

Different Responses to the Gospel

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[0:00] If you were to summarize all of that just in one simple phrase and sentence, for you, what would it be? Alex, what would it be for you? God on the mood to reach every tribe, tongue and nation, spirit, people spurred on by the death and resurrection of Christ.

God on the mood to every tribe and tongue spurred on by the death and the resurrection of Christ. This message that has to keep going. This message that, hey, there is going to be suffering. There is going to be persecution and there is death. And yet there is someone who dealt with death. And this message is going to keep moving to the point where we read Revelation 7, where every tribe and tongue will be worshipping God.

And that will be it. Flo, what is it for you? The Holy Spirit's movement in and through and for the church.

There are so many things that happen in the book of Acts. And we're going to go through four chapters today because simply there's just too much. But there's a couple of things that are for certain.

[1:02] All of this is done by the Holy Spirit. If you look at the beginning of your book, actually, there's not going to be one passage that we read today, but we're going to be flying through. So if you look at the Bible, the title, Acts chapter 1, is the Acts of the Apostles.

That's what it says, at least in my one. That's what it says. That's the title, the Acts of the Apostles. When really I would say, no, it's the Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles. If there's one common denominator in all of this, it's the Holy Spirit.

If there's also something else that is consistent throughout, it's that there will be pain. It won't be easy. This message that keeps going through is the most important thing we'll ever hear.

But it is also the hardest thing we'll ever hear. And that's what we see as we go through the book of Acts. And really, we reach this point where we, my hope is that we are sat here like, okay, what do I have to do?

This message is going to keep going, with or without me. But what is it that I need to do? Why am I gathering here? And where must I scatter to? Some of us are like, okay, I get it. But just speaking to that colleague, speaking to that family, speaking to that friend, it's just hard.

[2:05] What if they don't receive it well? What if they mock me? What if they never talk to me again? And we're all strapped with this kind of fear that we have. What if that happens if we share the gospel?

Well, let me kind of allay that fear for you. It will happen. If it happened to Peter, if it happened to Jesus, if it happened to Paul, the chances are it's going to happen to us. So let me get rid of that fear right now.

It's happening. But sometimes it's the fear of the unknown that really paralyzes us. What if we just change the way we think and go, actually, we're going to go and share the gospel. And there will be people guaranteed, absolutely, who will not receive it well.

Does that change things for you? Maybe a few months ago now, I asked a few of us, well, who's in full-time ministry? And the answer should be all of us are in full-time ministry. And we've just been seconded to the work fields that we're in.

We've been seconded to the friendship groups and to the families that we're supposed to be in. I listened to this podcast this week that featured our dear Queenie Lau, who, oh, you should listen to it. If you're interested, let me know and I'll send you the link.

[3:08] She just had this conviction. She's like, I am so clear that God placed me where I am working. That's the reason why I'm there. And the law stuff is secondary to this.

But my main thing is this is why I'm there. Wouldn't it be great if all of us had a little bit of Queenie in our eyes, in our hearts, when we go into work and go, I am doing this work. But it's because God put me here.

And that everything that I'm doing right now is because he put me there. What if we had that kind of mindset? And what if we were completely prepared for any interaction that we've had?

Can I have a raise of hands? Who's tried to share the gospel before and has not gone well? And it's been awkward and it's been weird. Can I just put a hand? Excellent. Okay. Lift your hand and be proud of that. Josh, tell us about your one.

My pastor encouraged us to bring a friend who wasn't Christian to church. Yeah. So I invited my friend and he stopped being my friend. Wow.

[4:07] Invited his friend to church because his pastor told him to. And then he lost his friend. Out. And of course, I've had the privilege of hearing that before. And that hurts. That hurts and that still stings.

There's so many things that happen when we do. And it's really out of our control. So then the question then becomes, well, do we still do it? Is this something that we do? Julian, what was yours? I guess the recent one was try to talk about faith at work and it just became very awkward. Try to talk about faith at work and then it became very awkward. Could that have just been because of you, of your personality? I decline to comment. Decline to comment. He pleased the fifth.

He pleased the fifth. What if we went looking for those awkward conversations? What if we were looking for those moments where, okay, well, I have to bring this up. I have to share. Now, there is a way to do it.

If you look at just the accounts of Acts, Paul does it in different ways. It's not as though he's doing the same thing, whacking people with the same Bible, with the same hammer each time. No, he does it actually very differently.

[5:11] And actually, we see in these next few chapters, he does it very differently. Sometimes it gets awkward. Sometimes he loses people. Sometimes 40 people decide to fast until they're able to kill him. That is what happens with Paul as we look at these scriptures.

So if you have your Bibles, we're going to be flying through. Flying through Acts chapter 23, 24, 25, 26. And then next week will be the finale, which will be exciting. Honestly, as I was reading this, this plays out like a movie.

In fact, there is a movie on the Apostle Paul, which I don't know whether it could. I haven't watched it myself, but I think this just feels like a movie. It just covers so much ground. And we're going to try and go through. But I'm going to try and ground us in the different responses that Paul gets from the four different people that he speaks to.

And it's different. And it's terrifying. And yet he just keeps going. And he can remain stoic. And he stays in the same way. Acts chapter 3, the first person he meets is the high priest called Ananias. Just for your info, we have not met Ananias yet. There's been different people who have linked to him. But he's really the high priest, same as Caiaphas back in Jesus' time. And so this guy was basically in control and was the leader of what was a group that we can call just the Sanhedrin.

[6:21] The Sanhedrin are two groups of people, intense Jewish sects. One of the Pharisees and one of the Sadducees. And they were both kind of very exclusive kind of groups. And they formed the Sanhedrin that had a lot of power.

And so Paul gets dragged in front of this group. And Ananias speaks to him. Now, Josephus, the historian, actually comments on this Ananias, this high priest, as someone who is greedy, who is hot-tempered, and who speaks profanities always.

High priest, everyone. And it's just fascinating. So this is what happens. We're going to try and go through a little bit. Acts chapter 23. And looking intently at the council, Paul said, brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.

And the high priest, Ananias, commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. So Ananias, this high priest, who's in a part of the Sanhedrin, listens to Paul, but he can't get through one sentence.

And he tells the guys next to Paul to give him a bit of a slap. Paul, who has been calm for the most of this book in Acts, because he's like, I've got to be a role model to the future believers.

[7:27] He just loses it. He loses it. And he goes, God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall. Are you sitting to judge me according to the law? And yet, contrary to the law, you order me to be struck. Paul gets angry.

Which is interesting. The reason why he gets angry is like, you're trying to try me by this law, and yet you're doing something outside the law. Can you see how stupid this is, that you just did that? Even more interestingly, afterwards, they said, would you revile God's high priest? He didn't realize that Ananias was God's high priest. Well, how would you? Why would you? If you look at someone who's greedy, who's hot-tempered, who speaks profanities, why would you think they're the high priest?

So Paul doesn't actually know him. But the moment he realizes, he actually apologizes. I did not remember this, that he was the high priest. For it is written, you shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people. So just that moment, he retracts it.

He says, okay, my bad. I didn't know who you were. You didn't act like you should be, but still, that's not interesting. Paul again submits to authority, not because he's scared of authority, but he submits to authority because of the power behind the authority.

[8:29] Because of God. That's why when you see in Romans 13, when he says, submit to authority, I'm going to submit to any authority. Why? Because I know that God is the one who put you there in front of me, above me.

So he submits. And then Paul gets really smart. So what he does here, now when Paul perceived that one power Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees.

It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial. He looks at these two groups and he sees a key difference between these two groups, which is this.

One group, the Sadducees, do not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They don't believe it at all. They believe in what's here and what's now, not the supernatural. They just want everything that they see. That's what it is. The Pharisees, on the other hand, actually do believe in the resurrection from the dead.

And these two groups have fought for the longest time. And so Paul, being smart, says, hey, guys, I'm a Pharisee. I'm one of you guys. And I actually believe in the resurrection from the dead.

[9:27] And he watches that basically the drama unfold between these two groups. And these two groups get so distracted by this issue that they've been fighting for for so long, they actually forget about Paul. Paul, so in some ways, he turns them on each other.

It reminds me of Matthew chapter 10, where Jesus says, be wise as serpents, but as innocent as doves. He looks at the situation. He looks at the group of people that are trying to get him into trouble, trying to kill him. And he puts them against each other.

And he says, guys, Pharisees, I'm actually here because I believe in the resurrection from the dead. And so anyway, it gets a little bit violent straight away. Can you imagine a group of holy people, Pharisees and Sadducees, because of something that they disagree with, because of someone that they're unlike, they suddenly start getting violent.

They jump from theology straight to aggression. Fascinating. And then verse 12, we go down a little bit.

When it was day, the Jews made a part and bound themselves by an oath, neither to eat nor drink, till they had killed Paul. There were more than 40 who made this conspiracy. I don't know what you're worried about when you spread the gospel.

[10:29] But my guess is that the chances are you probably won't be hunted down by 40 people who decide to fast and not eat or drink until you're dead.

And yet here we see things escalate quickly because of this. Thankfully, thankfully, actually, verse 11, just a side note on this. The following night, the Lord stood by him and said, take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.

So actually, after that whole incident with the Sanhedrin, you'd expect maybe if God's speaking to Paul, you'd hope God would say something like, hey, Paul, thanks for standing up for me. Thanks for being courageous.

I got this from here. No harm will be done to you. No, no, no. God says, hey, we're not done. You're going to be going to Rome. It's interesting when God often sees the suffering that we go through. He doesn't remove the suffering from us. He says, I am with you there and you have further to go. This is this is not where you end. Theologian says God does not always shield his servants from the storm, but he always speaks to them in the midst of it.

[11:38] The promise of the future is often God's way of giving us strength for the present. I think about this group of people. The Pharisees. As I've said before, I actually have so much sympathy

for these Pharisees.

They have given up so much to be where they were at. They knew scripture. They abided by the law. And yet they were still so far away.

Their hearts were still so hard. They believed in the resurrection of the dead, but when they saw, when they actually have been encountered with, hey, there is someone who actually died and rose again. They couldn't believe it. Their hearts were so hard.

It reminds me of Jesus when he was preaching on the parable of the sower, that there are these different soils that the gospel falls on. And one of them is simply just the path. It is so hard. The seeds don't even go in.

And what was the path here? This was just legalism. This was tradition. This was, dare I say, theology. They were so stuck in their own heads.

[12:39] They were refusing to see the truth that someone really did die and really did rise again. And so when we go out and share the gospel, that's going to be one of the things that we see. People who are just like, no, I'm not interested whatsoever.

In fact, I'm going to get 40 of my friends and we're going to hunt you down and we're going to try and kill you. Well, maybe not the second part. But they're like, no, I'm not interested at all. Thank you. But no, thank you. We're just going to leave it here.

I don't believe in that God stuff. And we have to be prepared for that kind of group of people. The hardest group of people, I think, to reach with the good news are those who think they know it all. Correct? Those who seem to know everything, those who seem to have the right answers for everything, those are the ones who are the hardest. And so when we approach those people, let's not be afraid.

And it doesn't mean that we have to now know everything. But what Paul shows is that actually he just has a personal experience that he can't help but share. Whether they believe it or not, take it or leave it.

[13:40] He has this take it or leave it mindset that we can see. And I think that's really interesting. Thomas Watson says this, A stone is hard because it has no pause for the water to soak in. A hard heart has no pause for the tears of repentance to soak in.

The worst kind of hardness is that which grows under the sun of the gospel. To hear the resurrection preached and to feel nothing is to have a heart that is not just a path but a pavement of ice.

I wonder whether there are people that we know in our lives who have that. Some of you are nodding. You're like, yep, I've been trying with that person but nothing. My encouragement to you is, well, I don't think there was anyone who probably had a harder heart than Saul.

He cared so much about what he thought was right that he was willing to kill. Which is the irony in all of this. And yet all it takes, all it takes is an encounter with Jesus. All it takes is for the Holy Spirit to move.

I'm going to pause here for 10 seconds. I'm going to do this every time we go through a character. I'm going to pause here for 10 seconds. And let's ask the Holy Spirit, who's the person who we think is that hard rock?

[14:44] That path that the seeds fall on and it doesn't go into? Have a think. And if that person comes up in your mind, pray for that person right now. Lord, we know that hearts will only be softened.

Stone only be turned to flesh when your spirit pours in. And so we pray for those people that come to mind right now. Those Ananiases that we have in our lives.

Those Pharisees, those Sadducees. Lord, would you move in ways that only you can. Thank you, God. So they plot to kill him.

Interestingly, they don't because Paul continues to move. Why? Because God's already said, hey, you won't die here. You're heading to Rome. Also, Paul has a nephew. Paul has a nephew who hears about these 40 people trying to ambush Paul.

And he goes to tell Paul. And so from there, Paul then tells the guards and tells them, hey, these guys are trying to kill me. And so what happens is all of this gets sent to Felix, the governor. And so this is where we fast forward a little bit and we move where he meets.

[16:02] He goes to Caesarea and he meets the governor. The governor here, Felix, is the same person, same role that Pontius Pilate had when Jesus was around. So he meets Felix.

And if from Ananias he got hostility from Felix, he gets the procrastinating spirit. He gets something that's very interesting that happens here. So he moves from Jerusalem and he goes to Caesarea, which is basically the headquarters for Rome.

And they thwart the plot to kill him. And he meets Felix. And it's really interesting. And we're going to fast forward a little bit because basically, actually, what's really interesting here is Ananias and the crew, they hear about him going to Caesarea and they miss the opportunity to kill him.

So they actually hunt him down and chase him all the way to Caesarea. And when they get there, Ananias is there and they appointed a spokesperson. This is the beginning of chapter four, by the way. And they appoint a spokesperson, Tertullus.

He must have been good with his speech. Well, here, what I'd call it, it would be he is a gifted suck up. And so this is what he says. Since through you we enjoy much peace. And since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation in every way and everywhere, we accept this with all gratitude.

[17:10] What a sleazebag. Verse four. But to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. We found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots. So they take their case to the governor.

And Felix then listens to their case. And then Paul actually gets the chance to explain himself. So the action continues to build here. And so chapter four, verse 11, verse 10, actually, Paul gets to speak.

Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense. You can verify that it is not more than 12 days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem. And they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city.

And he continues to go. And he goes all the way to the end. And it's really interesting here because what he's saying is, governor, with all due respect, I've been around for a little while now. I have not been causing trouble.

They say I've been causing trouble, but I have not. As evidenced by just my peacemaking all through this time here. And actually, Felix knows that. Because if we fast forward to verse 22, but Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the way, put them off, saying, when Lysias, the tribune, comes down, I will decide your case.

[18:16] So he knows about the way. And by now, they would have known that the way, they killed the main guy, they killed Jesus. And just when they thought that would be it, the way continues to grow. But they now have enough evidence.

They have enough years to go, well, actually, this group, they're kind of docile. They're kind of harmless. They're not trying to overthrow anyone. They're trying to live peacefully. So actually, he knows about this. So actually, Paul appeals to him on that point and says, hey, I'm not here to cause trouble.

And then a really interesting interaction happens here. So Felix says, okay, I'm going to listen to you later. And I'm going to move on. And after some days, verse 24, Felix came with his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish.

And he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, go away for the present. When I get an opportunity, I will summon you.

Isn't that interesting? Felix goes a little step further than what Pontius Pilate did. And Felix says, okay, well, I'm going to keep you here. I don't quite know what to do with you, but I will come and have chats with you. And so him and his wife, Drusilla, go and spend time with Paul.

[19:21] And they talk. And Paul's not afraid. And they talk about the message of Jesus. They talk about the exact words, righteousness, self-control and the coming judgment.

Isn't that interesting? That this powerful man who was in complete control was face to face with this prisoner and says, I'm going to come and spend some time with you. And Paul doesn't miss that opportunity.

And he speaks. And what does he get? He gets someone who is alarmed. Why was Felix alarmed? This powerful man who had nothing to worry about, who was in control.

Why was he alarmed? Well, because kind of because of his wife. Because his wife really wasn't his wife. Drusilla was actually married to someone else. Drusilla was actually Jewish as well.

And so this was an illicit marriage. And she actually then marries this Felix who's not Jewish. So this is not a good arrangement. And it's interesting.

[20:23] He's alarmed by it. He's like, oh, I didn't realize what I was doing was not right. I didn't realize that this wasn't pleasing in the sight of God. And his response when he finds out that it's not right, that he's alarmed, he procrastinates and says, you know what?

I'm going to deal with you later. I don't want to talk about this anymore. This is just getting a little bit too uncomfortable for me. We're going to move on. And maybe, and it says, go away for the present.

When I get an opportunity, I will summon you. Paul. He could have actually just said kind words to Felix and maybe have been released.

He could have maybe said, hey, this doesn't need to trouble you, Felix. I'm not here to cause trouble. I'm actually here just to spread the good news of peace, joy, goodness, kindness. So actually, if you just let me go, we're good.

No, no. Paul goes, hey, Felix, there is sin in your life. There is judgment that is coming from you, for you. You better repent. You better display self-control.

[21:28] You're not supposed to be with Drusilla. Can you see Paul's just like, no, I could use this opportunity to get released, but I'm not. I'm going to continue to speak truth. And when he continues to speak truth, when we continue to speak truth, often people will be alarmed.

And this tells me something. Let's not cheapen what the gospel actually truly is. When we go and share the gospel, there's one thing that we must share about. And that is sin.

We must share about the fact that we are sinners, that we all fall short of the glory of God. Because it's so easy to share about Christianity without sharing about sin. And this is how you do it. Hey, just believe in God.

Why? Because he's there for you. Why? Because when you are struggling, when you are sick, or when you are struggling to find a job, or when you are in pain in some ways, Jesus will just be there for you.

He loves you. He's like a teddy bear that you can just hold on to. He's like a comfort blanket. And he's here for your good. And if you follow him, he will cause you to be prosperous.

[22:29] I'll tell you what that is. That is cheapening what the gospel truly is. The gospel, the true gospel actually can be quite offensive. The true gospel is saying to someone, hey, actually, I know you're working hard at this.

I know you're trying to climb up in your career. I know you're trying to get more money so you can make good impact in your field. So you can be a good person. I think I'm here to tell you that there is no such thing as a good person.

I don't know about you, but I have sin inside me. I have selfishness inside me. I don't know about you. When you look at the news, you see people just displaying selfishness. And I realized just before I point the finger that actually this thing is pointing back at me, that I am that actually I am far worse than I imagined.

I don't know about you, but that's the good news. It's only good news if we share first the bad news, which is that there is a problem with how we are living. And very honestly, I don't think that's a hard pitch to make right now.

We can look around the world and go, yep, things are not going well. Everything is not okay and the world is on fire. But to be able to share what the gospel is, we must be able to share that we are in deep need of a savior.

[23:41] Sin is the biggest thing. We cannot cheapen the gospel. Jesus does love you. Oh, Chris.

It's an incredible podcast, Diary of the CEO, Stephen Barlin. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, that's like a master class on how we share the gospel with the atheists, I guess.

I just wanted to share that with everybody if you wanted to watch it. Diary of the CEO. There we go. You agree? Wesley Huff. Yeah. Wesley Huff. Yeah, yeah. There we go. Fine. Can you share that link with us and maybe we'll put it into the WhatsApp group?

That's something that else is true. Those of you who have been placed in your specific field, you know, I don't even know how to share the gospel in my field. Well, I guarantee you there will be someone here who knows a bit more, who has actually read a book about it, who has listened to a podcast about it.

And there are people out there who have gone before us and done this. Why? Because the book of Acts shows us that this has been going on for 2,000 years now. You are not alone. Equip yourself. Find the people who can inspire you in your specific field.

[24 : 41] If you are in law, go and speak to Queenie. Go and hang out with Queenie. Ask her how she is one of the youngest senior councils in Hong Kong and yet still shares the gospel and realizes actually that's not her main job.

Her main job is in full-time ministry sharing the good news of Jesus. What does that look like? There is so much good material out there. But be prepared. But be prepared. When you do it, some people will be like, oh, ooh, that alarms me.

That hurts a little bit. You're saying that I'm not a good person? And I'm like, yeah, we're not good people. You're saying that babies are born in sin? And I'm like, yes, have you met my baby? Have you seen how selfish my baby is?

Yes, he was born in iniquity. He can't help it. I can't help it. We all have it. Let us not cheapen the gospel. Yes, Jesus does love us.

But he loves us so much that he meets us exactly where we're at. But he also loves us so much that he wouldn't let us stay where we're at. When you love someone and they are just living in a way that is destructive for themselves, you're like, no, no, I can't leave you here.

[25 : 46] And that is the gospel. And of course, those things. The problem here is Felix, of course, he's in an illicit marriage. He also is trying to please the Jews. So he's actually trying to keep Paul there just to keep the Jews quiet.

And he's also keeping Paul in prison. Why? Because he's hoping that Paul will bribe him. So money, sex, and power. The triple threat. He's guilty of them all. But often it's not that serious for us. Well, sometimes those idols, sometimes those things are not necessarily money, sex, and power. If we keep tracing back, it probably does go back to those things. But so often it's actually, oh, I just want a healthy, happy family.

I just want a career where I'm just feeling fulfillment. Those things. Keller calls those things counterfeit gods. Things that we try and chase after, thinking that those are the things that are going to satisfy us.

And yet they don't. Tozer says this, the things of this world are not necessarily sinful in themselves. It is the love of things that chokes the life of the spirit. We have allowed our hearts to become cluttered with a thousand trifles.

[26 : 51] And there is no room left for the king. We are often so busy doing the work of the Lord that we have no time for the Lord of the work. We are often so busy doing the work of the Lord that we have no time for the Lord of the work.

Ouch. Those of us who are in ministry and too busy. What are your things? If we go back to the parable that Jesus shared, this is the thorny path.

This is the thorny soil. Where actually there is a desire for it, but everything else just chokes. Now, when we go out, we will see those kinds of people. Hey, that's it. I would love, I love the whole Christian thing.

It's a good thing. It makes me, it looks like it makes you a better person. It makes me feel warm and fuzzy. But I really can't because I've also got this thing that I have to do. I would love to, but I can't because Sundays are for this.

And so that's probably the sort that's most common in our field right here. How do you get to the point where we can show them actually those things are just things, but our love for them is what's pulling us away from the real thing, the only thing.

[27 : 54] How do we reflect on that in our own lives? I'm reminded of a conversation that Nicky Gumbel, the founder of Alpha, was an imaginary conversation that he shared about the devil and his demons saying, hey, how are we going to distract mankind from Jesus?

What should we do? Should we get them just addicted to all the pleasures of this world? Should we throw suffering at them where they will just be so just disgruntled and frustrated with God?

And then the devil says, no, no, no. Why don't we let them believe? But then we also let them believe that there's no hurry. There's no urgency to this.

Why don't we just let them believe that? That actually there is God, there is Jesus. Let's not find that because the more you find it, the more they'll believe it. But let them believe. But then let them also believe that there is no hurry.

One of my favorite books, and Wes shared about this to me last week, The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis. And he says this in this way. Where is it?

[28:57] You will find that anything or nothing is sufficient to attract his wandering attention. It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the light and out into the nothing.

Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. The safest road to hell is the gradual one. The gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts. C.S. Lewis is again imagining a conversation that the enemy has with his underlings on how to distract us. That path, the safest road to hell is the gradual one.

The gentle slope, the distractions where we say, I like it, but it's not the convenient time for it. Felix went as far as trembling, but he stayed there.

He had a convenient time to hear Paul again, but we never read that he had a convenient time to repent. Sadly for Paul. The next line tells us, verse 27, chapter 24, When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Portius Festus, and desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

[30:08] That's it. One sentence, two years. Paul gets left there because he wasn't afraid to share the true gospel. He refused to cheapen the gospel.

And he was left there for two years. Because someone procrastinated. Because someone decided that actually, it's kind of interesting, but what alarmed me is that I have to change my life.

So then he passes it to his successor, Festus, the other governor. And this one isn't even as good as the one before. And so when the new guy comes in, actually, what Festus wants to do, he wants to deal with this case very quickly.

He's like, okay, this case has been lying around for too long. It's now at my desk. Let's get rid of it. So straight away, he orders Paul to come and speak. And when he comes to speak, and actually, it so happens, there's a king who comes.

King Agrippa comes as well. So then Festus, the new governor in charge, presents Paul's case to the king. And this is what he says about this. And he's saying, okay, this is chapter 25, verse 14.

[31:06] And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, there is a man left prisoner by Felix. Brackets. This wasn't my problem, but it's now become my problem. But I'm trying to deal with it, king.

So here it is. Can you give me some advice? And when asked Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him, I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had an opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him.

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. When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evil as I supposed. Here's the key line, verse 19.

Rather, he's saying, hey, this case landed on my desk. I don't really know what to do with it because it's against what we're trying to do here. And obviously, I can't really find anything wrong with this guy. And then verse 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. Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them.

[32:13] He says, I don't know what to do with this group of people. And this guy, it's just a little bit weird. We can't, he's not following procedure here. And honestly, the dispute is only a really small, petty one. It's about this guy.

It's about this guy called Jesus. And there's a group who say that he's still alive and there's a group that says he's dead. And I don't really know what to do with it. Just that line in itself, the casual blasé referral to the single most important event in the history of mankind, that someone died and rose again.

What he does do accidentally is he realizes that Christianity, the crooks of Christianity is down to this one point. Did that guy die and stay dead?

Or is he still alive? The resurrection of Jesus. Now, Felix procrastinated. He was alarmed by it. Festus just treats it like a minor administrative headache.

He's like, let's get rid of this. When we go and share the gospel, we must focus everything that we share on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is the main thing. If someone comes to you and says, well, I don't know.

[33 : 20] I don't know about the miracles. I don't know about that big whale, that big fish that eats up Jonah. I don't understand that bit. I don't know about the blind man who got to see again because I've never seen that before in my life. And actually, you know what?

I'm a scientist. I don't even know how God created the whole universe in those six days and then decided to rest on the seven days. None of it makes sense. Well, here's the thing. Start with the resurrection because if you believe in the resurrection, none of those other things really matter. When we say that we believe in a God that died and rose again, we're saying that this is a God that defies just the laws of nature and science. If you don't believe in the resurrection, then none of it really matters.

Everything hinges on that. And of course, when we go and share these things with people and have these people have really smart questions to ask, don't be afraid to say, I don't actually know. But I know that there are people who might do. In fact, let's go and ask him right now. I've got a friend called Gemini. Let's go and ask him. And honestly, I joke, but it's helpful.

[34 : 24] Ask people in your life group. Ask people in your church. Ask smart pastors like Pastor Gabe. He would have to give you good answers. But be prepared for this.

That there will be people who take the resurrection of Jesus Christ and treat it like a minor inconvenience. But for us, 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says this, but that is of utmost importance. That's the only thing. That's the only thing that keeps me going when I'm facing death is when I know that someone faced death and conquered death and now rose again. So I grieve, but I don't grieve in the same way that you do because I believe that death has been dealt with once and for all.

Because of the person of Jesus is alive right now. But be prepared that there are people who are completely uninterested. And of course, when you say, I don't know, be okay with that.

I always worry. I'm always cynical of the people who seem to be able to explain everything about God, who seem to know God so well. But the truth is we cannot. You'd be worried if I could.

[35 : 28] Just like Harry Potter was not able to explain the life of J.K. Rowling to his friends. We're in a different realm. And that's okay.

What Paul focuses on, though, is not how to argue with people, but just, hey, I was one of you, and then I met him, and now I'm not. It's a personal testimony.

When we're talking about testimony, we're not talking about arguing people about things that are so theological and scientific. We're talking about a personal relationship with God that we now have because we met him. And it's up to the Holy Spirit to move them.

So he speaks to King Agrippa. Now, Paul, chapter six now, we're in the final chapter in case those of you who are struggling to follow. So, chapter six, verse one, so Agrippa said to Paul, you have permission to speak for yourself.

Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense. I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I'm going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews.

[36 : 36] Man, I'd be getting tired if I was Paul. Just time and time again, just explaining to himself, yet each time, he does it with respect. Now, Agrippa is a really interesting person because he's actually almost there.

Why? Because actually, he is very familiar. He himself was of Jewish descent. So he would have known about this and Paul seems to know this about him too. So he explains and we won't go through that because he explains basically his story.

And once he's finished this story, actually Festus, the new governor, chips in. And chapter 26, verse 24, he says, Paul, you are out of your mind. Your great learning is driving you out of your mind. Is what he's saying here.

He's saying, Paul, you have completely lost your mind. You have read so many books. You have completely lost it. You are crazy. And then Paul answers him respectfully. He says, I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words.

For the king knows about these things and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded none of these things has escaped his notice for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.

[37:45] Can you see when faced with someone who's calling him crazy, when faced with someone who is being condescending to him, Paul remains respectful. He says, hey, I'm not out of my mind.

I am indeed smarter than you, but I have not lost my mind. But what I am telling you here is the truth. And actually, I'm not even making it up. It's been a good few years now.

This hasn't been done in secret is what he's saying. What he's saying is that you've seen the people who have been following the way live. You've seen how this truth continues to permeate into society.

We're not causing trouble, but we are bringing hope and peace and joy. Lives are being transformed because of this. And he turns to King Agrippa and says, do you believe in the prophets? I know you do. I know you do because you're of Jewish descent.

You're a Jewish boy just like me. You went to the same kind of school as I did. You know this. You know this is true. And then King Agrippa says this, in a short time, would you persuade me to be a Christian?

[38:46] And then Paul answers him, whether sure or long I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am except for these chains. Now, people are actually guessing whether King Agrippa was being sarcastic.

He's like, are you trying to, are you going to try and make me a Christian now? He could have been saying that. Or he could have been sincere and said, well actually, really, is that all it takes? In this short time, just this short conversation, you're going to try and convert me to Christianity and have me leave behind all my Jewish descent?

Whichever way it is, what's more important isn't his response, it's actually Paul's response after that. Paul's saying, hey look, am I trying to convert you? I don't know. Short or long conversation, it doesn't really matter.

And actually, it's not even just you, King Agrippa. I hope that everyone here who's listening to me right now, they would hear this good news and they would believe. And they would be just like me, filled with hope, transformed completely, but maybe without these chains, is what he's saying.

You guys could all do without these chains, but I am an ambassador in chains. I'm good with this. But my hope is that I'm stood here after two years of waiting, but I'm still good. Because I hope that you guys would accept this good news.

[39:58] Can you see just Paul's heart? It's different. It's different to what often you and I have, but yet what we see here is a King Agrippa.

Maybe this is the rocky ground where there is no depth, where he did accept some things that were true. He was taught those things as a boy, as a Jew, and yet he was almost there, but not quite there.

He believed in a Messiah. He believed in a God, which was already way better than most people in Roman civilization at the time. At least this God. And yet he was almost there, but he wasn't there at all.

Spurgeon says this, an almost Christian is one of the most difficult people to reach because he has enough of the gospel to immunize him against the power of it, but not enough of the gospel to save him by it.

An almost Christian is one of the most difficult people to reach because he has enough of the gospel to immunize him against the power of it, but not enough of the gospel to save him.

[40:57] by it. McLaren says there is no almost in the kingdom of heaven. To be almost across the chasm is to fall to the bottom. Agrippa represents the soul that sees the light, weighs the cost, and decides that the world is worth more than the truth.

He had the level at an information level, but he didn't go into the communion with God. He had the intellect, but it didn't drop into his heart. Before we turn and go, hey, those are the people that we have to reach. I wonder whether we stop there and go, hmm, is that us? Are we kind of close to the gospel, but not quite there? Because almost is not quite enough. Agrippa stayed at the tradition level, but it didn't go into the personal level. His rocky ground was his power, his tradition.

I wonder what ours is. I wonder what we're actually holding on to that stops us from truly living by and experiencing the power of God. Almost Agrippa. Ironically, Paul was the one in chains here, but in reality, they were the ones that were really in chains. And he said that. He's like, I wish that you guys were where I was at. Maybe mine is these things here, but it really doesn't matter. I'm here to

share with you the good news of Jesus Christ. I was like you. I was blind.

I was a murderer. And yeah, I was completely transformed. I don't know what experiences we will face when we go out and share the gospel, but I think we can take great comfort in the fact that Paul met all kinds of responses, whether they were procrastinating ones, whether they were alarmed, offended by the message of Jesus, or whether they were uninterested, or whether they were hostile and tried to kill him. I don't know about you, but I take comfort in that.

And next time I go and share the gospel, I'm like, oh, actually, I'm going to be prepared for anything. Because if it happened to Paul, if it happened to Peter, and if it happened to Jesus, then it's probably going to happen to me. And if it doesn't happen to me, it's probably because I'm doing it wrong. In some weird, strange way, that actually lifts the fear off my shoulders.

[43:07] I'm like, take it or leave it. This is what it did to me. This is how it transformed me. Let's spend the final few minutes now reflecting, because if we look at the parable of the sower, the hard ground, the thorns, the rocky ground, what Paul represents is the good soil.

The one who was willing to see the depth of his sin, how he was actually blinded by his own tradition, blinded by his rage. And then Jesus encounters him and actually blinds him. But the moment he opens his eyes, he sees a new way. My prayer is that we would be the good soil, because we can't go out of here from here. If we are procrastinating, if we are uninterested, if we are hostile, if we're not alarmed and offended by what we are in front of a holy God, you can't give what you don't have yourself, right? So the prayer is, Holy Spirit, would you convict me of that sin and righteousness?

Would you free me from the chains and the things of this world that choke me away from, pull me away from you? Free me from that need to approve, need to please, need to be liked, and be willing to share the truth to the people that you put around me, those who I deeply love and those who I don't love much, those who are reacting to me in all kinds of ways, but let me be the same.

Again, the style is different. I think we live in an age where people crave relationship. They're yearning for authentic people sharing in an authentic way.

This week, a few of us, we were actually away in Thailand with a group of missionaries all around Asia coming together, and I was just blown away by the obedience and trust that people around the globe have in following this message and saying yes to God, even if it meant the moment they chose to follow Jesus, their families would disown them.

[45:18] Even if it meant they had to surrender their own comforts and their own ambitions. What's the common denominator to here as we look at this book is that there were people who were constrained by the spirit, who couldn't help. Now that they know the truth, they can't help but share it.

My prayer is that when we go and share that message, we will encounter good soil. People who are receptive, but also that God will give you what you need to prepare you when you meet the rocky, when you meet the thorny, when you meet the offensive, when you meet the hostile. Imagine if we all left here now just so passionate, so convicted by the brokenness that we see in this world, and we want to play our part in sharing light. Imagine what it would be like if the next people that you speak to that is not in this room, you shared the good news of Jesus to.

Let's spend a moment now before we have the worship team come up just to just ask the Holy Spirit to guide. As I look around the room, I see people already who are saying yes to Jesus, saying yes to his Holy Spirit, saying I will do this, I will do Alpha, I will go back into my workplace, I will go and speak to that friend now.

So my final exhortation is this, lean on the Holy Spirit. If that person comes to Christ, it won't be because of you. It will be because of the Holy Spirit convicting him.

It will be because of the power of the cross moving in that person. We just need to be the vessels. Would we be vessels that have no fear?

[47:09] Because God is with us. Spend a moment to pray now. God, we are with you.

We are inspired by Paul. He was a chosen instrument. And yet we are also recognizing this morning that we have also been chosen.

to share this good news that we profess to believe in, this way that we say that we follow.

Holy Spirit, we need you. We need you to shake us out of our procrastinating spirits.

the fear that's in us the insecurity that's in us the anxieties that are in us the same power that conquered the grave the same power that filled Peter and Paul is the same power that lives inside us would you use us?

[48:54] would you send us? give us the courage to have awkward conversations give us the resilience when others mock us but most of all fill us with compassion and love for those we share this message to Lord would you have your way in us?

would you fill us up and send us out? we seek to be your hands and your feet but still but still but
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