



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 26:1–32

“Agrippa: The Curse of Casualness”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Give me one rational reason why you need the pictures of this crowd, and then I realize there is one. We do need your picture for the, the book, so we have not had really good response, and so we need you to, it may be my fault, we need your picture, so that we will be able to identify you, and you identify us that much better. So we hope that you will make a special effort to have your picture taken, particularly those of you who have signed up for place in the, the book. So make every effort to have your picture taken. A number of people have gone out of their way to make it possible, and to serve without any kind reward, other than the fact that you may be there. So please, do have your picture taken.

Now, we're turning to Acts chapter 26, verse 1 through verse 32, for our Scripture reading, as we near the end of our exposition of the Acts of the Holy Spirit through the apostles and our Lord. Acts chapter 26, the apostle has been in custody now for some time. He has appeared before Felix and Festus the procreators, and now he will particularly explain his situation to King Agrippa. Verse 1 of Acts chapter 26:

“Then Agrippa said unto Paul, ‘Thou art permitted to speak for thyself.’ Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself. ‘I think myself happy King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee, touching all 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 straightest 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? 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.”

That probably means, “I tried to compel them to blaspheme” because we have no record of the apostle's success in this. He may have been successful on, upon occasions of course, but this particular Greek verb may be rendered, that he “tried to make them blaspheme” and I tend to think that's probably the most accurate rendering

““And being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Whereupon on 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 fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue; 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

which I will appear unto thee. Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee. 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.””

You may remember from the reading of previous accounts of Paul’s conversion that this information came to Paul from Ananias, according to Acts chapter 9. Here it is stated to come from the Lord. Probably Luke has telescoped the accounts here and, of course, what came from Ananias to Paul, as the account makes clear in chapter 9, came from God to Ananias, and so Luke’s recording of Paul as saying this here is, in my opinion, in perfect accord with the teaching of the whole of the book. Now, the apostle gives his response.

“Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision, but showed 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 great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come. That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.”

This is evidence that the apostle regarded the Lord Jesus as the servant of Jehovah, for in those great passages in the book of Isaiah, these facts are set forth.

“And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice; Paul, thou art beside thyself. Much learning doth make 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. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.”

Now, it's evident that we must understand the term “believe” here, in the sense that he was convinced of the truthfulness of the prophetic teaching, but so far as the specific application of that text to him, we have no indication that Agrippa believed in the evangelical sense, of trust in our Lord. The Reformers like to make a distinction when they spoke about faith. They spoke about faith as composed of three elements: *notitia*, knowledge; *assensus* or ascent; and *fiducia* or trust. And they sought to make it plain, that a person might have *notitia*, or knowledge, and still not be a converted man; that he might even have knowledge and ascent, and not be a converted man; that in order to have true biblical faith, he should have knowledge, ascent, and trust. Now, as so far as we know quite plain, that Agrippa did not have evangelical faith, but he did, being a Jew, accede no doubt, to the general statement the Scriptures do tell us what God says. There are many people in the evangelical church like that today, sitting in the pews, who if you ask them, “Do you believe the Bible?” They would say, “Yes, we believe the Bible. The Bible contains truth.” But so far as a personal relationship to that truth, a personal relationship to the Lord of the Scriptures, that is not their experience.

So Paul says, “I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, ‘Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.’” We'll discuss that in a moment. That's most likely an incorrect rendering of the text, but the truth of it is a biblical truth. Our Lord remember, did say to individuals, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” So “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian,” expresses a general biblical idea.

“And Paul said, ‘I would to God, that not only thou, but also that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.’ And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them. 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 unto Caesar.”

You might wonder why they did not really then set him free. Well of course, that would have been the right thing to do, to set him free. But at this stage, something else has developed. The apostle has appealed to Caesar, to Rome, and for them to dismiss a case in which an individual had appealed to the highest authority, might have been thought on the part of Rome, to be a challenge of their ultimate authority, and so it’s evident that the apostle, having said, “I appeal to Caesar” has gone above the local authorities, and they have recognized it, and so they are going to send him on to Rome in order to be above criticism in this case. Now, we know from the Scripture, that God in his providence had determined that Paul should go to Rome; had already told him that, and so all things are working in accordance with the council of the will of God, which is precisely what Paul states about the Lord God, “He works all things according to the council of his will.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word.

I don’t think there can be much question, that the scene that we are looking at in Acts chapter 26, is one of the most dramatic in the New Testament. Festus and Agrippa may well have thought of it as a Roman holiday, but God was fulfilling his promise that he had made to the apostle a long time ago. He had said to him, that he was going to enable him to give testimony, not only to the Gentiles and to Israel, but he would be able to bear his name before kings as well, and so here he makes the king of preachers a preacher to kings. Agrippa was not a very mighty king. In fact, Agrippa was king over a very small territory, and the Romans were the ones who allowed him to use the term. He wasn’t much of a king otherwise, but he was the last Jewish king, and he had a little bit of a territory.

He had a wife who was very well known. Bernice was as well known in her day, as Elizabeth Taylor is in ours. She also had had a rather sodden past, shoddy past, I should say. And in the palace

hall where the apostle was, was Festus, the Roman procreator of the land of Judaea, or under whom King Agrippa served. The palace hall was no doubt, decorated with all of the things that characterized the situation. There was Agrippa in the purple of a king, and Festus was in the scarlet of a Roman procreator. There were the soldiers about: the lectors, the centurions, and others. And then there was that little Jewish man that Voltaire called “that ugly little Jew.” But it’s quite clear that he was the commanding presence in that gathering. Paul, the “ugly little Jew.”

That reminds me of how Thomas Jefferson used to like to take out after evangelical Christianity. He once said, “Of this band of dupes and impostors” speaking about the gospel writers and the disciples of our Lord, “Paul was the great carafes, the first corrupter of the doctrines of Jesus.” This was Thomas Jefferson’s attitude to evangelical Christianity; one of the greatest opponents of the Church that America has ever known, due to the influence of Thomas Jefferson. He made many other statements in a similar vane, but in the final analysis, if we were to ask, “Who is the greater man, Thomas Jefferson or the Apostle Paul?” Well to my mind, it would be no contest whatsoever. Throughout the western world, the Apostle Paul is recognized as a devoted servant of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the writer of literature that is the object of perusal and study and spiritual blessing of countless multitudes down through the past nineteen hundred years.

If Felix, the procreator who preceded Festus, was the procrastinating man who, when Paul preached of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come trembled and said, “Go thy way this time. When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee,” Festus is the politely unprincipled Roman procreator. Spiritual things, evidently, made no real impression upon Festus at all. In fact he said once, when he talked about spiritual things, “I was perplexed about such matter of questions, as questions concerning the resurrection.” Agrippa is a man who should have known better, being a Jewish man, and being acquainted with the things that had happened in the land of Palestine over the past generation. He is typical of the “Curse of Casualness” toward spiritual things, by those who know a great deal about the things of the Word of God.

Well, the apostle is going to have an opportunity to defend himself before Agrippa. Agrippa said that he wanted to hear Paul, and so Festus brought him forth when Agrippa came to pay his respects to the new procreator, Festus, in the land of Judaea, and chapter 26 records Paul's great defense before Agrippa. He begins with what we would call an exordium of a speech; a beginning. And he begins in a sense, as one was expected to begin such a defense of himself, because he begins by speaking in a very polite way. Quintillion, who was the author of the greatest work on rhetoric in ancient times said, “The ears of our audiences must first be propitiated,” and so one might think that the apostle had read Quintillion, because he begins by stretching forth his hand, evidently, he had at least one hand free or he could speak in such a way, that even though he had bond, as he said later on, he could raise his hands. And he said, “I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee, touching all the things whereof I am accused by the Jews. Especially because I know that you are expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews, and, therefore, I ask you to hear me with longsuffering, or longsuffering patience.” So he begins in a very nice way, and I rather think that the apostle had not read Quintillion, but after all, he's been a Christian for many years now, and one thing you can be sure of with Christians, that if they've been a Christian for a lengthy period of time, something of the gentleness and courtesy that one would expect in the finest of human nature, comes to be theirs.

Now, of course, there are some of us who have never quite measured up yet, but generally speaking, the influences of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ are the influences of courteous gentleness, and an understanding of the situation in which one might find himself. And I think that this was just the natural product of a man who spoke of his life as being “for me to live, is Christ.” And he began in a very courteous way, and then after his opening exordium, he speaks of the absurdity of the accusation for Jewish belief. Notice what he says, “My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, all of the Jews know. They knew me from the beginning, if they would testify that I lived after the straightest sect of the Pharisees, and now I stand before you before you, being judged with respect to a promise and a hope for which all

of the twelve tribes await.” That is the hope of the resurrection. And Paul, in the climax of this opening section of his speech says, “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?”

Well, if we are Christian people, and who’ve read the Scriptures for a long time, I think we can understand what Paul is saying quite plainly, “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” We know the Scriptures speak of God as omnipotent, and therefore, he is able to do anything that he determines to do that is in harmony with his nature. He cannot, of course, square a circle, and things like that, which are either logically contradictory, or contrary to his nature, but anything within reason he can do. He is an omnipotent God. Now, we might forget that the resurrection itself does have things about it that suggest that it’s incredible. Think about it for just a moment. We now live in year whatever, I don’t know what it is, but after thousands, and thousands of years, there is hardly a spot on the face of this earth at which place, someone has not died.

And, furthermore, when we die, our bodies disintegrate, and become ultimately dust, so that the face of this globe is covered with the dust from bodies of individuals. And now you say to me, that God is going to raise the dead; that is, he’s going to take all of this dust, and he’s going to bring about a resurrection, and everyone, both saved and lost, shall receive resurrection bodies? That is something of an incredible thing. And, furthermore, if you go on to say, that in this resurrection those who are the believing individuals, shall have a body like our Lord’s own glorious body, while those who are not believers shall have a body, but a body in which they shall suffer the pangs of eternal death now, I think, I’m beginning to understand a little more how incredible such a doctrine is. Gathering all this dust into bodies? And bodies like our Lord’s own glorious body? You can see how that kind of doctrine, to a man who doesn’t have any understanding of the revelation of God, might think that it is an incredible doctrine.

But Paul says, “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” Because Agrippa is a person who has, ostensibly at least, listened to Holy Scripture, and if

has not listened to the specific indications of Holy Scripture of a resurrection, for if the Abrahamic promises are to be fulfilled there must be a resurrection of human bodies, he at least has come to know that God is an omnipotent God. And therefore, if he created this universe to affirm that he cannot raise an individual is surely a contradiction in terms. So Paul says, “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” This doctrine of the resurrection in a sense, becomes the way in which God distinguishes between, to use figurative language, between the Israelites and the Egyptians. And by that I mean, those who are believers ideally, and those who are unbelievers ideally.

Now, the Lord Jesus made it very plain that, “He that hears the Word of God is of him. Those that are of him hear the Word of God.” Listen to what he says in John chapter 8 in verse 47, “He that is of God heareth God’s words. Ye therefore hear them not, because you are not of God.” In chapter 10 in verse 26 our Lord Jesus again says, “But ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep as I said unto you.” So the resurrection is just one indication whereby we distinguish between those who are “of God,” and those who are not of God; those who are “of his sheep,” and those who are not of his sheep. “Why should it then be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?”

Now, having made that great statement, Paul asks Agrippa to look at his past life. “If you look at my past life Agrippa, you will see that, that cannot explain the great change that has taken place in me. I was the greatest heresy hunter that the Jews have ever known.” He speaks about how he persecuted the saints. He shut them up in prison. He received authority from the chief priests to do that. “When they were put to death, I gave my vote against them. I punished them often in every synagogue. I tried to persuade them to blaspheme, being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.” In fact, that is precisely what he was doing when he encountered the Lord on the Damascus Road. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Well no.” So Jeremiah states and implies. No, but God can, because God can change nature.

As the apostle wrote in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 in verse 17, “Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away. Behold, all things have become new.” That’s a generalization. Those who are in Christ are new creations, but if you want a specific illustration of it, a particularization of it, then think of the apostle’s conversion on the Damascus Road. And that’s what Paul goes on to describe, how the Lord interrupted him in his persecuting activity against the Christians on the Damascus Road and brought him to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. He speaks about how he was on his way to Damascus. He had authority, and then he says, “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 he heard the voice saying, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goads.”

New Testament scholars and others have puzzled a great deal over the conversion of Paul. Outside the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, it may well be the second most important event described in the New Testament; how God interrupted the Apostle Paul and what he was doing, and transformed this heresy hunter into one who preached the faith that he once sought to shatter and take out of human existence. It has, this particular conversion has been the object of a great deal of investigation. Some of the most amazing theories have been brought forward to explain what happened to the Apostle Paul. Believing Christians have believed that the Lord appeared to Paul and gave him a specific revelation. Others have sought to explain it in other ways. One of the favorite explanations was to explain it by epilepsy.

Joseph Klausner, the well-known Jewish author, pointing to epileptics like Mohammed, Augustine, Julius Caesar, Peter the Great, Napoleon, Pascal, Rousseau, Dostoyevski, and others, said that, “Evidently, the apostle suffered an attack of epilepsy on the Road to Damascus, and that explains what came to pass.” Mr. Spurgeon used to say, “Oh, if that is true, O God, give us many epileptics, for that is what we need.” Others have said, “No, he was the victim of a sunstroke because the Scripture does make special reference to the fact, that it was around noon, and we all know that at that particular spot, the sun does shine brightly,” and its no doubt true, that many people have

suffered sunstroke in that area. Ironside used to say, “It was a sonstroke. It just wasn’t s-u-n stroke, but s-o-n stroke. It was truly a sonstroke.”

The finest explanation and the only one that really satisfies the context and explains the life of the apostle is that this was an appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ to the apostle. And when he said, “I am Jesus who thou persecutest,” that is expressive of the truth. Notice that when our Lord spoke to Paul he said, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” The apostle might well have replied, “I’m not persecuting you Lord. I’m persecuting them.” But in that very term, our Lord makes it plain that, to put your hand upon one of the saints, is to put your hand upon him, for the New Testament makes very plain, that our Lord Jesus is the federal head of the saints. He is the covenantal head of the saints, and they’re identified with him. He represents them, and his experiences in representing them on the cross, are the fundamental facts of divine redemption. And thus, to touch his saints, is to touch him, for he stands for them. They are in Christ, and the characteristic phrase of the New Testament, “in Christ,” expressive of union with him, is applied in our Lord’s statement to the apostle, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me.” Then he says, “It’s hard for thee to kick against the goads.” That was a well-known figure of speech. Farmers who read this would have know it well, because it referred to the plowing of fields. An individual would have his oxen, and he would have his plow, and they usually plowed with one hand, with one hand on the plow, and then in one hand, they had a goad by which they kept the oxen at their work.

Now, some have thought that what this means, when the Lord said, “It’s hard for thee to kick against the goads,” that the apostle has had misgivings previously about what he was doing; that he really, deep down within, felt that maybe he was wrong in what he was doing. We don’t find any evidence of that in Paul’s writings, and so I suggest to you, I suggest to you because it’s a questionable point, that when the Lord said to Paul, “It’s hard for you to kick against the goads,” that what he was really talking about, was what Paul was from the divine standpoint, and from the divine standpoint, God as he had said to Ananias, “He’s a chosen vessel unto to me to bring my word before the Gentiles, and Israel, and kings,” it was God who was working out his life in such a way

that, ultimately, he would come on the Damascus Road to the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so the “goads” are not Paul’s feelings of self-doubt, but rather, the goads of divine providence, guiding him into the place that God wanted him to be, so that he might become what God intended for him to be; another indication of the divine work in the affairs of men. And after all, as we have said already, he works all things according to the council of his own will.

Paul goes over his commission. He speaks about the fact, that he was told that he would be the instrumentality to open the eyes of Gentiles’ enlightenment. Then secondly, to turn them from darkness to light; to emancipate them from the power of Satan unto God. And thirdly, that they might be endowed with spiritual blessing, and the spiritual blessing that he mentions, among many others, is the forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by the faith that is in him.

Now, I’d like for you to notice, that in the apostle’s writings, he never varied from this gospel which he was given right from the beginning. That is one of the characteristic things of the preachers of the New Testament. They were absolutely intolerant of other ideas of the way of salvation. Does that seem strange to us in the 20th century? Why of course it does, because one of the things that we are supposed to have in the 20th century, is tolerance. But tolerance, when it comes to things of God, is ultimately indifference to that which is true from God.

Elton Trueblood, whose name was never on the roll of any clearly evangelical church, a well-known philosopher of religion; he has written many books, books largely not read by evangelicals, though many of them should have been read by them. Mr. Trueblood has a book called, “Foundations for Reconstruction,” and in it he has a chapter on the “Necessity for Intolerance.” It is very striking, that one that most Christians would call “a man who tends to liberalism,” I regard him as a Christian man, but he in the eyes of many, tended to liberalism in theological things, and in this chapter Mr. Trueblood makes it plain, that much of so-called religious tolerance of our day is really indifference. Can we really be indifferent to those things which are basic constituents of Christianity and the Christian message? Trueblood rightly says that, “If the Old Testament prophets had been as

broad minded as many modern day religionists, and that monotheism would never have survived the Old Testament times.”

James Denney, a Scottish Presbyterian theologian of the earlier part of the twentieth century, in his great book, “The Death of Christ,” writes under the heading of “The Intolerance of Paul” these things, “The first commandment is, “Thou shalt have none other gods beside me,” and that’s the foundation of the true religion. As there is only one God, so there can be only one gospel. If God has really done something in Christ, on which the salvation of the world depends, and if he has made it known, then it’s a Christian duty to be intolerant of everything which ignores or explains it away. If we’re going to be faithful to the one God and the one gospel, how can we be tolerant of doctrines that are contrary to what the one gospel of the one God says? It’s only unfaithfulness, unbelief, tragic departure from a clear testimony to the Lord Jesus, that leads a Christian man, a supposedly Christian man, to be tolerant of other ways of salvation.”

Now, if you have any doubt about this, and I don’t think people in Believers Chapel generally have, unless I could probe down in your psyche, and you might say, “Perhaps those people that preach at Believers Chapel are wrong,” let me recite to you again, some of the familiar passages of the Word of God. Listen to the Apostle Peter. “Neither is there salvation in any other.” Listen to John. “He that hath the Son, hath the life. He that hath not the Son of God, hath not life.” Now, notice the last clause. “He that hath the Son, hath life.” Well, we can all agree on that. “He that hath the Son, hath life.” But there is also life in a lot of others too. After all, “He that hath the Son, hath life,” but he that hath the Rosh Nishi, hath life too, or he that hath Mohammed, he hath life too, or he that hath the Law of Moses, he hath life too we might say.

But John prevents anyone from saying that. “He that hath the Son, hath life. He that hath not the Son of God, God says, “No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him.” In other words, there is no life apart from the divine revelation that comes, ultimately, from the Lord Jesus Christ. One God. One gospel. One Lord who reveals the truth through the Holy Spirit. Intolerance. Faithfulness. Faithfulness to the Lord God. May God

deliver us from the mealy mouthed kind of tolerance that is supposed to be a great virtue in the twentieth century. It's a great mistake for a Christian to fail to stand up for the uniqueness of our Lord Jesus Christ and the uniqueness of the gospel of the Lord Jesus. There are three people in this audience at the present time who are saying, “The rest of you, I have my doubts about you today.”

Now Paul, after having mentioned his commission says that his actions reflect simply, obedience to the vision that he received. “Whereupon,” in the nineteenth verse we read, “O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.” Vision is not enough. Obedience must follow. Light is not enough. We must walk in the light that is given to us, and Paul explains how he has done this; how he has obtained help from God; how to this very day, he continues witnessing to small and great saying, “None other things that are found in Moses and the prophets.” In other words, “All I am simply saying, is that the things that Moses and the prophets wrote about, which you are supposed to believe, are the things that have been fulfilled in history, and I am speaking about them.” Well at this point, Festus a Roman, he doesn't understand what in the world is going on, like people in Believers Chapel occasionally who say, “Dr. Johnson is way off up there, and I'm down here.” Well, that can be true, you know, but often it's simply because we're not responsive to the Word of God.

People like to say Paul is unintelligible to the average man. No, Paul's not in, unintelligible to the average man. Paul makes the greatest of sense to an individual who is in despair over his relationship to the Lord God, because it's in Paul that we find a word for those who despair, and who need the mercy of God, and who need to be delivered from what they conceive to be an eternal wrath and condemnation. Paul has words for such people. He doesn't have words for people who are trusting in themselves, and the words that he speaks seem to have no relevance to them, but for those who are troubled over their relation to the Lord God, they are like a man who is thirsting to death, and finds water; a fresh spring, so the Apostle Paul, to those who have need deep down within.

Well, Festus is not that kind of a man. Festus is a typical Roman. He’s interested in the pragmatic kinds of things. He has a contempt for ideas, because the Greeks had ideas, and the Romans now are the, those who have authority in the world. They like to study the Greeks, but so far as ideas are concerned, the Romans were interested in things that work. I think the Romans must have been economists, because they were interested in the things that work.

This past week I read, I think it was in *The Wall Street Journal*, the senator from South Carolina who ran for president a couple of years ago said that, “Economists are people who discover things that work, and wonder if theory will support it.” Well, I thought that was rather interesting. It does explain why, “If you put all economists head to toe around the world, they would never reach a conclusion,” so someone else has said.

Well, Festus was a very pragmatic man, and so he was not interested in the things that Paul was saying, and Paul was going on, and obviously he was very impressive in the delivery that he had given. Finally, he broke in while Paul was still speaking and said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are beside yourself. Much learning has made you mad.” Well Paul stopped with that, and he turned to Festus and he said, “Festus, I’m not mad. I speak forth the words of truth and soberness, and 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.”

Well, someone has said that when a preacher begins or when a public speaker begins, the first attitude of the audience before he even speaks is, “Ho hum.” And if he’s still saying “Ho hum” at the end of what you’ve said, then you haven’t done the kind of job that you ought to do. I think Festus must have been just that kind of man, but he forgot, and sometimes we forget, that the preachers of the New Testament have an instinct for their quarry. They are like hunters who are seeking to find a soul, and so now Paul’s language becomes second person language, as he turns to Agrippa and he said, “Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.” In other words, he’s going to turn precisely to Agrippa. Evidently, he sense, senses there is not a whole lot of

hope for Festus at this point, but Agrippa may be responsive, and he says, “Believest thou. You are convinced, but are you converted?”

There is a difference. To say that the Bible is the Word of God, to say that a Christian faith is correct, is not the same as having come to a personal relationship to the Lord of the Christian faith, the Lord Jesus Christ. “King Agrippa, believest thou?” And Agrippa replies, this reply, incidentally, is capable of several different interpretations. It’s possible to take it sincerely, as if he said, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian,” but almost all New Testament scholars feel that, that cannot be the truth, even though that’s a New Testament truth. “To be close to faith, and yet not have faith,” Jesus did say, as I mentioned previously, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God to some.”

It’s possible too, that it’s a contemptuous dismissal. He might be saying something like, “Are you trying to persuade me to become a Christian?” I personally think it should be rendered this way, as an embarrassed evasion. Like so many people, when they are confronted by someone who asks them, “Are you a Christian,” flee to such things as, “Yes, I was baptized by Dr. Truett or Dr. Criswell twenty years ago,” or “I’m a member of the Presbyterian Church. My father was an elder,” or “I believe in God. Of course, I believe in God.” But little do they realize often, that all of the demons believe in God. Satan believed in God. He said, “Yea, hath God said?” He had no doubt about the existence of God. As a matter of fact, the Scriptures say that every single individual, deep down within his heart has had implanted there, because he’s created in the image of God, a conviction that God exists. And when a man says, “I don’t believe in God,” he’s fighting against something that God has implanted in human nature from the beginning. That’s why Paul writes as he does in Romans 1:18, “The wrath of God has been revealed from heaven, and it’s been revealed to men who are holding down the truth in unrighteousness.”

So I rather think that Agrippa at this point wants to evade the question, and so he says, this is the way Greek puts it literally, “In brief, you are trying to persuade me to act a Christian.” And maybe he said it with a smile on his face as if, “You cannot catch me in the trap that you would catch

me in Paul. In brief, you are trying to persuade me to act a Christian.” But of course, he’s not a Christian.

Now, Paul in responding says, “I would to God, that not only you, but also all that hear me this day, were both in a little and a great.” The Greek text says, “Altogether such as I am, except these bonds.” What a, what a gesture that must have been. I wish that all of you, look around. Bernice, the typical illustration of one who is having all of the “joys,” of life; wealth, riches, influence, a good time; the kind of thing that people think today is “the thing.”

And then there was King Agrippa. Agrippa, king, last of the Jewish kings; the only Jewish king that shall ever be until the Lord Jesus comes from heaven again. Look at him. The last Jewish king; king of a little territory way off up in the northeast. All the Roman soldiers standing around, Festus the Roman procreator, the lectors, the centurions, the leading citizens of the community; all are there and Paul says, “I wish that you all, all of you, would exactly as I am, except these bonds.” This is the man who said, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” And I say, I say with the apostle, that the happiest man, the most blessed man in that entire gathering, is that “Voltaire’s ugly little Jew.” The man who has a true perspective on human life, who understands what human life is, and has committed himself, by the grace of God, to the Lord Jesus Christ for time and for eternity. And I say to you in this audience, that there is no status in this society that can possibly compare with the status of “in Christ.” In Christ. That’s the greatest place for any person to be. Have money. Have position. Have influence. Satisfy your life’s goals if they do not reflect the goals of the Word of God, substandard living to that in Christ. Magnificent royalty is nothing compared to that.

May I just, in a few moments, the Cowboy game is tonight at eight o’clock in case you’ve forgotten. The triumph of Paul and the tragedy of Agrippa. Think of the opportunities of this man Agrippa. Just think of them. I don’t have time to explain them. He was a cultured man, grandson of Herod, royalty characteristic of them; all of the benefits that the influence of his family, the education, and so on provided a man. Something of a fair minded man, because he acknowledges at the end, that even though he hasn’t responded to the apostle, still he doesn’t see any reason for him

to be in bonds. A religious man who understood the nature of the Old Testament revelation to some extent, but a slave to his passions for his own sister is his wife, who has also been the wife of other individuals. He believed the Scriptures were the Word of God, so far as we know. He had known of Christ because he uses the term “Christian.” Paul hasn’t used that term. He knows of Christ. He knows those things that had happened in the land of Palestine. As Paul said, “They were not done in a corner.”

But he has resisted the appeal of the Holy Spirit. He listened to the generalities and the universalities, but when Paul began to speak of the particularities, particularities such as the things of, “How do these things pertain to you Agrippa, then he began to resist. You might wonder why. Well, I don’t know why. I know there was Bernice, who was by his side, and the relationship between the two was a sinful relationship. Maybe in Bernice’s case, who had also previously engaged in sinful relationships to other men, perhaps we can say, “Love of sin.” Or, there is Festus standing by, and with Festus it was the fear of man. “The fear of man bringeth a snare,” the Scriptures say, “but whosoever putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.” Festus is willing to bypass the law in order to do a favor for the people over whom he rules.

And then there is Paul. Why didn’t Paul come to faith in Christ until the Lord interrupted him on the Damascus Road? Well it was, no doubt, partially the shame of reproach of Christ in the case of many. In Paul’s case, he was completely, he was interrupted, but after all, when a person comes to the knowledge of the Lord like Paul, with the influence that he has; no more power, no more influence. He’d been a man who had advanced in Judaism beyond his contemporaries, and now he cannot exercise the power and influence that he had. He was going to be meeting now with the Christians, who meet in the upper rooms, and in the little houses, and furthermore, have people call them “Puritans” and “Calvinists,” and these like that. Well, that’s really an anachronism, isn’t it? Call them people who believe in holy life, and call them people who believe in the sovereign grace of God; that kind of thing. That’s never popular doctrine. That’s not popular today. That’s not even popular altogether in Believers Chapel. Are you startled? No, I’m not startled. You’re not startled

either. It's human nature that we have to contend with. Human nature is filled with sin, and it's the work of sanctification to constantly deliver us from our sin and misunderstanding, and that sanctification is still working in me. Some doubt it, but I'm trusting in the sovereign grace of God to ultimately sanctify me. I know that I need a great deal of it.

How may we settle the matter? Well, I think in our account here, the apostle has made it plain. He said that he was shown, that he should go out and tell the Gentiles that they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

There's a marvelous story with which I'll conclude, of a well-known preacher who was concluding his message, and in concluding his message he wanted to bring home the facts of the gospel of Christ, and he chose to use the text in the Old Testament, “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die O house of Israel?” And he said first, “Why will ye die? Why this desperate resolve? Why this firmness? Why will ye die? You vacillate elsewhere, why are you so obstinate here?” He emphasized the first word “why.” “What reason have you got? What motive have you got? What argument? What apologies? What excuses? Why will ye die?” And then turning to the little pronoun “you” he said, “Why will ye die, you gray heads?” And we have some gray heads here this morning. We have more at eight-thirty, but we have quite a few at eleven. “Gray heads, why will you die? You face soon, perhaps, the relationship with the Lord God. Why will you die? Or you young people, why will you die?” He said, “You who have such promise and opportunity, your life, so far as we know, lied ahead of you. Why will ye die?” And finally, he emphasized the final word, “Why will ye die? Why this determination to make your way ultimately to the lake of fire? Why are you so purposing in all that you do, to spend your time in separation from the Lord God? And he concluded with the text, “Turn ye, turn ye from your evils ways, for why will ye die O house of Israel?” Well, that's a marvelous way to conclude this sermon. Why will ye die?

Let's stand for the benediction.

That question is so important in the light of the fact, that the Lord Jesus Christ, by his blood that was shed, has made it possible for us to escape eternal death, and to enjoy the forgiveness of

sins, and also to have an inheritance among them who have been sanctified by the faith that is in me. Let me assure you of this one thing; you like Agrippa have been present in the preaching of the news concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you leave today, never having believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, you can be sure of one thing; that what has happened today in your life is no trivial thing. May God help you to realize that. May God help us all to realize that.

Let's bow together in a final word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the opportunities that are ours, and O, if there are some here who have never [End of Tape]