

# Saved by Grace

**Week Commencing 26 June 2023**

*Notes for next week's sermon on Acts 26:1-32– Hope and Trial*

**Please note** – that due to my impending holidays, these are the last time reading notes will be made available in this Acts series. (Not quite sure if people making use of these, Mark)

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## **DAY 1: Read Acts 23:11-25:27**

In Acts 23:12 through Acts 25:27, the plot centres around the Apostle Paul's legal battles and political manoeuvrings that follow his arrest. After Paul passionately defends his faith before the Jewish council, a group of more than forty Jews conspire to kill him, vowing not to eat or drink until they succeed. Paul's nephew learns of the plot and informs him, prompting Paul's nephew to report it to the Roman commander in Jerusalem. Taking the threat seriously, the commander arranges for a large group of soldiers to escort Paul to Caesarea for his safety. Paul is secretly moved out of Jerusalem during the night. In Caesarea, Paul appears before the Roman governor, Felix, who listens to accusations brought against him by Jewish leaders. Paul defends himself, asserting his innocence and commitment to the Way of Jesus. Despite the lack of evidence, Felix keeps Paul in custody for two years, hoping for a bribe. After Felix is replaced by Porcius Festus as governor, the Jewish leaders urge Festus to transfer Paul back to Jerusalem for trial. Aware that he won't receive a fair trial there, Paul exercises his right as a Roman citizen and appeals to Caesar. Festus grants his request, informing him that he will be sent to Rome for trial before Caesar.

During this time, King Agrippa and his sister Bernice visit Festus. Festus discusses Paul's case with Agrippa, and they agree that Paul could have been released if he hadn't appealed to Caesar. Festus arranges for Paul to present his case before Agrippa, providing an opportunity for Paul to share his testimony before prominent figures.

In his defence before Agrippa, Paul recounts his conversion, mission, and faith in Jesus Christ. Agrippa acknowledges Paul's innocence and concedes that Paul could have been set free if he hadn't appealed to Caesar. Ultimately, Paul's appeal to Caesar stands, and he is prepared for the journey to Rome for trial. Although we don't get to explore these chapters in detail, we still see that God is calling the shots – for the purpose of seeing that the good news continues to spread. That gospel eventually spread, all the way to YOU!

## **DAY 2: Read Acts 26:1-8**

Paul's defence before Agrippa, presents an opportunity for Paul to share his testimony and explain the reasons behind his faith in Jesus Christ. Paul begins by acknowledging King Agrippa's familiarity with Jewish customs and beliefs, highlighting his position as an expert in all matters concerning the Jews. This sets the stage for Paul to present his case effectively.

His testimony centres on his hope in the resurrected Jesus – which he related in v6, to the hope promised the Jewish ancestors. It is the resurrection that has put a target on Paul's back (v7b).

So Paul challenges Agrippa directly in v8 – *why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?* By emphasizing the reality of Jesus' resurrection, Paul asserts that the message he preaches is not based on mere human imagination or wishful thinking. Instead, it is rooted in the miraculous work of God, who has the power to conquer death and bring forth new life.

The resurrection of Jesus serves as the cornerstone of the Christian faith. It demonstrates God's victory over sin and death, affirming the truth of Jesus' divinity and the validity of His teachings. Paul's reference to the resurrection is meant to compel Agrippa, and anyone else who hears his testimony, to seriously consider the claims of Jesus and the life-transforming power of the Gospel. If Jesus has not been raised, then your faith is completely misplaced; and we are all deluded. Friends – keep pointing people to the RISEN Jesus!

### **DAY 3: Read Acts 26:9-18**

Paul now recounts the events surrounding his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus and the subsequent transformation it brought to his life. We first read of this back in Acts 9.

Paul begins by describing his initial opposition to the followers of Jesus. He admits that he had been fervently persecuting them, even to the point of imprisoning and voting for their death. However, he explains that it was during one of these journeys to Damascus that a bright light from heaven suddenly surrounded him and his companions.

Paul then narrates how he heard a voice speaking to him, identifying Himself as Jesus. Jesus questions Paul, asking why he was persecuting Him. This encounter leaves Paul stunned and trembling, as he realizes that he has been opposing the very Messiah he had previously denied.

Jesus commissions Paul to be a minister and witness to the Gentiles, turning them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Paul receives the divine mission to proclaim forgiveness of sins and a place among those sanctified by faith in Jesus.

From being a zealous persecutor of Christians, he becomes a fervent advocate and messenger of the Gospel. We see the grace and power of God to radically change the trajectory of a person's life and to use even the most unlikely individuals for His purposes.

No one is beyond the reach of God's transformative grace! Paul's conversion serves as a powerful testimony to God's ability to change hearts and redirect lives. It encourages us to have hope for ourselves and for others who seem far from God, recognizing that His transformative power knows no bounds. The commission given to Paul to open eyes and turn people from darkness to light reminds us of *our* derived responsibility to share Jesus for life and be agents of transformation in the world. We are called to proclaim the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ and to invite others into the light of His salvation.

### **DAY 4: Read Acts 26:19-32**

Here we witness the continuation of Paul's defence before King Agrippa, Festus, and other prominent figures. This passage portrays Paul's unwavering commitment to sharing the Gospel and his desire to see others come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul begins by explaining his obedience to the heavenly vision he received on the road to Damascus. He shares how he faithfully proclaimed the message of repentance, urging both Jews and Gentiles to turn to God and demonstrate their repentance through their deeds.

As Paul recounts his ministry, he acknowledges the opposition he faced from his own people, the Jews. Despite this resistance, he emphasizes his commitment to faithfully carry out the mission entrusted to him by Jesus. He recounts that he preached nothing but what the prophets and Moses had foretold – that the Messiah would suffer, be the first to rise from the dead, and proclaim light to both Jews and Gentiles.

As Paul passionately shares his message, Festus interrupts him, accusing him of being out of his mind due to his extensive knowledge. Paul responds by asserting his sanity and appeals directly to King Agrippa, whom he recognizes as knowledgeable in these matters. He respectfully asks Agrippa if he believes the prophets and presents a powerful question: "Do you believe the prophets? I know that you do."

Agrippa, seemingly moved by Paul's words, responds with a poignant remark: "In a short time, would you persuade me to be a Christian?" Agrippa acknowledges the persuasive power of Paul's message and recognizes its potential impact on his own life. However, he does not fully embrace the faith at that moment.

The passage concludes with Agrippa and Festus discussing Paul's case privately. They conclude that Paul could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar, indicating that they found no wrongdoing in his actions. Despite this, Paul's appeal to Caesar stands, ultimately leading to his journey to Rome.

This passage serves as a powerful example of Paul's unwavering commitment to his mission and his dedication to sharing the Gospel message. It highlights his boldness, wisdom, and knowledge of the Scriptures as he presents a compelling defence of the faith.

We are surely reminded of the importance of faithfully proclaiming the Gospel message, even in the face of opposition or scepticism. It encourages us to have confidence in the power of God's Word to transform lives and to boldly share the truth of Jesus Christ with others.