

A Testimony that Matters to the Nations

Acts 26:1-32

Halifax: 18 August 2013

Introduction:

Last week in our sermon series from Acts,

- I showed you how, in God's providence,
 - the Lord gave Paul a most amazing opportunity to testify of Jesus Christ.
- All the circumstances were marvellously brought together to bring it about that Paul was able to testify:
 - before the new governor of Judea, Festus,
 - before King Herod Agrippa II who was an expert in the Jewish religion, being himself a Jew, and being in charge of appointing the High Priest in Jerusalem,
 - before those who were part of King Agrippa's entourage (as he came with great pomp)
 - before the five tribunes (commanders) of the Roman Army who were stationed at Caesarea,
 - before all the prominent men of the city...
- They were all gathered together to hear Paul testify about the Lord Jesus.
 - They were gathered because Festus was in a bit of fix because, as the new governor of Judea,
 - he had tried to do the Jews a favour by suggesting that Paul go to Jerusalem to be tried there.
 - He did not know that the Jews' whole purpose in asking for this was that they might ambush Paul and kill him while he was en route.
 - But in any case, it was unjust for Governor Festus to suggest this because he knew that Paul had done no wrong—
 - He only did it because he didn't want the Jews to be angry with him as they would have been if he had acquitted Paul!
 - He knew they could make a lot of trouble for him and he really wanted to start off on the right foot, so he made this suggestion...
 - But Paul, being fully aware that the Jews had no intention of giving him a fair trial, exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar.
 - Festus had no option, under law, but to accept this request, and so he did.
 - But now he was in a bind because he did not know what to put down as the charges against Paul...
 - It would make him look like a fool to have not ruled on a case in which there were no charges with supporting evidence...
 - In the last verse of Acts 25, he himself describes the problem:
 - **Acts 25:27: "it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him."**
 - And of course he was right! It would be most unreasonable!
 - But it just so happened (in God's providence of course) that King Agrippa, the expert in all things Jewish,
 - had come to welcome Festus as the new governor of Judea...
 - And Festus took this opportunity to ask him if he would help him figure out what to write to Caesar about Paul...

- Now King Agrippa, who was very curious about the Christian religion, and saw this as a great opportunity to learn more about it,
 - was more than happy to oblige!
- And the beauty of all this was that it was not an official trial, but an opportunity for Paul to testify freely of the faith that he preached!
 - You can see in verse 1 that Agrippa gives Paul an open mic as it were.
 - The assembly wanted to know what Paul believed that so angered the Jews, and of course, Paul was quite happy to tell them!
 - And as an added bonus, they invited a whole assembly of dignitaries to listen and hear and evaluate what he had to say!
 - What a marvellous opportunity.

What would Paul say upon such an occasion?

- Wouldn't you like to know?
- Well you can know!
- In Acts 26 we have a full record—probably a summary—but a full summary!

Please turn to Acts 26 and take a look.

- This is the very Word of God that I am reading to you, so be reverent in your hearing.

Acts 26:1-32: Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You are permitted to speak for yourself.” So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: ² “I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, ³ especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently. ⁴ My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. ⁵ They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. ⁶ And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. ⁷ To this *promise* our twelve tribes, earnestly serving *God* night and day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. ⁸ Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead? ⁹ Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against *them*. ¹¹ And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted *them* even to foreign cities. ¹² While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, ¹³ at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me.

¹⁴ And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? *It is* hard for you to kick against the goads.’ ¹⁵ So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. ¹⁷ I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, ¹⁸ to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’ ¹⁹ Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰ but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. ²¹ For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill *me*. ²² Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come— ²³ that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles.” ²⁴ Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!” ²⁵ But he said, “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the

words of truth and reason. ²⁶ For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.” ²⁸ Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.” ²⁹ And Paul said, “I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become

both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.” ³⁰ When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them; ³¹ and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, “This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains.” ³² Then Agrippa said to Festus, “This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

- May the Lord bless the hearing of His holy Word.
- Paul was very happy about the arrangement!
- In fact, he says so to King Agrippa in verse 2!
- What evangelist would not cherish such an opportunity!
 - He tells Agrippa how happy he is to speak before someone like him who has the ability to evaluate what he says from the scriptures.
- Paul proceeds by giving his testimony in which he shows four things:
 - That he was divinely called by the risen Christ to his ministry...
 - That he was called in particular to preach to the nations that they might have the blessing of Christ...
 - That is message is valid, as evidenced by God’s miraculous preservation of his life, by its agreement with scripture, and by its basis in truth and reason.
 - And then he shows how earnest he is that all would believe.
- We are going to look at each of those four points,
 - but before we do, I want to remind you about how important Paul’s testimony is to the church.
 - It is extremely important...
 - Paul was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles...
 - Yes, Peter was the first to baptize a Gentile—and the other apostles also went to the nations...
 - But Paul was God’s chosen instrument to lead the church in fully understanding how God wanted the Gentiles to be incorporated into the church with the Jews.
 - He understood the theology and the implications of Gentile inclusion into the kingdom through Jesus Christ...
 - And he was instrumental in setting forth these doctrines and establishing for all posterity the fact that Jews and Gentiles are built on the same foundation which is Jesus Christ and His saving work!
- Paul was God’s instrument, we might say, to embrace the Gentiles—
 - to see to that they were properly welcomed into God’s kingdom and received in the way that God wanted them to be received!
 - This was his job, and he did not fail to accomplish it.
- But you see, the church had to know that his work was sanctioned by God so that they would believe it and act on it!
 - Now that our acceptance has been the norm for 2000 years of church history, no one questions it...
 - But this was far from the case in the first century!

- If the Lord had not made it clear that Paul was His faithful apostle who was speaking according to His will,
 - we Gentiles might be in a very different position today!
- All through his ministry, Paul emphasized that he was an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, called of God.
 - And here, in Acts 26, we have a very full testimony that he was a man sent directly by Jesus.
 - I might mention, however, that he does not mention everything here—
 - for example, he says nothing about all the miracles and signs that he worked to confirm his apostleship.

➤ But let's get started with the first thing he shows this gathering...

I. See how Paul shows that he was called of God to his ministry.

A. Paul explains that he was totally devoted to the faith of his fathers.

A.1. He explains that he was in no way disgruntled with his Jewish upbringing.

A.1.a. The Jews knew very well that he was thoroughly instructed in the faith of Israel,

- And that he was a committed Pharisee who lived out his faith with great zeal...
- In verses 4-5 he says:
 - **Acts 26:4-5: "My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee."**

A.1.b. Paul explains this because he does not want anyone to confuse him with one who was either

- ignorant of the faith of Israel...
- or one who was rebellious and wanted out...
- There is no virtue in foolish covenant breakers who grow up with all the privileges and arrogantly break away—
 - who have the word so near them—and then break away in rebellion or in ignorance.
 - In no way did Paul do that!

TRANS> He broke away from some of the traditions of men that he had been taught, but he did not break away from the faith as it was revealed by God.

A.2. He explains that his devotion, in fact, has not essentially changed!

A.2.a. He was taught from the Holy Scriptures to believe in the resurrection and he was taught to look for the Messiah, the Christ of God.

- And now he is being judged because he is proclaiming that that same hope has been realized in Jesus Christ.
- He says, in verse 6,
 - **Acts 26:6: And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers.**
- In verse 7, he says that it is the same hope that the twelve tribes are still seeking—not realizing that the Messiah has come!
 - They are vainly striving to attain the resurrection, earnestly serving God night and day...
 - Their devotion is very real—but they are not striving according to knowledge—as Paul describes them in Romans 10.

- They are seeking to attain by their works what Christ has attained for us and what we are to receive by faith.

A.2.b. Paul explains that ironically, he is accused for preaching that Israel's hope has been fulfilled—

- He is opposed by none other than Israel's ordained clergy!
- Look at the second part of verse 7 and verse 8:
 - **Acts 26:7-8: For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?**
- Why are they offended with Paul's preaching that God has raised Christ when the resurrection is the very thing they hope to attain?
 - Why is it strange to them that the Messiah came,
 - it should be his task,
 - not merely to conquer the Romans...
 - but to conquer sin and death for His people!
 - If they know that God had promised resurrection from the dead,
 - should it really surprise them that the Messiah would be the one who would accomplish this?
 - Should they expect someone else to conquer death?
 - Then who?

TRANS> But Paul is accused by the Jews for believing this very thing!

A.2.c. My brothers and sisters, this may seem like a very strange thing—

- for Paul who is preaching the truth to be opposed by the very men who sat in Moses' seat—the high priest and the Sanhedrin!
 - But this has often been the case in the history of the church.
- This is the very position that Luther and Calvin and Wycliff and Huss found themselves in when they were opposed by men who were set apart in the church (as they also were) by ordination.
 - It is the position I found myself in years ago when I came to believe the scriptures and follow them while a member of a liberal Presbyterian church.
 - It is the position that many of you found yourself in when you began to follow the Jesus according to His word.
 - You were opposed by the very leaders of the church!
- It is disconcerting to have duly ordained men oppose you...
 - But know that you are in very good company when that happens...
 - It was the ordained priests and princes who opposed Jeremiah...as well as almost all of the prophets of old...
 - It was even the high priest himself and the Sanhedrin—the constituted church court of the Old Testament, that opposed Jesus Himself and ordered Him to be crucified!
 - If you are following the Word, you cannot let the opposition of such men, however official they may be, hinder you...
 - The truth is not in the men who are ordained, but in the scriptures.
 - Do not follow any man unless he speaks according to the Holy Scriptures.

B. Paul explains how he came to be persuaded that Jesus was the Christ.

B.1. He explains that for a long time, he himself thought he should oppose Jesus of Nazareth.

B.1.a. He did not understand that Jesus was the fulfilment of all of Israel's promises and of all that they hoped in.

- No, Paul thought he was serving God by doing all he could to oppose Jesus of Nazareth

B.1.b. He explains the great lengths to which he went in his opposition in verses 9-11:

- **Acts 26:9-11: Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.**

- He was not one who simply questioned or disagreed—he was a very active and zealous persecutor and antagonist.

B.2. But he was stopped dead in his tracks by the risen Lord Himself!

B.2.a. It was not just a vision—it was an encounter with the risen Jesus while Paul was in the very act of persecuting His people!

- **Acts 26:12-15: While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,**

- He was authorized by the ordained men who sat in the seat of Moses and who oppose him now...

- He was in the very act of persecuting Jesus' people...but then... verse 13...

- **Acts 26:13-14: at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'**

- This was the last thing Paul expected—for he thought he was faithfully serving the Lord!

- But now he is accused of persecuting the Lord Himself because he was persecuting His people.

- He is told that this work of his will be as worthless as the energy an ox expends to kick against the goads...

- The goad was a spiked implement that a stubborn ox would kick against when he was prodded to do his work,

- But with every kick, he only succeeded in wounding his poor feet!

- This is the position you are in right now if you are resisting God's call upon your life.

- I wonder about you—are any of you of fighting against the Lord—against his calling—against His will?

- Don't you know that you cannot win against Him?

- All you can do is bring yourself into more and more misery.

- In amazement, Paul cries out...as verse 15 says:

- **Acts 26:15 So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?'**

- And he receives the very clear answer...

- **'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'**

- Now there is no uncertainty about the identity of the one that Paul has met on the Damascus Road!
 - It is none other than the risen Jesus of Nazareth!
 - Paul was in no way looking for this—but now he has no way to escape what he has both seen and heard.

B.2.b. Some of you have had an encounter like that in your own life...

B.2.b.1) You were going on about your business—whatever that business might have been...

- And the Lord stopped you dead in your tracks and showed you that you were in rebellion against Him.
- You may not have even known that you were in rebellion...
 - Some of you did, and some of didn't...
 - Some of you may have thought you were a pretty good person just going about life and not hurting anyone...
 - But Jesus stopped you and He showed you that He is Lord of all—and that ignoring Him is inexcusable!
 - He showed you that He is alive and that you cannot ignore Him without severe consequences.

B.2.b.2) Now of course in saying that you had an experience like Paul's,

- I don't mean that you had an encounter with Jesus in a physical way—that you heard a voice and saw a light that was brighter than the sun...
 - That was unique to Paul because he was an apostle whose commission it was to tell others about his encounter with the risen Lord!
 - What happened to him was not the rule, but an exception—and a most extraordinary one at that!
 - He was unique, even among the apostles, as he himself testifies, because he did not encounter Christ when all the other apostles did...
 - As you know, they walked with Him when He was on the earth—and they saw Him many times after He had risen...
 - But Paul had this personal encounter with Him—and many other encounters after He had already ascended.
 - This was not to be a pattern that would be repeated, but a highly exceptional event for a highly exceptional calling.
- We should not expect to have such personal encounters today.
 - God does not reveal Himself to each of us individually, but to the whole church as a body...
 - And all the revealing of Christ was done in the first century when the foundation of the church was laid...
 - And it was done to the prophets and the apostles for the sake of the whole body.
 - God is not interested in revealing to each generation what He has revealed to the body as a whole.
 - If You want to know Him today,
 - it must be through the apostles' testimony which is given to us in scripture, not through private revelations.

- Yes, there is indeed a very personal encounter that we have with Christ—and in that way, it is like Paul...
- But it is a spiritual encounter when God opens your heart to receive the word...
 - to see that you are sinner and that Christ is the only Saviour.
- We are dependent on the apostles and on their testimony.
 - That is why Paul's testimony is so important to us.

II. See how Paul next describes his call to testify of Jesus to the nations.

A. He shows how Jesus commissions him to be His special apostle to the Gentiles!

A.1. We saw back in chapter 9 and in chapter 22 how Ananias repeated the commission—

- but here Paul explains that he first received his commission directly from the Lord.
- That is, in fact what makes an apostle an apostle...
 - The word *apostle* means “a sent one” “one sent by an authority to do work for that authority...”
 - While missionaries and church planters *could* be called apostles of the church—being sent by the church...
 - we typically reserve the term for the apostles of Jesus—
 - those who were sent directly by Him.
 - those who saw the risen Lord with their own eyes and who heard His voice with their own ears
 - and who were sent by Him to tell us what they saw and heard.
 - These are *the* apostles.

A.2. See how Paul is thus sent and commissioned by the Lord Himself in verse 16:

- Jesus says to him...
 - **Acts 26:16: ‘But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.’**
- Do you see the two things here?
 - First, that he has seen the risen Lord Jesus and is to testify of that...what he has seen...
 - And second, that he is to be a witness of those things that Jesus is yet to show him—
 - He will receive direct revelation from Jesus to pass on to others as an apostle who is responsible for laying the foundation of the church now that Jesus has come.

A.3. And Paul as an apostle is unique even among the apostles in that the revelation he is to receive concerns the Gentiles in particular!

- In verse 17, Paul says that the Lord told him:
 - **Acts 26:17: I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you,**

A.3.a. The Gentiles are the non-Jews—

- Until Jesus came, God had revealed Himself and His promises to the Jews—but once Jesus was risen and ascended,
 - having accomplished redemption by His death and resurrection,
 - it was time for God to extend His mercy to the other nations!

A.3.b. This had long been the plan of God, and He had announced it beforehand.

- Even when He first called Abraham as recorded in Genesis 12,
 - He had promised that in his seed, all the nations of the earth would be blessed.
- And the prophets—especially Isaiah and the Psalms—had emphasized this future calling of the nations into God’s kingdom.
 - In Isaiah 49:6, God the Father says to God the Son,
 - **Isa 49:6: ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’**
 - And Psalm 89:6 says:
 - **Ps 86:9: All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify Your name.**
- It should not have been a surprise to anyone that the nations would be blessed when Jesus came!

A.3.c. Paul’s task was not only to witness to the Gentiles, but also to incorporate them into God’s kingdom.

- The Lord Jesus specifically revealed to Paul that the Gentiles were to be ingrafted in through faith in Jesus...
 - apart from circumcision or the observance of the ceremonial law which belonged to the time before Christ came.
- It was very difficult for the Jews to accept the Gentiles, and Paul was given the task to incorporate them into the church upon the one foundation of Jesus Christ.
 - It was revealed to him, directly by Jesus, that the Gentiles were joint heirs with the Jews—as members of the same body—one in Christ Jesus—where there was neither Jew nor Greek, but where all were one!

B. Jesus tells Paul what his service to Him will accomplish for the nations—

- a whole lot more than continuing to kick against the goads to be sure!!!
- Jesus mentions four things in verse 18—
 - four things that are yours if only you believe.

B.1. First, Paul’s ministry would bring illumination to the Gentiles who had been in the darkness.

- He says, **‘to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light...’**

B.1.a. Isaiah says that gross darkness had covered the people...

- We all are in the darkness apart from Christ—
- It is a terrible thing—to live your life as a stranger to the living God.
 - It is our rebellion that brings us to such a state—
 - a state in which we don’t even know where we came from or what our purpose is or where we are going—it is just darkness!
 - We can try to be bold and make something out of life, but we don’t even know what life is for because we are cut off from our Maker.

B.1.b. But when the apostles testimony about Jesus comes to us our eyes are opened and suddenly we see all that we have done...

- It is like the Damascus Road experience I mentioned before...
 - We realize that we have been all wrong—that we have completely missed our whole reason to be—to glorify God and to enjoy Him.
- We realize that we are made in His image and that we are meant to live as those who came from His hand...
 - as those who love with the deep love that we see in Jesus...
 - as those whose sole purpose is to do the will of God—to please Him...
 - and as those who have the privilege of knowing God—whom to know is to know true beauty and glory and excellence...
 - We have been dazzled by vanity, but now our eyes have seen the Lord of glory and His ways—
 - His love, His justice, His wisdom, His purity, His wrath, His goodness and grace—all revealed in the gospel.
 - That is what Paul was bringing to the nations!

➤ But it would be dreadful to see all of that if we could not live according to the light...This is the second thing that Paul will bring to the Gentiles...

B.2. Paul's ministry will set Gentiles—will set all you who believe—at liberty to serve God!

- As it says in verse 18...besides turning them from darkness to light...
 - **Acts 26:18: to turn them...from the power of Satan to God!**

B.2.a. Until the word of the apostles about Jesus comes to you, you cannot serve God because you are in bondage to Satan...

- You are captive to him to do his will and you cannot escape.
- But what a marvellous thing it is when you are finally set free from your sinful rebellious self to freely serve God...
 - Yes, you will still struggle with remaining corruption—but your whole direction in life is turned to God!
 - You are enabled to do His will now—to love as God has always loved—to be a part of that!

B.2.b. This all comes about because you are joined by faith to the living Jesus who cleanses you—

- You are buried with Him in baptism and you are raised with Him to walk in newness of life...
- When you turn to Him for life, He gives you His Holy Spirit who enables you and gives you strength to serve God!
- Paul was bringing this grace—this powerful grace—to the nations—to the Gentiles—so that they would begin to serve God!

➤ But that is still not all...

B.3. Paul the Apostle, armed with the gospel of Christ, would also bring the forgiveness of sin to the Gentiles!

- Paul's message will go forth to the Gentiles—verse 18...
 - **Acts 26:18: that they may receive the forgiveness of sins...**

B.3.a. The Jews had long known about God's forgiveness...

- They had the whole sacrificial system which testified of God's holiness and their sinfulness...

- which sin could only be taken away by the death of a substitute.
- They had this in their ceremonies—but now in Christ we have the one sacrifice that truly takes away sin.
 - The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world as John the Baptist called Him.
- This good news is brought to the Gentiles, again, as verse 18 says,
 - **Acts 26:18: that they may receive the forgiveness of sins...**

B.3.b. How deficient the gospel would be without this!

- The light that we are brought into shows us how wrong we have been—as soon as the apostolic words illumine us and the Spirit opens our eyes, we see how wrong we have been...
 - We see that we are dreadfully guilty and deserving of nothing but condemnation...
- But the apostolic message brings forgiveness because it tells us that Jesus died for our sins—for the remission of our sins!
 - On the cross, He was cut off for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquity because all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way.
- But by His stripes we are healed...
 - Jesus gave Himself a ransom for us that we might be completely forgiven.
 - As He said at the Lord's Supper, this cup is the new covenant in His blood for the remission of the sins of many!
 - He promises that if we believe on Him, He will not cast us out.
 - He will fully pardon all our sins!

➤ But that is still not the end of the rich grace that the Lord Jesus commands Paul to bring to the Gentiles...

B.4. There is also the promise of a glorious future—a sure and certain hope!

- Not only do we receive light and liberty and forgiveness—but also
 - still verse 18: **an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me [Jesus].**

B.4.a. This is the glorious announcement that the Gentiles will be joint heirs of the kingdom of glory with the Jews...

- The Jews were the ones whom God had sanctified and promised eternal life to—an inheritance that goes far beyond Canaan!
 - But now this is promised to the Gentiles—that the Gentiles will be given an inheritance among them!

B.4.b. In John 17, Jesus explained that this inheritance was actually His inheritance—which He brings us into when we trust in Him!

- It is the inheritance He was given as our mediator after He finished the work the Father had given Him to do on earth to save us...
 - He went to live in the full communion of His Father—in glory!
- He brings us to live with Him in that glory!
 - He says that we will behold the glory that He had with the Father before the foundation of the world,
 - and that we will live in the love of that glorious household!

B.4.c. What a glorious alternative—instead of eternity in the place of everlasting fire—there is eternity in heaven with Jesus!

- In a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells...
 - That is the hope that belongs to Gentiles who receive the apostolic word of the apostles!
- TRANS> My brothers and sisters, is this not all too good to be true?
- No indeed—it is all very true!

III. See how Paul shows that his message is valid.

A. Paul's message is valid because the Lord has preserved him as He promised.

A.1. Paul faithfully preached the message he had been given to the Gentiles...

A.1.a. He tells Agrippa that he has been faithful in verse 19-20:

- **Acts 26:19-20: "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance."**

A.1.b. What else could Paul do after being commissioned by the risen the Lord, but go forth to the nations with the grace of God that had been entrusted to him?

- What else but tell the Gentiles to repent and receive the blessing that God has brought into the world for them?
- We have seen in Acts how Paul did do this and how many Gentiles did receive the word and were transformed by the gospel to live for God.

A.1.c. Have you received the blessing?

- Have you turned from your vain life to enter into the glorious life that belongs to those who are in Christ?
- If not, why?

➤ Paul was fulfilling the Lord's mandate—but for this reason...he was opposed...

A.2. Yet, the Lord showed that He was with him by preserving him when men sought to kill him.

A.2.a. As we saw before, of all people, he was opposed by ordained men who stood in the place of God's shepherds but were worthless shepherds.

- Paul describes their opposition to him in verse 21 for preaching to the Gentiles as he had been commanded to do
 - **Acts 26:21: For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.**

A.2.b. But Paul shows that Jesus was with him, just as He promised—to keep them from killing him...

- **Acts 26:22: Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand,**
- The only reason Paul was still alive—still standing—was because the Lord has miraculously preserved him!
 - He miraculously preserved him until the foundation was complete.

A.2.c. So Paul's message is validated by the Lord's preservation of him to preach it—the preservation that was promised back in verse 17 where Jesus said:

- **17 'I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles.**

- TRANS> But there is more to show the validity of what Paul preached.

B. Paul's message is valid because it conforms to scripture

B.1. He says that he preached nothing but what can be found in Moses and the prophets.

- Look at verse 22 & 23:
 - **Acts 26:22-23: “Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”**
- Conformity with scriptures is a test that every servant of the Lord must pass ever since the time of Moses!
 - Moses, as well as all who bring God’s revelation, was given many miracles to validate the word that he preached...
 - But after his writings had once been given,
 - every prophet and every minister that follows is to be evaluated by whether or not he speaks what is in agreement with Moses and whatever prophets of the Lord have gone before that minister.
 - Isaiah says,
 - **Isa 8:20 To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.**
 - What is taught in each generation must be tested by its agreement with the holy scriptures.
 - Let no one boast of his ordination if his doctrine is not in accord with scripture.
 - The true church is the church that conforms to scripture...
 - That is why we are reformed—reformed according to the law and the testimony of God instead of following the doctrines and traditions of men.

B.2. And what did Moses and the prophets teach?

- You see what Paul says in verse 23:
 - **Acts 26:23: that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.**
- The whole Old Testament pointed to these things...

B.2.a. You have the entire system of sacrifices that God revealed from the time of the fall in which it was held forth that remission of sins would come by the death of a substitute offered by a priest of God.

- Only the Messiah could be both that sacrifice and that faithful priest (which priests under the law had to be sanctified by all sorts of sacrifices because of their own sins).
- And of course Jesus’ own sufferings were expressly set forth in places like Psalm 22 or in Isaiah 53:10,
 - where it says that it pleased the Lord to make His soul an offering for sin, thus tying Him together with all the sacrifices.

B.2.b. And the resurrection is set forth by God constantly bringing forth His people from death, as it were...

- Joseph was brought up from the prison to reign...
- Israel was brought up from Egypt to serve God in Canaan...
- Again and again they were raised up from bondage to their enemies when they had sinned and at last even from the exile.
- But again, it is specifically set forth of Christ that He would conquer death itself...

- For example, in Psalm 16, it says that the Lord will not allow his holy one to see corruption...
- or in Psalm 118 where it says that the stone which the builders rejected has been made the chief cornerstone.

B.2.c. And you have the calling of the Gentiles which we looked at before...

- In the Psalms and in Isaiah and many other places we are told that the Gentiles would be gathered in to the Messiah.

- TRANS> So now we have two ways that Paul's message was shown to be valid...
- because it was the message Jesus gave him to preach and Jesus had preserved him as He had promised...
- because it was fully in accord with the scriptures...
- And now we come to the third reason it is seen to be valid...

C. Paul's message is shown to be valid because it is based on truth and reason

C.1. Festus, being a Roman, charges Paul with madness.

- Like Felix, it seems that he has had too much of Paul's message, so he cries out—as verse 24 tells us:
 - **Acts 26:24: Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!"**
- Foolish men speak this way about things that go beyond their capacity to understand...
 - As a Roman, he had no use for resurrections—what good was that for establishing the glorious city of Rome!
 - That was just a fairy tale, he supposed...
 - And so he accuses Paul of philosophising himself out into unreality—into a dream world...
 - He is like the mystery religions—

C.2. But Paul completely dismisses the charge...

- **Acts 26:25-27: But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner."**

C.2.a. Paul's point is that he has been speaking about events that have happened in recent history...

- He appeals to Agrippa who knew about the resurrection of Jesus.
 - It was not done in secret...in a corner...
 - Jesus was openly crucified and openly raised again in public...
 - More than 500 had seen Him at once after His resurrection.

C.2.b. There is so much evidence for the resurrection...

- C.2.b.1) If all of the apostles who saw the risen Christ had not seen Him, then they were all liars...
- They all claimed to have seen Him and to have spoken with Him many times during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension.
 - If they had made this up, what did they have to gain by it when they were beaten and brought to suffer death?
 - What reason would they have to go on propagating a lie—all twelve of them plus Paul—if they were called to die for it?

C.2.b.2) And not only that, but you have their transformed lives—I mean these men were uneducated fishermen and such...

- And yet, they went into all the world ministering the gospel with great power and with marvellous understanding.
- And the gospel also transformed the lives of all those who received it from them...
 - Sadly, we are living in such low times of apostasy in North America, that the transforming power of the gospel is not seen as much as it ought to be in the church...
- But in many places, it absolutely amazing—
 - In the lives of our brothers and sisters in Iran, in China, in remote villages whose lives are totally transformed.
 - Even atheists have written articles testifying of the powerful effect the gospel has had in African villages—
 - more than anything else!

- TRANS> Paul was not speaking of ethereal things—he was speaking words of truth and reason—of real things—of things that were coherent and that stood together.

IV. See how Paul's message came with great power...and persuasion.

A. Agrippa acknowledges that he knows that Paul is trying to persuade him to become a Christian...

- In verse 27 Paul asks him if he believes the prophets and declares that he knows that he does...
 - And then verse 28 says:
 - **Acts 26:28: Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."**

A.1. Agrippa's words are very difficult to translate and have been variously translated...

- Some put it in the form a question—
 - **Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian in such a short time?**
- They are probably deliberately enigmatic...
- But the general point is clear enough...
 - Agrippa is letting Paul know that he knows what he is up to!
 - He feels the pull of the message that Paul is preaching—
 - He knows that Paul is trying to persuade him—but he is resisting it.

A.2. And Paul does not deny it...

A.2.a. That is a great way to disarm people—when they try to disarm you by accusing you of trying to persuade them...

- Don't deny it—don't try to excuse yourself—
 - just admit it!

A.2.b. In verse 29, Paul says:

- **Acts 26:29: I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.**
- Paul has nothing to hide—
 - He wants the whole room to become believers and he is very happy for them to know that!

A.2.c. I did that with a fellow I invited over to dinner from work...

- I had been witnessing to him and he had been talking to me about Christ...

- but when I invited him over he said, “But you have a hidden agenda.”
- And I said, “A hidden agenda—no way! I have been very open with the fact that I am trying to persuade you to become a Christian...
 - And if you come over to our house, we will have family worship just like we always do and I will preach at you...”
- He came anyway, even though I did not let him disarm me...
 - Instead I showed him my gospel gun.

B. We are not told if anyone was persuaded...

B.1. We are told that Agrippa stood up at this point—he had heard enough...

- And we are told after discussing Paul’s case with the others dignitaries he concludes that Paul has done nothing worthy of death and could have been set free if he had not appealed...
 - So poor Festus is still stuck with his problem
 - He has to send Paul to Caesar and he has no charges against him.
 - Nero will have to wonder about that!

B.2. But it is far worse for Festus and Agrippa and all who were present that they have heard Paul’s appeal and are walking away without Christ!

- Paul was earnest in trying to persuade them, but because of their hard hearts they did not receive the word.

B.3. I would desire to persuade all of you too...

- How could I have such a gospel and not try to persuade you?
 - It’s the best news in the world—of course I want you to have your eyes opened, to be delivered from the power of Satan to the power of God, to receive the forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified.
 - How could I have something so excellent and not want you to have it?
- And the bigger question—how could it be that you could have such good news—so near to you—so accessible to you—and not receive it?
 - Are you mad?
 - How is it that your rebellion could keep you from something so excellent, so beneficial, so persuasive?
- And you who do believe...
 - Isn’t the gospel marvellous?
 - Just think where you would be without it!
 - What if God had left us Gentiles without this salvation?
 - He might justly have done so—but in His great mercy, He did not!
 - And just think of what a rich inheritance you have with it... and inheritance with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Lord of glory!