book of **Philippians**. He says, “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (**3:8**). Paul says in that same book, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (**Phil 1:21**).

Paul just doesn’t care anymore. He doesn’t care about anything except knowing Christ and preaching Christ and someday soon being resurrected with Christ. That is everything to him.

So here’s Paul’s preaching of the gospel starting in **verse 2**. Let’s listen up. **And we might have some King Agrippas in this room right now. Maybe we have some Bernices or some Festuses in this room right now who are lost and desperately need to hear about Christ. If that’s you today, listen up now. Here’s how a person gets saved.**

Here’s what Paul says.

² “I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, ³ especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. ⁴ “My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. ⁵ They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. ³¹ ⁶ And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, ³² ⁷ to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, ³³ as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope ³⁴ I am accused by Jews, O king!

In other words, Paul is saying **“I’m a Jew. I’m a real Jew. I grew up as a Jew. I was a Pharisee of Pharisees. And I have believed in the Messiah that our people have been anticipating for centuries. And unlike others who rejected that Messiah, I’ve embraced him.”**

And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king!

Look at **verse 8**.

⁸ Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?³⁵

Paul’s got some insider information here. He knows that they are intrigued by the fact that he believes Jesus was raised from the dead. So he goes right after that.

And he says,

⁸ Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

“God created the world, didn’t he? God has performed incredible miracles throughout human history, hasn’t he? Can’t God raise Jesus from the dead?”

The reason this is so important, by the way, is because if Christ wasn’t raised from the dead than our faith is meaningless. Paul said as much earlier when he wrote 1 Corinthians.

And also Paul knew that this “resurrection idea” would be offensive to both Jews and Romans. But it’s an essential element of the gospel. It was essential back then; and it’s essential right now.

If Christ wasn’t raised from the dead, we might as well just go home right now. You don’t need to come back here next Sunday. You don’t need to sing songs of worship and study this Bible. That would be meaningless. Everything hinges on whether or not Christ was raised from the dead.

But of course we know, like Paul knows, that Christ was raised from the dead. He was raised on a Sunday, and that’s why we gather and worship on Sunday.

³¹ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 333: “Josephus described the Pharisees as ‘a certain sect of the Jews that appear more religious than others, and seem to interpret the laws more accurately’ (*Wars* 1.5.2).”

³² Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 714: “Paul thoroughly identifies with being Jewish, and his faith is not a violation of this heritage. He is faithful to ‘our’ religion and ‘our’ fathers.”

³³ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 168: “In verse 6, Paul does something amazing. He says, ‘And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers.’ In other words, Paul condemns the Jews who have accused him of abandoning the Jewish faith. In his eyes, he is *more* Jewish than his accusers because he recognizes that God’s promised Messiah has indeed come.”

³⁴ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 333: “That hope was the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom (cf. 1:6; 3:22–24; 13:23–33; Gal. 3:17–18; 4:4; Titus 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:11–12) and, specifically, the resurrection connected with His coming.”

³⁵ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 168: “Paul is pointing out that resurrection is consistent with Jewish beliefs. In this way he turns the tables on his accusers who ridicule his belief in the resurrection. Why should Jews exhibit surprise at Paul’s message of the resurrection of Jesus when the Hebrew Scriptures point to such a resurrection?”

And Paul goes right after that here. He goes right for the jugular talking about the resurrection.

Look at verse 9.

⁹“I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints³⁶ in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote³⁷ against them. ¹¹And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme,³⁸ and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

Paul is saying here, **“I’m the least likely person to get saved. I not only opposed Christ and his followers; I participated in murdering Christians. When my colleagues stoned Stephen I was there giving approval. I was there to hold their coats so that they could throw rocks harder at Stephen and kill him faster. And that’s when everything changed. That’s when my life took a radical turn in a different direction.”**

¹²“In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. ¹⁴And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul,³⁹ Saul,⁴⁰ why are you persecuting me?’⁴¹ It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ ¹⁵And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

By the way, goads are ancient cattle prods. They are pointy sticks that shepherds would use to poke their herds and move them forward. And sometimes the animals get angry and kick the goads. But that does no good, right? It just makes the situation worse. Jesus says to Paul, **“Why do you keep kicking against the goads. Why do you keep trying to resist the sovereign God of the universe?”**⁴²

By the way did you notice that Jesus spoke to Paul in Hebrew? Does everyone see that in verse 14? Jesus had just come from heaven and was speaking Hebrew to Paul, and so I think that we’ll all be speaking Hebrew in heaven someday. What do you think about that?

I told a Croatian friend of mine that we will speak Hebrew in heaven someday. And he said, “O no we won’t, we’re going to speak English.” And I said, “English? Why would we speak English?” And he said, “Because all the Americans in heaven can’t learn a second language. So everyone will just speak English.”

So Jesus, after coming to Paul from heaven, spoke to Paul in Hebrew. And here’s what he says:

¹⁶But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸to open their eyes,⁴³ so that they may turn from darkness⁴⁴ to light⁴⁵ and from the power of Satan to God,

³⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 501: “It was a different Paul who was telling the story now. He called them ‘saints.’”

³⁷ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 334: “The Greek phrase translated I cast my vote literally reads ‘I threw my pebble.’ The reference is to the ancient custom of recording votes—a black pebble for conviction and a white one for acquittal.”

³⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 715: “The reference to blasphemy probably means denying who Jesus really is or even cursing him (*m. Mak.* 3.10–15). Pliny the Younger (*Ep.* 10.96.5) shows a Roman attempt to make Christians deny Jesus in Bithynia during the early second century.”

³⁹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 716: “Saul was addressed with his Semitic name, Σαούλ (*Saoul*). Elsewhere Luke uses the Greek form of the name, Σαῦλος.”

⁴⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 716: “The double naming, ‘Saul, Saul,’ points to a theophany (Gen. 22:11; 46:2; 1 Sam. 3:4; 2 Esd. [4 Ezra] 14:1; 2 Bar. 22.2).”

⁴¹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 717: “The Lord who appeared to Saul is the risen Jesus who is being persecuted when his people are persecuted. Jesus identifies closely with the believers’ suffering.”

⁴² Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 170–1: “Paul’s testimony should influence the prayer life of Christians. As believers, we can and should pray for our non-believing family members and friends—that the goads would be too sharp and prove too exhausting for them to continue to resist. Christians can pray that God would use life’s circumstances as a means to draw people to repentance and to show their need for Jesus Christ.”

⁴³ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 718: “With the opening of people’s eyes and their turning in response comes receiving the gift, the reception of forgiveness of sins (Luke 1:77; 3:3; 4:18; 5:20–21; 7:47–49; 11:4; 17:3–4; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38).”

⁴⁴ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 171–2: “Without Christ, all remain spiritually blind. Sin and death shrouds the eyes of sinners in a thick darkness which nothing but the power of Christ can dissipate. Left to our own devices, we will wander in the darkness and remain in our sin.”

⁴⁵ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 336: “Scripture frequently uses light as a metaphor for salvation (Matt. 4:16; John 1:4, 5, 7–9; 3:19–21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:36, 46; Acts 13:47; 26:23; 2 Cor. 4:4; 6:14; Eph. 5:8–9, 14; 1 Thess. 5:5; 1 John 1:7; 2:8–10). Because of that,

that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified⁴⁶ by faith in me.’¹⁹ “Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,²⁰ but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea,⁴⁷ and also to the Gentiles,⁴⁸ that they should repent⁴⁹ and turn⁵⁰ to God, performing deeds⁵¹ in keeping⁵² with their repentance.⁵³ ²¹ For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.⁵⁴

Verse 21 is about the closest thing you’ll find to a “defense” in Paul’s speech. Instead of trying to defend himself against false charges, Paul just says, “**forget about a defense, let’s try to get these people saved!**”

Look at verse 22.

²² To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass.⁵⁵ ²³ that the Christ must suffer⁵⁶ and that, by being the first to rise from the dead,⁵⁷ he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”⁵⁸

salvation can be described as being called ‘out of darkness into His marvelous light’ (1 Pet. 2:9), and believers can be described as sharers ‘in the inheritance of the saints in light,’ who have been ‘delivered ... from the domain of darkness, and transferred ... to the kingdom of His beloved Son’ (Col. 1:12–13).”

⁴⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 718: “Inheritance is linked to sanctification as the natural extension of justification. The categories are distinguishable but not separable.”

⁴⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 504: “The narrative of Acts mentions Paul’s preaching in Damascus after his conversion (9:20–25) as well as his subsequent witness in Jerusalem (9:28f.). There is no mention of a larger witness of Paul ‘in all Judea.’ There are grammatical and textual problems with this reading, and it may well be that the text originally referred to Paul’s preaching ‘in every region among both Jews and Gentiles.’”

⁴⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 720 and 700n6: “Texts such as Ps. Sol. 17:22–23 and 2 Bar. 72 show that for many Jews, there was no possibility that Gentiles could share in divine eschatological blessing... Some OT texts, however, look to Gentile blessing: Gen. 12:1–3; Isa. 2:1–4; and the OT texts Paul notes in Rom. 15:7–13. The difficult relations with Gentiles in the intertestamental period hardened attitudes about the Gentiles and their gods among some Jews.”

⁴⁹ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 175: “Without repentance, however, there is no good news. Without turning away from sin, there is no gospel. Preaching which does not proclaim the truth of our condition masquerades a false gospel as good news. Any attempt to cover up the truth of our depravity for fear of offence only endangers humanity even more. Christians must call nonbelievers to repent of their sin.”

⁵⁰ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 174: “Acceptance of Christ necessarily means turning away from the world and turning toward a life of obedience to God. A host of churches proclaim “gospel messages” devoid of a call to repentance.”

⁵¹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 719: “This is not a third responsibility, since the term *πράσσοντα* (*prassontas*, performing) is a present participle, making the performing of deeds something that happens alongside, and simultaneously with, the other elements, in dependence upon repenting and turning (Luke 3:8; Eph. 2:8–10; Titus 2:14; 3:8; Gal. 5:22–23; 2 Cor. 13:5–7).”

⁵² Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 176: “Being saved by grace, however, does not permit a lifestyle of rampant, unrepentant sin. Some believe that salvation by grace means a person can disregard the commands and ordinances of God. Paul, however, dispenses with such notions. The Christian faith necessitates a life of repentance—of turning away from sin and pursuing Jesus Christ.”

⁵³ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 719: “Paul was not an antinomian. He did not believe that someone who had faith could do whatever one wished without concern for God’s moral standards. So here he also exhorts his audience to live, in response to grace, in a way that produces fruit reflecting the change of direction called for by forgiveness.”

⁵⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 506n171: “Luke 24:44–49 closely parallels Acts 26:19–23. The same themes appear in both: the opening of the Scriptures (‘Moses and the prophets’), the necessity of the Messiah’s suffering and resurrection, the ‘witness’ to both Jews and Gentiles.”

⁵⁵ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 721: “Here the claim is that although the preaching of Christ seems new, it is in fact very old, rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures, already ancient in Paul’s time. So Paul is not a religious innovator and perverter of the truth; he is merely preaching what God promised from long ago.”

⁵⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 721: “The term *παθητός* (*pathētos*, suffering) is an adjective and describes the Christ as one who would undergo rejection (Acts 2:23; 13:29; 17:3; esp. 8:32–36, where Isa. 53 is cited; also Luke 22:37 and Isa. 53:12). Texts such as Isa. 53 and Pss. 2 and 118 are probably alluded to here (see Acts 8:32–33; 4:25–26; 4:11). Jesus must undergo this suffering; it is a part of the divine plan. Luke notes this concept often (Luke 24:26, 46; Acts 3:18; 17:3).”

⁵⁷ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 721: “Texts in mind here include Pss. 16:8–11 and 110:1 (Acts 2:22–36).”

⁵⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 714: “In defending himself, Paul is also explaining that the roots of this new faith are in fact old, reaching into Jewish promise. This is one of the most important statements in Acts about the relationship of Jesus to Jewish promise. It ties in to verses 8, 22–23 in the speech. It is Jesus’s suffering and resurrection that are alluded to here in line with Jewish messianic hope (for messianic hope in Judaism, see Isa. 25:6–12; 51:5 LXX; 2 Macc. 2:18; 1 En. 40:9; T. Benj. 10.11; 2 Bar. 30.1; 4Q521 2.2.1–13.”

Here's the essence of Paul's testimony. Let me summarize what Paul says here: **"I was a sinner far from God. I murdered Christ's followers. I persecuted the church. I was full of hate and fury and rage. And I did everything in my power to stamp out those who followed Christ."**⁵⁹

"But in my sinful state, when I was as far from God as humanly possible, God reached down and saved my life. Jesus came and revealed himself to me, and now I'm not just a follower of Jesus, I'm a proclaimer of the gospel. And my mission in life is to tell people that by repenting and turning to God they, like me, can have their sins forgiven and have new life in Christ."

That's Paul's testimony. And that's the gospel! Are there any sinners in this room who, like Paul, have been saved by grace through the blood of Jesus? And what Paul is saying here is that even the most hardhearted enemy of the gospel can come to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Write this down as a second point from our message. Things Aren't Always What They Seem!

2) Sometimes the **enemy** of the **gospel** gets saved (26:1-23)

"That guy's too far gone. There's no hope for him."

"She'll never turn to Christ. She'll never repent. She'll never relinquish control of her life to the Lord."

"He'll never get saved. He's the worst sinner I've ever known. He hates Christians." Yeah, don't be so sure. Things Aren't Always What They Seem!

I read a biography several years ago about Brother Andrew, the well-known Bible-smuggler who smuggled Bibles into communist countries during the Cold War. And I was surprised to find out that this humble, godly man who had done so much for the Kingdom of God throughout his life was actually a bit of a "hell-raiser" before he gave his life to Christ. He even went to a revival meeting once drunk and heckled the preacher through the duration of his message. He's one of those people that we could have written off as too far gone to come to Christ. And yet God, through a remarkable set of circumstances, brought him to saving faith and then sent him out to do incredible things for the Kingdom of God.

Let me just say this as clearly as I can... no person is too far gone! No person is too lost to have their sins forgiven! And if you are here this morning saying to yourself, "I'm too far gone. I cannot be forgiven! I've done too much!" Let me tell you that that is a lie from the pit of hell. It's a lie that Satan has used again and again to keep people in a state of unbelief and unrepentance.

It doesn't have to be that way. And I'm here to tell you that today—this day—you can have your sins forgiven. You can have new life in Christ, no matter what you've done. No matter where you've come from.

You might say, "How do I do that, Tony?" Well, all you need to do is obey what Jesus told Paul in verse 18.⁶⁰ Look what it says:

turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that [you] may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

Also verse 20 says,

repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with ... repentance.

Repent of your sins. Believe on the name of Jesus Christ who died on the cross and was resurrected from the dead and you shall be saved. That's the gospel. God isn't reluctant to convert even the most hard-hearted enemy of the gospel.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Mohler, *Acts 13-28 for You*, 168: "Believers too, therefore, should not underestimate the power of personal narrative in sharing the gospel. Indeed, telling others of God's saving work in our lives connects nonbelievers to the gospel in a powerful way. Sharing your testimony will not only communicate the truth of Christ but show his grace as it worked on you."

⁶⁰ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 337: "Obedience is the sine qua non of the Christian life. It accompanies true salvation (Rom. 6:16; 1 Pet. 1:14), acknowledges God's authority (Acts 5:29), is an expression of trust in God (Heb. 11:8), and is the proof of believers' love for Him (John 14:15, 21)."

⁶¹ Mohler, *Acts 13-28 for You*, 170: "Paul's conversion—and your conversion—was no accident. Conversion is a culmination—the culmination of God's saving plan for you, which he purposed before the foundation of the world."

Now why is Paul telling us these things? Why is he giving his testimony before Festus and Agrippa and all these dignitaries in Caesarea? He's not doing it just to tell them a great story. He's not doing it either, to simply defend himself against false accusations. He wants them to get saved. He wants Agrippa to get saved. He wants Bernice to get saved. He wants every person in that room from the lowliest servant in the room to King Agrippa himself (the great-grandson of the King who tried to kill baby Jesus) to get saved.

And that's what makes Festus's words in **verse 24** so discouraging. Here's how Festus responds to Paul's plea:

²⁴ *And as [Paul] was saying these things in his defense, [As Paul was pouring out his heart and pleading with this audience to turn to Christ] Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning⁶² is driving you out of your mind."⁶³*

This is every pastor's worst nightmare.⁶⁴ You pour out your heart and try to deliver passionately the thing that you are most passionate about, and the audience says, "**He's crazy.**" "**He's read one-too-many books and they've scrambled his brain.**"⁶⁵

But watch how Paul responds. Notice he doesn't fire right back with, "**O yeah, well you're insane!**"

²⁵ *But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus,⁶⁶ but I am speaking true and rational words.⁶⁷ ²⁶ For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner."⁶⁸*

Paul is still pleading. Paul is still hoping. He is still persuading. And if he can't get through to Festus, he's going to go for Agrippa, who at least has some background with Jewish thinking. "**Maybe he, like me, will become a true Jew, and accept the Messiah that we've been waiting centuries for, Jesus Christ.**"⁶⁹

Look at **verse 27**.

²⁷ *King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?⁷⁰ I know that you believe."⁷¹ ²⁸ And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?"⁷² ²⁹ And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am⁷³—except for these chains."⁷⁴*

⁶² Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 178: "Interestingly, when Paul addressed the Areopagus in chapter 17, the Athenians mocked his ignorance. Now, however, Festus believes Paul is too educated. The determination to reject the gospel will reach for any straw."

⁶³ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 339: "It is not surprising that Paul was accused of being insane; so was Jesus (Mark 3:21; John 8:48, 52; 10:20). The reason for the accusations against both is found in 1 Corinthians 1:18: 'For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.'"

⁶⁴ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 39: "This is a pastor's nightmare — preaching with enthusiasm, hoping for great results, when suddenly someone stands up and shouts, 'Pastor, you're crazy!'"

⁶⁵ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 328: "Knowing that an obviously intelligent, educated man such as Paul would claim that a dead man had come alive must have especially baffled Festus (cf. 26:24). Yet it was precisely the issue of the resurrection of Jesus Christ that most clearly set Christianity apart from Judaism and was the cornerstone of the gospel."

⁶⁶ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 167: "He reveals that even when before secular rulers, Christians must show honor and respect."

⁶⁷ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 178–9: "The Christian gospel, however, is not irrational. Paul even says his words flow from truth and rationality (26:25). On the other hand, the gospel is not rationalistic. None come to understand the gospel through an intellectual exercise or superior powers of reason. We do not figure out the gospel through our own ingenuity. The gospel is rational, but minds darkened by sin cannot grasp its truthfulness except through God's grace and mercy."

⁶⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 507–8: "The expression 'not in a corner' is often found in Greek philosophical writings, particularly in contexts where philosophers are accused of withdrawing into their 'ivory towers' and not confronting the larger society in the markets and streets. This meaning well fits Paul's situation." Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 722: "The metaphor of things not being done in a corner refers to no hidden events tucked away somewhere in the corner out of public sight... The idiom means not doing one's philosophical reflection in a way that is disengaged from the public."

⁶⁹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 500: "Paul had been born a true Jew, reared a true Jew, trained in the strictest Pharisaic viewpoint of Judaism, and still remained a true Jew."

⁷⁰ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 173: "On trial for his life, Paul knows that he is not standing before Agrippa by accident. God has sovereignly put him there. God has equipped him and given him the words to speak. Paul homes in on Agrippa and, through the proclamation of his testimony, shoots a gospel arrow into Agrippa. Paul knows that the same gospel that rescued him can transform all who hear it—even a pompous, prideful king."

⁷¹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 709: "Agrippa II was part Jewish, and so the Roman governor was seeking his help as one with some knowledge about these matters. Agrippa had a reputation of being very pious in religious matters and expert in Jewish issues."

⁷² Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 509n181: "The term 'Christian' occurs only here and in 11:26 in Acts (only elsewhere in the NT in 1 Pet 4:16). In all three contexts it might be seen as an 'outsider's view' of the Christians. In the Apostolic Fathers, the term does not appear

This little dialogue between Paul and Agrippa really prompts the question, who is the crazy person in the room? Who really is out of their mind? Is it the humble lowly Paul who pleads with those who are more powerful than him to give their life to Christ? Or is it this incestuous King who would rather bow to peer-pressure and political posturing than to heed Paul's message of saving faith?

Look at **verse 30**.

³⁰ Then the king rose,⁷⁵ and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them.⁷⁶ ³¹ And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment."³² And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free⁷⁷ if he had not appealed to Caesar."⁷⁸

Who cares about that stuff? Who cares about Paul's sentencing? Paul doesn't even care about that stuff! What about your soul, Agrippa? What about your soul, Festus? Do you have any concern for the most important message that you've ever heard in your entire life? All these guys care to talk about is **"This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."** Who cares? What about your soul?⁷⁹

This brings to mind people who leave church on Sunday and say to themselves, "That was such a nice service. The music was so nice, and the pastor used such nice words? And everyone dressed so nicely?" Who gives a rip about that stuff! Did you meet with the Living God of the Universe or not? Was your life changed by a radical encounter with God's Word? That's the conversation you should be having.

Sometimes the conversations are even worse as Christians would rather talk about sports or the weather than anything spiritual. That's safer.⁸⁰ That's more dignified. Just like Agrippa: "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment." Who cares! Did you even hear what he was saying to you?

It makes you wonder, doesn't it, who's really crazy in this passage. Is it Paul? Or is it these people who would ignore the most important message they've ever heard in their life? Again, Things Aren't Always What They Seem.

Write this down as a third point from the message. Things Aren't Always What They Seem.

- 1) Sometimes the **prisoner** is more **honorable** than the rulers (25:13–27)
- 2) Sometimes the **enemy** of the **gospel** gets saved (26:1–23)

except in Ignatius. It does not thus seem to have been in early use among Christians as a self-designation but as a term used by outsiders for them."

⁷³ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 180: "The king's response to Paul reminds us that in our evangelism we may not always or ever see a revival break out when we proclaim God's word. Evangelism takes time. Christians cast out gospel seeds. God gives the growth. God has called us to faithfulness; and he will tend to the rest. Yes, we present our messages persuasively. Yes, we urge our hearers to repent. It is God, however, who completes the work. You and I, like the apostle Paul, must simply be faithful to proclaim."

⁷⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 509: "Paul gave an object lesson in bold witness at this point. Most Christians would have trouble even witnessing to a king, but to persist when once put off is remarkable."

⁷⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 510: "There is every reason to believe that Paul would have continued his witness had he not been cut short by the king's rising to his feet (26:30). Agrippa had heard enough, enough to know that Paul was innocent of any breach of Roman law. He had heard enough of Paul's witness too, enough to know he was not ready to become a Christian (v. 28)."

⁷⁶ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 161–2: "This episode shows believers the importance of a faithful gospel witness. When Christians share the gospel, they might hope to see a person repent and believe on the spot. Rarely, however, do such spontaneous conversions happen."

⁷⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 510: "Then the question rises about why, with this opinion from the Jewish king, Paul was not now set free. The answer seems to be, just as Agrippa's remark indicates, that it would be no easy matter to stop the appeal process. For Festus to do so would have been an affront to the emperor and an implicit admission of his own ineptitude in allowing the process to be set in motion."

⁷⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 724: "Some scholars challenge this part of the passage and its credibility. How could this conversation be known? The results of the hearing would have made the view of the governor, Agrippa, and Bernice evident. It is possible that this result and explanation would have been communicated to Paul, possibly even as 'You could have been freed if you had not appealed to Caesar.' So it is off to Rome for Paul. The injustice—but providence—of his situation continues."

⁷⁹ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 162: "When you share the gospel, you may not see an instant conversion. You do, however, cast a seed which may germinate and take root later on when that person has another conversation about religion. You do not know how God can use a brief moment of faithfulness and implant his word in a person's heart."

⁸⁰ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 39: "To be earnest about wealth or power or science or pleasure or athletic championships is not crazy from the world's viewpoint. But to be fervent about spiritual things is called madness."

3) Sometimes the one called “**crazy**” is actually **sanely** speaking truth (26:24–32)

I read recently about a famous man named Milton Wright (1828–1917) who said publicly that it was impossible for man to fly. In fact he said, “Flight is reserved for the angels.” But his son, Wilbur Wright, felt differently. And on December 17, 1903, Wilbur took his airplane for a twelve second flight in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.⁸¹ People thought he was crazy for trying to fly. Now Wilbur Wright is considered a hero, especially those of us who have had the privilege of jumping into a plane and flying to foreign destinations that we could never have traveled to elsewhere.

Another great pioneer in human history, a man named Robert Fulton was though crazy when he developed the steamboat. Once while he was demonstrating the steamboat, a group of bystanders started chanting “It’ll never start, never start, never start!” And when it started that began shouting, “It’ll never stop, never stop, never stop.” It makes you wonder in hindsight - who were the real crazies in those scenarios?⁸² Once again we see that Things Aren’t Always What They Seem.

“Paul you’re out of your mind! You’re preaching is sheer madness.” Is it? Is it? If Paul’s preaching is madness, then I’d much prefer his madness to the madness of King Agrippa. I’d much prefer the foolishness of following Christ to the foolishness of rejecting him. I’d much rather live a life that imitated the humble, confident Paul than the sinful, self-aggrandizing, self-indulgent King Agrippa. Where does the real madness lie? Who’s really crazy in this story?

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:25 that “the foolishness of God is wiser than men.” He says in 1:27, “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.” He says in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

Can I just say that we live in a crazy world right now! We live a world where people can’t define what is a man and what is a woman. We live in a world where illicit sex is celebrated, and babies are commoditized, and many American families are a dysfunctional mess. And yet, the idea of Christian purity and monogamy and abstinence are ridiculed. Who’s crazy in that scenario?

We live in a world where easy divorce and infidelity are encouraged because whatever makes you happy, do it! We live in a world of shameless self-indulgence where people are promised that more stuff will make them happy, and yet those same people are shocked when more stuff just makes them more and more unhappy. It makes you wonder, who’s really crazy in this world? Is it the Christ-followers?

We live in a world where it is perfectly normal and even encouraged to be passionate about sports, passionate about politics, passionate about sex, passionate about education, passionate about temporal stuff of this world. But if you show any passion about Jesus Christ, then people say... “easy now you’re starting to sound a little crazy!” Charles Finney once said, “If you have much of the Spirit of God, it is not unlikely you will be thought deranged by many.”⁸³

There’s actually a long list of people throughout church history who have been consider crazy because of their love for Jesus Christ. In his commentary on Acts, Kent Hughes writes about a man named William Borden who in 1913 at the age of 26, left his large home near Chicago’s Lake Shore Drive, gave away over \$500,000 to become a missionary to the Muslim world. People thought he was nuts for doing this. Six months later he died from cerebral meningitis amidst the flies and heat of a Cairo hospital. At that point people were sure he was mentally unbalanced, but God did not share their opinion.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Illustration taken from Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 39.

⁸² Illustration taken from Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 39.

⁸³ Here’s the full quote from Charles Finney, *Revival Lectures* (Grand Rapids: Charles Finney, n.d.), 125, quoted in Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 39. “If you have much of the Spirit of God, it is not unlikely you will be thought deranged by many. We judge men to be deranged when they act differently from what we think to be according to prudence and common sense, and when they come to conclusions for which we can see no good reasons. Paul was accused of being deranged by those who did not understand the views of things under which he acted. This is by no means uncommon. Multitudes have appeared, to those who had no spirituality, as if they were deranged. Yet they saw good reasons for doing as they did. God was leading their minds to act in such a way that those who were not spiritual could not see the reasons.”

⁸⁴ Illustration taken from Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 39.

Similarly in 1885 a man named C.T. Studd, England's most famous athlete, with six other promising young students (later referred to as the Cambridge Seven) left for China to help Hudson Taylor spread the gospel in that nation. These men were ridiculed for their "enthusiasm."⁸⁵ People thought they were crazy. People thought they were nuts. Why would anyone leave the comforts of home to preach the gospel in a hostile foreign context? They must be crazy.

Hughes refers to this mentality of Paul's as a "blessed madness."⁸⁶ **And I don't know about you, but I think for myself, I could use a little bit more of Paul's "blessed madness." My hope for myself and for our church is that we would be a little more gung-ho... a little more all-in... a little more sold-out... and little more crazy... by the world's standards... for our Savior, Jesus Christ.**⁸⁷ **1 Corinthians 1:18 again says,** "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

We're going to take communion now. But before we do that, I'm going to pray. And I'm going to pray specifically that God would stir up "blessed madness" in this church. May God give us the kind of passion that Paul had in the book of Acts that these Roman leaders called crazy. Pray with me.

⁸⁵ Illustration taken from Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 39.

⁸⁶ "Blessed Madness" is the title of chapter 39 in Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition.

⁸⁷ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 39: "What would Paul say to people today? To unbelievers, he would say, 'I wish you knew Christ like I do.' To those who know Christ, he would say, 'Even if others think you are crazy, keep on serving Christ!'"