



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 26:1-28:16

“Agrippa, the Ship and on to Rome”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee again for Thy word and we are grateful to Thee for the privilege of the study of it. When we think of so many who do not have the opportunity, we know that Thou hast truly blessed us, given us an opportunity that we must take advantage of. We pray that Thou wilt deliver us from the kind of backsliding and apostasy that so often characterizes the people of God over a lengthy period of time. We look back at the history of the nation Israel, its bright beginnings, and then through the years some of the significant and blessed experiences that the children of Israel had, which are so instructive for us.

And then as we look at the later stages of their history and see how, as a nation, largely they turned away from Thee. We are fearful, in the truest sense, of departing from Thee in our hearts. We pray Lord that, by Thy grace, Thou wilt keep us in close relationship with Thee and deliver us from indifference, and lethargy, and backsliding. We know of course that we cannot lose our salvation, but we know that it is certainly possible for us to become cold and indifferent, and regard the things of the Lord as just the things that are like other things in our lives, somewhat significant, but not very significant at all. Oh God, as Thou dost give us opportunity to hear the word may we be

responsive and may our lives be drawn by the Holy Spirit into a deeper walk with Thee. We pray that this time tonight may contribute to that end. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Tonight we are looking at Acts chapter 26, chapter 27, and the first part of chapter 28 and our subject is “Agrippa, the Ship and on to Rome”. Now we left the apostle in the city of Caesarea, with Festus and with King Agrippa. And the apostle is now going to give his third account of his conversion in the Book of Acts. It's interesting that in these three accounts, in Acts chapter 9 and Acts chapter 22 and then again in Act chapter 26 in which Paul explains what happens, what happened to him on the Damascus Road, there are additions to the testimony and other insights are brought out by him that are not found in the others. And so, in order to get a full picture, it is useful to look at all three of these accounts, of the apostle's conversion.

What we are looking at in Acts chapter 26, when Paul gives his testimony before King Agrippa and his wife Bernice, and Festus the governor, is one of the most dramatic scenes in all of Scripture. It was a kind of Roman holiday to Festus, and Agrippa, and Bernice, but God was fulfilling his promise that he had made to the Apostle Paul, back when he interrupted his life on the Damascus Road and brought him to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. For remember, according to Paul's account in Acts chapter 9 and verse 15, Paul said that, “The Lord said unto him, Go thy way” this is to Ananias about Paul, “Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:” and so here is the fulfillment of the initial commission, that the apostle was to speak to kings. And here in the presence of King Agrippa he is going to give his testimony again.

Voltaire spoke of the Apostle Paul as, “That ugly little Jew.” And one cannot help but think of that, when you look at this incident here in which Paul appears before Agrippa in his purple, and Festus in his scarlet, and Bernice in her lavish and rich clothing and garments, and all of the Roman soldiers about, and others that were attached to the

governor, and to the king, and the chief men of the city. It was a magnificent gathering of important people, but the compelling figure is the one in the midst, the Apostle Paul. So often, men have thought of Paul in this way.

Thomas Jefferson is admired by many liberal Americans, but any who know anything about Jefferson's philosophy and policies have an entirely different picture of him. In fact, if you listen to what people ordinarily said about Thomas Jefferson you would think that he was a great man in every way. Well he certainly was an influential man in the United States, but his philosophies were diametrically opposed to the philosophies of the word of God. Listen to what he said about the apostles and the Apostle Paul. He said, “Of this band of dupes and imposters,” he refers to the gospel writers and to the disciples who are responsible for the New Testament, “Of this band of dupes and imposters, Paul was the great coryphaeus, the first corrupter of the doctrines of Jesus.” Now this is the attitude of Thomas Jefferson to the things of the word of God. And incidentally, this statement is not a casual statement which he made on the spur of the moment and for which he was sorry later on. There are a number of statements, all of the same general character that Jefferson made in, at different times. This was his studied opinion. He was a man who was opposed to the essentials of New Testament Christianity.

Well, Voltaire may call him, “The ugly little Jew” and Thomas Jefferson may call him, “The coryphaeus, the first of the coryphaeus of the dupes and imposters who wrote the gospels and the first corrupter of the doctrines of the Lord Jesus.” But when one reads the life of Paul, one cannot help but feel that he is the commanding figure of history since the time of the Lord Jesus Christ. As always, in the gospel, in the history book of the early church, written by Luke, Paul fills Luke's canvas. Since chapter 13 on through the remainder of the book, Paul is the great commanding figure. He's the man who has learned the truth of the living God and a man who most illustrates, I think in his life, what Luke says when he began his account, that what he is going to do is to set out the things

that Jesus has continued to do and teach. Remember he said in the first two verses of his book, “The former treaties have I made oh Theophilus, of all that Jesus began, both to do and teach until the day in which he was taken up after, that he through the Holy Ghost, had given commandment unto the apostles whom he had chosen.” So Luke considered his gospel to be the book in which he set forth the things that Jesus began to do and teach. Now what the Acts is, is the account of what our Lord continues to do and teach, through the apostles in the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, Paul is the illustration of what the Lord Jesus is still doing. Isn't it striking too, that the Book of Acts concludes, almost in the midst of things that are happening, there is no conclusion like the conclusion of the epistles, like the conclusion of other books, but the book seems to stop as if the apostle intended to write some, as if Luke, the historian, intended to write some more, but for some reason was not allowed to do so. He didn't say, “Now this is the end.” And that's the impression, I'm sure, the Holy Spirit would want us to obtain, from reading the Book of Acts. It doesn't have an end, because through this whole age, we are still seeing the acts of the Lord Jesus Christ, which he is doing through his disciples. So what he wrote in the gospel is what our Lord began to do and teach, what has happened since, is what he has continued to do and teach and he is still doing that. So Luke, and the Acts, are the end of the acts of our Lord in the flesh, and the acts of the apostles. But the Lord Jesus is still continuing his work. Someone has said, he was gone, but they were not forgotten, and he has ministered through them to the glory of God since.

Well, now briefly, we want to just take a look again at the, at the defense that Paul made, because we have already looked at this several times. And it's not necessary to go over the ground again in detail, and we do want to try to finish our series of studies. The apostle is in front of Felix, the procrastinating man. He's in the presence of Festus who is the politely unprincipled man. And now he is going to give his defense before King

Agrippa, who illustrates an unconcerned man. The apostle in verse 1 of chapter 26, standing before Agrippa, hears Agrippa say unto him,

“Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth his hand, and answered for himself: I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently. My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God, unto our fathers: Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?”

Now that is a good place to stop for just a moment because, right here is really the heart of some of the difficulty that people have with reference to the Christian faith from the intellectual standpoint. They find it difficult to believe that the supernatural is possible. And always, in the commentaries that are written concerning the New Testament, by men who are unsteady in the faith, or actually oppose the faith, the supernaturalism of the word of God comes in for criticism. But the apostle says, “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” It really comes down, does it not, to the question of what kind of God, God is. If he is, as the Scriptures set him forth, an all powerful, sovereign being, and if he is responsible for the creation of this universe, if he is omniscient and omnipotent, and omnipresent and full of righteousness and holiness and justice and truth, if all truth resides in him, if he is

responsible for our creation and our preservation, if it is he who has made the creation about us, and if it is he who preserves it, and further, if it is he who providentially guides all of the circumstances of life and is moving them toward a certain conclusion, then it is not a thing incredible that he should raise someone from the dead.

You can see that for Paul, one word from the Lord God outweighs all the library of human lore. In other words, for Paul, the fundamental presupposition that he carried in his spiritual activity was, the Scriptures are the word of God. Now it's not necessary, it's not possible of course, to talk about why that presupposition is a scientific basis upon which the Christian faith might be rested, but it is. The apostle felt that that was the fundamental presupposition upon which he rested. One word of God outweighs all human speculation. One never finds in the Scriptures, men saying, “I think, I would imagine, the weight of opinion is,” but we have the writers of Scripture saying, “We know, we know, we are fully assured.” In other words, they had a sense of certainty, which was grounded in something that gave them that certainty. And that presupposition was the Scriptures are the revealed word of God. And one certainly senses that as he reads this statement. The apostle goes on to say, in verse 9,

“I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, (probably a reference to Aramaic) Saul, Saul,

why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; (in other words Paul is given assurance that the Lord is going to appear to him from time to time after this great event) Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, (you see how everything is moving toward Rome) To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and to great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.”

Now one can see from this that his defense of his conversion and his commission is very much like his defense in the other accounts. It is simply this, you cannot account for what happened to me by natural causes. I was after all, totally committed to Judaism. I was one who had advanced in Judaism beyond any of my contemporaries, he tells the Galatians in order to argue the same way. And if you will look at my life you cannot possibly account for the tremendous change that has taken place in me, other than that which I am telling you has happened that is, the Lord has appeared to me on the Damascus Road. The apostle felt that if you looked at his past life and looked at his

present life, there was no other reasonable explanation of it. And men have sought to give many explanations since. They have sought to say that the apostle was one who had a sun stroke on the road to Damascus, and sun stroke does make you act rather peculiarly, but a sun stroke cannot account for such a change in life as this. A.J. Ironside used to say it was sun stroke, but not an s-u-n stroke, but an s-o-n stroke. And then of course there are many other who have said that he was really an epileptic, and he had an epileptic fit, just like Mohammad and Augustan and Julius Caesar and Peter the Great and Napoleon and Pascal and Russo and Dovstoiesky, all of whom were epileptic so we're told. The apostle had an epileptic fit on the Damascus road, and that accounts for the tremendous change. Well I like Spurgeon's comment. He said, "Oh blessed epilepsy that made such a wonderful change in this man, [Laughter] would God that all who oppose the name of Jesus Christ might become epileptics in the same sense." Well, Mr. Spurgeon had a gift for that kind of comment and I think that's probably the best comment on the stupidity and foolishness of a suggestion like that. Well now let's move on and read further, because the interesting part of the defense appears now as Festus and Agrippa respond to it. And verse 24,

“And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. (in other words he subscribed to the theory that the apostle had just plain gone crazy, he was no longer playing with a full deck, so, much learning has made thee mad) But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.”

Now of course Festus responds just like a Roman would respond because the Romans had great contempt for men with ideas, if it was the kind of thing that might

embarrass them. And when they were taught as children, if they were well taught, they usually had a Greek tutor. And the Greek tutor taught them things that had to do with principles and ideas and philosophies because the Greeks were the philosophers and the Romans were the pragmatic kind of people. But later on men in authority in Rome were men who generally speaking, did not care for ideas, and so Festus responds in the way that you might expect a Roman governor to respond. He calls it just enthusiastic nonsense. But Agrippa is different, and Paul of course knows that, because Agrippa was half Jewish, and therefore he really is a person who had a fairly good understanding of the things that the apostle was talking about.

So the apostle says in this 27th verse, “King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to become a Christian.” What the apostle does here is of course, carry the war right to the heart of Agrippa, because since he knew that Agrippa was half Jewish, and therefore had a relationship to Judaism that Festus didn’t have, he probably thought that perhaps the appeal to him directly will have more effect.

Now the reply that is made is a very interesting reply and I wish I could be absolutely certain of the precise force. The Authorized Version that I’m reading says, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” Now it is possible that we could take that to be a sincere kind of remark. In other words, he expresses the idea that Paul’s approach has been very compelling, he doesn’t see anything in what he is saying that can be criticized, no doubt he has felt the force of the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and if this is a sincere response, then he would be saying, “I’m on the verge of responding to what you’re saying, Paul.”

Now the Authorized Version takes the Greek text in that way, and others do as well. But it is also possible to render this in another way. It’s possible to take it as a contemptuous dismissal. And in that case it would be something like, “Are you in a brief period of time, seeking to persuade me to be a Christian, to live as a Christian?” In other

words, it's a contemptuous kind of dismissal, of this urgent appeal that the apostle is making to him. Almost as if he were saying, since the word “in brief” is at the beginning of his statement, it's almost as if he's saying, “Listen Paul, do you think it's going to take only one sermon for me to act like a Christian?” It's possible to take it that way. Or it's possible, also, to take it as an embarrassed evasion. And in that case, it would be spoken with something like a smile, and he would be trying to just put it off. So we're not exactly certain what Agrippa meant in that expression. It would be nice if we could be absolutely certain, but unfortunately the Greek text can be rendered in several different ways, with several different nuances. And I'm not sure myself, which way this should be rendered. The idea that he is speaking sincerely of course, is true to biblical doctrine. The idea that it is a contemptuous dismissal is certainly true to the situation. It seems to me it's one of those.

At any rate, whatever it is, it was a tragedy. Because here is Agrippa, and Bernice, and Festus, the Roman governor, and they are before the Apostle Paul, and before the Apostle Paul, little realizing the critical moment in their own history that this really was. You know I'm sure that afterwards, they went off, and probably they said some things like, “You know he really can make you feel guilty” or “He certainly has a command of the Old Testament Scriptures, I've never heard anybody who can sight the prophets and the psalms like that little Jewish fellow.” And then others would say, “Well I must say that, even though I don't believe what he said, he surely is a very sincere fellow. It's obvious he believes what he is saying.” And the tragedy is, that they didn't realize before whom they really were standing. Of course they were standing before Paul, they were standing before one of the great figures of history, no question about it. No matter how we may evaluate human history, one of the great men of history is the Apostle Paul. If you look at the influence that his writings have had, there isn't anyone that you can think of that has had anything like the influence that the apostle's literature has had, if you just look at it as a human being. And here is Agrippa, and Festus, and Bernice, and then of

course there was Felix, and then all of the others who stood before the apostle in his ministry.

You know, it is something that is extremely important to realize, that when we stand before the word of God, it is a critical moment in our own history, an extremely critical moment. And often, the events that seem just ordinary to us, are really the events that are absolutely critical for our lives. Now of course, Agrippa, if he never did come to faith in Jesus Christ, is waiting the judgment day, and he looks back to this event with an entirely different perspective, “Oh I wish I had responded to the ministry of Paul the apostle, in order that I might be delivered from the torment that I feel now and the torment that I face in the future.” It’s a very serious thing. It reminds me of the statement the Ezekiel makes in chapter 33 and verse 11 in which he addresses Israel and says, “Why will ye die?” and an expositor of the Bible has said, “All of those four words may be emphasized, “Why will ye die?”, “Why will ye die”, why is that your determination? And “Why will ye die?” personal appeal, and “Why will ye die?” eternal death. Well it’s a great event, and at the conclusion of it we read here,

“And Paul said, (to Agrippa, Agrippa, no it’s a, it’s not a pathetic appeal. I think it’s a grand appeal, the apostle says) I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, yet, without these bonds, (that’s a magnificent appeal) And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with him: And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed to Caesar. (but since he appealed to Caesar, then of course, he must be taken to Rome)”

Now the 27th chapter is a lengthy chapter and it's one of the great chapters for those who like to understand shipping and sailing in ancient times. Did you know that this is one of the most important of all chapters in ancient literature, dealing with those subjects? And Luke has given us a magnificent, a classic. The ancients had no love for the sea. Ships were uncomfortable, to start with. There were long delays, you can see some of that here because the apostle of course, leaves from Caesarea, goes up the coast, they cross over the Aegean Sea, to a place they have to wait there to get another boat, probably didn't know didn't have any scheduling. They get there and they just wait until they get another boat. And it was filled with delays to travel. And furthermore, it was extremely perilous because they didn't have any compasses or sextants, like we had later on. And consequently, it was a very dangerous kind of existence. Many people lost their lives in the sea.

When one studies the Aegean Sea, there are certain times in which the, it's possible to travel, and have hope of arriving safely. Up to the time of September the 14th, it's relatively safe to travel on the Aegean Sea, but from September the 15th until November the 11th, it's dangerous, they say, and from chapter, and from November the 11th and, rather November the 12th on, is practically impossible. Now, this was around October the 5th. So you can expect that the apostle and those with him are going to have a difficult time. So let me read a few verses here. And we'll start with verse 1 through verse 8, where the apostle moves from Caesarea to fair havens, which was a little place under the Island of Crete. Now you can take your Dramamine right at this point, if you like, in order that you might not get sea sick, as we go through this chapter. Chapter 27,

“And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band. And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us. And the next day we

touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself. And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. (so they've moved all the way across the corner of the Aegean there) And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein. And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone; And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea. (now he goes on and the next part of the section, beginning at verse 9 through verse 26 describes the storm) Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, (that's the time element that lets us know this is in October, the day of Atonement, and the fast that was associated with it is over, so it was that time of the year) Paul admonished them, And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives. (so the apostle warns them right at the beginning, but what can you expect sailors to do when a land lover tells them that they're going to have difficulty on the journey, well they don't pay him any attention, as you might expect) Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. (I should have pronounced that other, Euroclydon, and I know that everybody in the audience knew that I had mispronounced it so I want to go back and be sure and

pronounce it correctly) And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat: Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away. (it's almost as if the apostle was in the company of those who were giving up, but I think that Luke is really speaking for himself here and for the others) But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, (I told you, you notice that) you should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. (please notice that statement) Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.”

Now, from this point on, we will of course, see the apostle move from Malta, to land, and the shipwreck. But I'd like to make just a few comments about that preceding section here, because when the apostle appears and says the things that he says to them, there is some very interesting theological things that appear. You can see from what the apostle says here that he's the kind of individual who is well acquainted with the normal affairs of life. We often say about people, “He's so heavenly minded that he is of no earthly good.” Well the apostle was not that kind of a person. I'd like for you to notice the true nature of divine predestination, and human responsibility. Do you notice the statement in verse 24, saying, “Fear not Paul, thou must be brought before Caesar, and lo

God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.” Now I want you to look at verse 31. Now in the midst of the trip, when, I guess I really should read on, let’s read on, verse 25, verse, rather from verse 27,

“But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country; And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms. Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day. And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.”

Now I found that extremely interesting, and I’ll tell you why I do. If you’ll look back at verse 24, the apostle had said, that the angel had appeared to him and said, “Fear not Paul, thou must be brought before Caesar, and lo God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.” But now here is the apostle saying in verse 31, “Except these abide in the ship, they cannot be saved.” I find that extremely interesting because, the apostle at one point says everybody is going to be saved, but in the next moment he’s saying, if you don’t stay in the boat, you are not going to be saved.

Now you notice me, I’m turning something up here in front of me because I was looking for something that had been written, which I had typed up, and I have found it, eureka. Because what we find illustrated here is, the divine, sovereign, predestination, on the one hand, and human responsibility on the other. The apostle says in verse 24, that the angel said to him, “God has given you all them that sail with you and so Paul, you need not worry.” So, when the men seek to make their way from the boat, it seems very strange for Paul then to say to them, “Look, if you don’t stay in the boat, you’re not going

to be saved.” If the angel has told him that all are going to be saved, then why could not Paul simply say, “It doesn’t make any difference whether you stay in the boat or whether you go out, you’re going to be saved”?

You see in Scripture, divine, sovereign predestination is not opposed to human responsibility. The reason for that is this, divine, sovereign predestination works through the means of the appeals, and warnings, and prayers, and admonitions, by the individuals. In other words, if I were a divine being I might say, “Martha Johnson is to be saved.” But at the same time, in my divine, predestinating grace, I would also be free to say, “Martha Johnson shall be saved through the prayer of her mother.” And so it is important that her mother pray. In other words, the predestination includes the means. That’s why people have difficulty with the doctrine of predestination and say, “If the doctrine of predestination is true, why pray, why preach, why admonish, why testify? Just sit back, and God’s will is to be done.” That totally ignores the fact that God has determined the means as well as the end. And so the apostle is perfectly harmonious with biblical truth in saying, “God’s told me everybody is going to be saved on the boat.” But the Lord also told him, everybody’s going to be saved on the boat, if they stay on the boat. So, he says, “Except you abide in the ship, you cannot be saved.” So the apostle here is harmonizing the doctrine of sovereign, divine predestination and human responsibility, they’re not opposed to one another.

What I was looking for was an account of a conversation I had with a man twelve years ago. And I just read it again this afternoon, because I had written up an account of it afterwards, it impressed me so much, it was, well April 10th, 1971. I was in Calgary in Alberta at a conference, and it was an Easter conference, as you probably can tell. And the president of the Prairie Bible Institute, a well known institution in Canada, was Mr. L.E. Maxwell, L.E. Maxwell. He was a well known, earnest, evangelical preacher and teacher and educator, but also an extremely strong Arminian. And the school’s a fine school, but it’s just an Arminian school. And Mr. Maxwell’s a Christian man, I’d heard him

preach. Well he was teaching at Three Hills, Alberta, where the school is, and he was teaching students and in the lecture, referred to Mr. Eric Hanson.

Now Mr. Hanson had been associated with Mr. Maxwell and so they knew each other quite well, and he had referred to him, in his lecture. And Mr. Hanson was a reformed, Pentecostal preacher. And Mr. Maxwell referred to Mr. Hanson as a person who believed, quote, “that horrible doctrine of predestination” unquote. Well Mr. Hanson was telling me this, he is the reformed, Pentecostal preacher who now believes in the doctrine of divine predestination. He’s a very interesting fellow. He was a Norwegian, as you probably can tell by his name, but he spoke with a little accent and he had a good sense of humor. And I know that even Mr. Maxwell couldn’t be mad at him, even though he hated his doctrine. But at any rate, Hanson told me if Maxwell hadn’t mentioned his name, nothing would have come of it, but since he mentioned his name to the students, and since he was around, and the students heard the name, then a group of them came and visited Mr. Hanson at his house, which was located near the school. And they came with their Bibles to discuss the matter. And they told Hanson what Maxwell had said. And Hanson said, “Well, Hanson’s opinions are not worth a thing.” And they replied, “We know this doctrine began with Calvin.” Hanson said, he said, “Well let’s turn to the Bible. I respect Calvin, but to tell you the truth, it goes beyond him.” And he said, “I then pointed them to Ephesians chapter 1 where Paul says that we were chosen in him before the foundation of the world, and then I turned to Romans chapter 8 and I expounded the texts, Romans chapter 8, verse 29 and verse 30.”

And as he concluded, the students said, “Well, we see it began with Paul.” And Mr. Hanson then said, “I didn’t stop there,” he said, “I asked them to turn over to the book of Malachi.” And he expounded Malachi chapter 1, and you’re of course acquainted with the fact that in Malachi chapter 1 the prophet says, “Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated.” And so the students said, “Well, the doctrine was in existence before Paul.” And Mr. Hanson said, “I didn’t stop there, and I said ‘Let’s go back to the Book of Genesis.’”

And he expounded, he said, “Turn to Genesis chapter 25 and verse 23,” and he read these verses, which of course, are sited in Romans chapter 9, “And the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder (Esau) shall serve the younger (Jacob).” And he said the students, when he turned to Genesis 25:23 and expounded, they said, “Well, we see it now, it was God who started it all.” [Laughter]

Well, that is really the truth it is God who has started it all. And the apostle was told they're all going to be saved, but it nevertheless, as they sought to escape, he said, “Look, if you don't stay in the boat, well, you're not going to be saved.” Well let's read on, then. Oh I should mention one other thing here, because there's another important principle here. Notice that 25th verse, the angel had said to, well Paul, reporting what had happened to him said, “Wherefore sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me.” That's the true nature of faith. I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me. That's really what faith is.

Sometimes you hear people today, and particularly in academic circles say, “Faith is not the believing of an historical fact. You do not have faith, if you do not have some uncertainty. And so consequently, you cannot have a historical fact as the object of faith. Faith doesn't rest on something that is so objective that there is no question about it at all. There must be some basis for doubt, an uncertainty, to be faith.” The Bible doesn't know a definition of faith like that. The definition of faith in Scripture is something like this, “I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me.” Faith rests upon the revealed facts of the word of God. There doesn't have to be uncertainty to have faith. In fact, that's why the writers of Scripture speak with such certainty about the divine truth. Because they believe God as it was told them. Well, let me finish reading the chapter. Verse 32,

“Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off. And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth

day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you. (now this is another instance in which the apostle is dealing with these men very practically) And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat. (I think there's something rather humorous about this, cause these fellows had been in a storm and no doubt they had been sick for days, and they hadn't been able to eat anything much and furthermore, they hadn't been able to cook anything, so they were not in the greatest of physical shape) And we were all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea. And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore. And falling into a place where the two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves. And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.”

Now if you'll give me just five more minutes, I'd like to read the first sixteen verses of chapter 28 because here, after an event or two, the apostle reaches Rome. Now they discover that they're on the island of Milet, which is the present day Malta. Malta was known, of course, as a land, an island that was bombed probably more than any

other island in World War II. It was also the place where General Dophie was stationed. And Dophie was a well known Christian man who, as General of the forces, taught Bible classes while all of this was going on. So Malta is a place with some tradition from World War II.

“And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Miletta. (or Malta) And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came out a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.”

They were quick to jump to conclusions over the snake. You know there are lots of people that are quick to jump to conclusions. I've heard about, a story about one fellow I think it was Ironside again, who tells a story about a fellow who was a preacher and the rumor went around to the effect that his wife had attended a meeting of some heretical group. Probably went over to a place like the word of faith, and that he had gone there in great indignation and he had dragged her out by the hair of her head and brought her home and beat her. And he undertook to explain that he had not dragged his wife out of that meeting, that he had never at any time dragged her about by her hair, and that he'd never beaten her, and also that his wife had never attended that meeting, and finally that he was a bachelor and never had had a wife. [Laughter]

I was attending a meeting also well, in fact it occurred at the same time that I was in Calgary. And John Phillips, who is on the faculty of the Moody Bible Institute, was one of the speakers and when he was introduced, the fellow gave him a very flowery introduction. And when John got up he said, “This reminds me of a man introduced as a man who made a million dollars in oil in Texas.” He said, “The man got up and he said, ‘I’ll have to make a few corrections. It wasn’t oil, it was coal. And it wasn’t in Texas, it was in Pennsylvania. And it wasn’t a million, it was a hundred thousand. And it wasn’t made, it was lost. And it wasn’t me, it was my brother.’” [Laughter] So, it’s not good to jump to conclusions.

Not long ago I was accused of believing that God simply chooses one man to be saved and another to be lost arbitrarily, without any consideration whatsoever of human responsibility. Well a friend of mine heard another man say that and so he just went to him and he said, “Look, have you ever spoken to Dr. Johnson about that?” He said, “No.” But you see, people like to, they like to hear rumors and they like to pass them on. But to go to the individual and see if that’s really true, well that would destroy all the fun of it. The fun is going around and saying, “Do you know what he believes, he believes this.” But you know, it’s more serious than that, because some day we’re all going to have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. And then, it will be remembered. And we’ll remember too. And we’re going to answer. In fact the Lord Jesus said we’re going to answer for every word that comes out of our mouths. That’s enough to make us all solemn.

Well, they jump to conclusions of course, and one moment they think that Paul is a criminal and the next moment he’s a god. What interests me about this of course, is that the apostle here is able to be bitten by a snake and it doesn’t seem to have any effect on him. In fact, this is one of the great texts that the snake handlers out in western, or eastern Tennessee, and western North Carolina and Kentucky, emphasize in their meetings. I have here with me, some instances of individuals who have, on the basis of

this and Mark chapter 16 and verse 18 have sought to actually in all of their meetings they, when they get into the frenzy, particular frenzy, they bring in the snakes and then they will hold the snakes up and invite the snakes to bite them. There have been a number of them who have lost their lives that way. Because in Mark 16:18 it says, “They shall take up serpents and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them, they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover.” One of the saddest things about that of course, is that not only is that a questionable part of the word of God, but even if we assume that that part of Mark is genuine, many of the ancient manuscripts do not have it at all, even if we assume that it is genuine, what it refers to is the signs that apostles did, and the members of the early church that were given these miraculous gifts at a particular time in the churches history. Many a person has lost his life because of the misinterpretation of these things. Well, let me finish, because our time is up. Verse 7,

“In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: (or dysentery) to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. (ah the signs of an apostle were wrought) So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed:”

That’s striking, if you should read this in the Greek text, that in verse 8 the word for heal is a word that means simply, “to heal” with no particular connotations and so it evidently does refer to something supernatural. But the word in verse 9 is a different verb. It is the verb, *therapeuo*. And you all know the English word, therapeutic. And so this is a verb from which comes a word, and words, that refer to healing through the use of medicine. Now we cannot be absolutely sure of that, but in the light of the different verbs, there’s certainly a strong possibility, that in verse 9, Luke is talking not about

miraculous healings, but about the healings that were accomplished through the use of medical means. And after all, remember who was there, who was writing the account? Why, it is Luke, the physician.

And so here we have possibly, an instance in which we have evidence that the gift of healing does not exclude medical help. There are people who have, unfortunately, thought that the Scriptures taught that they must depend only on supernatural means for healing. But there seems to be evidence here, not only that the apostles did perform supernatural acts of healing, but that it was perfectly harmonious for medical attention to be given, when available, and when it might be useful. In fact Paul wrote to Timothy, you know, and said, “Take a little wine for your often infirmity’s sake.” Now the last lap is described in verse 11 through 16 and I’ll close with this,

“And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.” (these of course were the two sons of Zeus, and here is the Apostle Paul on the deck of the boat, and the boat has of course the signs of the heathen gods) And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days. And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli: Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage. And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.”

And so, they have come to Rome. Back in chapter 19 and verse 11...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]