***Paul's Appeal for Prayer Support - No. 3
Romans 15:30-33
RO191-02***

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**Paul's Need For Prayer Support**

Romans 15:30-33, Paul's Appeal for Prayer Support. This is Segment Number 3. The apostle Paul has been describing his work of bringing the Jerusalem relief fund, which he has gathered from Gentile churches to the city of Jerusalem to relieve the famine conditions of the Jewish Christians in that city. He has, in this letter to the Christians in Rome, asked them to pray for his safety when he arrives in Jerusalem. He has been warned by the Holy Spirit that bonds and afflictions await him in Jerusalem. He doesn't know in what way or to what extent. He has also been warned, enroute to Jerusalem at the city of Tyre by the Christians there, that they had been alerted by God, that the situation in Jerusalem is not very promising for Paul.

When he gets to Caesarea, the prophet Agabus is also impressed by God to speak to Paul and again to alert him to the fact that in Jerusalem he will actually be bound and be delivered over to Jerusalem authorities for punishment. The apostle Paul himself senses that his direction before the Lord is to go on with the project, to be the head of the committee that is taking the fund to Jerusalem to deliver to the spiritual leaders there for distribution to the saints. Whatever happens, he feels he must go on and execute this mission. But he has been prepared that it is not going to go well when he gets there.

When he does arrive, upon the questionable advice of the Christian leaders in Jerusalem, Paul agrees to take part in a Jewish ritual to show that he still esteems the Jewish way of life. This is what angers the Jews against him; this is what the false accusations have been all about: that the apostle Paul has been denigrating Judaism, the Jewish way of life, the Jewish customs, and teaching Jews to ignore their heritage. This has not been the case at all.

**Events Leading to Paul Being Seized**

The unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem therefore seize Paul in the temple. They stir up a riot, bring false charges against him. He is accused of preaching against the Jewish people, against the Mosaic Law, against the temple worship and of bringing a Gentile into the forbidden area of the temple grounds. None of those things were true. But Paul had to be rescued by the Roman authorities so that they would not kill him on the spot. He does try to reason with the mob, and he does this by describing his own Jewish heritage, his own education as a Pharisee in the very city there of Jerusalem, and his great devotion as a Pharisee to the Mosaic law. He tells, in fact, his dedication was so great that he was one of the first of the persecutors of what he calls the Way, meaning the "Way of the Christians," the "Way of Christianity." He was among the first to imprison and to execute Christians.

Then he tells them of his salvation experience on the road to Damascus when he heard a voice from heaven, which proved to be the voice of what he calls the Righteous One, meaning the Lord Jesus Christ. He looked up into heaven and there he saw Jesus standing before him, alive indeed, as the son of God, and as Israel's true Messiah Savior. There was no doubt in Paul's mind, at that point, that the leaders of Jerusalem had lied about the body of Jesus being stolen by the disciples and that he hadn't really been resurrected, it was very clear to Paul now that indeed Christ was alive and that he had made an enormous mistake. In that moment, the apostle Paul called Jesus Lord, which means "deity," and recognizing him as Messiah Savior. "Lord, what do you want me to do?" Paul described himself as one who has been chosen to witness and that he was eager to witness to the Jewish nation concerning the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Paul was shocked to discover in his Damascus Road experience that he had actually been persecuting the Lord Jesus Christ. Because that's the question the Lord put to him, "Paul why do you persecute Me?" And the reason that he was persecuting Jesus, was that he was attacking the body of Christ, the Church, the believers of this age.

So, Paul tried to witness to the Jews in Jerusalem following his conversion, and they immediately reacted against him. So, in a vision, the Lord directed him to flee for his life from Jerusalem.

**Paul is Seized**

The Jews continue to listen to him. The mob was now quiet. And then he said something that brought everything to an end. He said to them that 'God had commissioned him to take salvation to the Gentiles.' When he said that, the mob went into a frenzy again, because this is what angered them. Paul was telling people everywhere that a Gentile has as much access to God now as a Jew, and a Gentile doesn't have to be associated with the Mosaic Law to get to God. That's what angered them: a Gentile has as much access to God and maybe even more than a Jew, and he doesn't have to go through the Mosaic Law to get there. When he said that, the mob went into its rage again, they were infuriated at this suggestion. And again, Paul had to be rescued by the Roman soldiers from the enraged mob which wanted to kill him.

The Roman commander arranged for Paul to be examined by the Jews' Sanhedrin court, the religious court, to determine his guilt. At that point, at the session of the Sanhedrin court, Paul declared that he was on trial because he believed in resurrection from the dead, by which he meant through the salvation in Christ Jesus.

Well, when he said that, he broke up that meeting because the Sanhedrin was made up of liberal Jews who were Sadducees, who did not believe in resurrection, and of the biblical Jews, the Pharisees, who did believe in resurrection, so the Sadducees and Pharisees went at one another, and that meeting came to an end. Once more, in order for Paul not to be killed, Roman soldiers rushed in and literally extracted him from the room by lifting him off his feet and carrying him out so that he got out of that debate about the resurrection. However, Paul, in a vision, is reassured by the Lord, 'You are going to get to Rome.'

And this is what we're doing, we're bringing in the Book of Acts here to give you the background, that Paul is a living, breathing human being who suffers all the kinds of agonies and concerns that we do and how God comes through. God is really out there. He really is working. There's no doubt about it in Paul's mind. Paul was just feeling his way as you and I must feel our way, how he's working and where he's going, and to know enough doctrine to avoid making false assumptions and making wrong moves with our lives.

So, Paul is removed and the Roman officer in charge, the commander, through Paul's nephew, gets the word that a group of 40 some men have formed a conspiracy, vowing to murder Paul from ambush. So, Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander, orders a detail of soldiers gathered together, actually 470 of them. And at 9 p.m. that night, he decides to remove Paul from Jerusalem altogether. They take him 62 miles to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, to the lovely city of Caesarea.

**Paul Taken to Felix**

The commander, Claudius Lysias, sends Paul from Jerusalem actually to the governor of Judea, Felix, who is residing in Caesarea. He sends a letter explaining the charges against Paul. The governor, Felix, agrees to hear Paul's case when the accusers arrive from Jerusalem. So, please turn with me to Acts 24, where we pick up the story of Paul's progress toward Rome. In Acts 24, the delegation from Jerusalem arrives. Ananias the high priest comes. Some of the ruling elders come with him, and they bring their lawyer with them, a man named Tertullus. They come to Caesarea to accuse Paul.

Acts 24:1, "And after 5 days, the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with a certain attorney named Tertullus; and they brought charges to the governor against Paul. [Acts 24:2,] And after Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying to the governor, 'Since we have through you attained much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation, [Acts 24:3,] we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness. [Acts 24:4,] But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing.'"

He gives an introductory compliment to Felix and then proceeds to list the charges. Paul is accused of fomenting trouble among the Jews, being a leader of the Nazarenes, meaning the Christians, and desecrating the temple with the Gentiles.

Acts 24:5, "'For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. [Acts 24:6,] And he even tried to desecrate the temple; and then we arrested him. (And we wanted to judge him according to our own law. [Acts 24:7,] But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands, [Acts 24:8,] ordering his accusers to come before you.) And by examining him yourself concerning all these matters, you will be able to ascertain the things of which we accuse him.' [Acts 24:9,] And the Jews also joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so."

The Jews were very confident. They thought that they had a Matlock in Tertullus, and that they knew how it was going to end up. They knew that 60 minutes later this guy was going to be nailed once more without any problems. But they were in for a big surprise. Paul responds to his accusers simply by denying the charges and saying you haven't proven anything.

[Acts 24:10,] "And when the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul responded: 'Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense, [Acts 24:11,] since you can take note of the fact that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. [Acts 24:12,] And neither in the temple, nor in the synagogue, nor in the city itself did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot.'" Paul said, 'I haven't even discussed these religious matters so that anybody could say that I was creating a contention. I went up there to worship and I went about my business quietly and privately.' Acts 24:13, "'Nor can they prove to you the charges of which they now accuse me.'"

Now, Paul goes on to admit that he is a follower of the way of Christianity and he has based that, he says, upon the Old Testament Scriptures. You must remember there was no New Testament Bible at this time, and Paul's preaching was on the basis of what the Old Testament revealed about the coming Messiah and how Jesus beautifully in every detail fulfilled those predictions and those identifying qualities. Paul further says he is standing, waiting for the resurrection from the dead, and living a life of integrity himself.

Acts 24:14, "'But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law, [the Old Testament Scriptures,] and that is written in the prophets; [Acts 24:15,] having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, [That is a resurrection.] that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. [Acts 24:16,] In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and men.'"

And Paul very slyly slips in there the statement that the resurrection that he is looking forward to is going to be a resurrection of the righteous, the born-again ones, the saved ones, the Heaven-bound ones, and also of those who are unrighteous, the lost people who are headed for the Lake of Fire. He makes that distinction and, in a very subtle way, he brings to focus the fact that there is a right and there is a wrong. There is a way to go to Heaven, God's way, and there is a way not to go to Heaven, which is man's way, which will take you in the other direction. Paul is making it very clear that one of these days, as is true in our day as well, we're going to find out who's right and who's wrong. That's a fact of life when you deal with God; He does not wishy-washy around concerning that which has to do with His own integrity. And Paul says, 'I take this position and I can tell you that I do with perfect integrity of conscience. I'm not putting on any front. I know what I'm talking about. I know what I saw on that Damascus road. I want to tell you fellows, 'I am going to Heaven and I know it, and you are challenging me on that very fact. One of us is wrong.' And in a subtle way, Paul was saying 'some of the people standing here are going to Heaven and some of the people standing here are going to end up in a Lake of Fire.'

So, in Acts 24:17, Paul explains to Felix what he was doing in Jerusalem in the first place. "Now after years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings;" that is the Jerusalem relief fund.

Then he talks about his participation in the ritual of the Nazarite vow under the Mosaic Law, which is what caused the problem in the first place. It really was, I think, bad advice to tell him to do this and he should have avoided it. In any case, he tells what happened, Acts 24:18 in the process of bringing this offering and presenting and bringing the relief fund and in presenting the offerings in the ceremony in the temple of the Nazarite vow, Acts 24:18 says, "'in which they found me occupied in the temple, having been purified, without any crowd or uproar. But there were certain Jews from Asia - [Acts 24:19,] who ought to have been present before you, and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me.'" Paul says, 'This trouble was begun by a group of Jews from Asia who particularly hate me because my ministry has been in Asia. I have been winning Gentiles and planting churches all over this part of the Roman Empire. Jews have been saved. These Jews who are in Jerusalem at this point, on this occasion, they know who I am. This is why they hate me. And as a matter of fact, Felix, Governor, I don't see them standing here. You know that it is a basic principle of Roman law that you must face your accuser in a court of law. Where are my accusers? I am a Roman citizen. I have the right to see these people eyeball to eyeball. They are the ones who brought the accusation. They caused the trouble, but they're not here.' Paul knows his way around.

Acts 24:20, "'Or else let these men themselves tell what misdeed they found when I said before the Council.'" He said, 'but since those who brought the charges aren't here, let these who represent them tell what the Council in Jerusalem decided.' Well, the Council decided they couldn't decide. They didn't know whether he was guilty or not. The mob just wanted to kill him.

[Acts 24:21,] "'other than for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, "For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today."'" Paul says, 'All I did was say, "Hey, I believe in the resurrection of the dead." And pretty soon, all these guys are fighting each other and they're about ready to tear me apart.' Here he's playing a little innocent guy. He knew very well he was going to start a riot by saying that, 'I believe in the resurrection of the dead and that's why I'm here.' Well, of course, that was a true statement. But he knew the Sadducees and the Pharisees would go at one another over that issue. Well, that ended up the trial. So, they didn't bring any charges against him.

Acts 24:22, "But Felix, having a more a having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off, saying, 'When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case.'" Felix had had some contact with Christians. Governor Felix said, 'These Christians are not really bad guys. I know something about the Christians. I've had experience with these who follow the Way of Christ. And I have reservations about what you're telling me, that these are bad people and that their primary leader, their representative, is the worst of the lot.' So, he says, 'I'm going to ask the commander who is in charge of all this to come down from Jerusalem. And I'm postponing this case until he arrives.'

Acts 24:23, "And he gave orders to the centurion for him to be kept [That is Paul, to be kept] in custody and yet have some freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from ministering to him. [Acts 24:24,] But some days later, Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul, and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus." Felix postpones the hearing until the commander can come. And then, he has another session with Paul privately. Apparently, his Jewish wife, Drusilla, is interested in Paul. She is a true Jewess faithful to Moses, and she'd like to hear what this man has to say. So, Drusilla the Jewess and Felix, the Roman commander, come to hear what Paul has to say about his faith in Jesus Christ.

Acts 24:25, "And as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, 'Go away for the present, and when I find time, I will summon you.'" Lo and behold, Paul is talking about some big human problems. There's a God out there. He is the creator. He has revealed himself through Scripture and he is holy. He abhors sin and no one or anything can stand in His holy presence that is sinful, that has any moral guilt that has not been covered in some way by an act of God. Therefore, Paul talks about absolute righteousness: being absolutely perfect to be able to go into Heaven. He talks about a person's conduct of self-control, not acting like a brutal barbarian beast. He talks about a time of facing this holy God and having judgment pronounced guilty or not guilty. The very thing that Paul was doing, standing before Felix to be judged guilty or not guilty, Felix is reminded that there's a God up there who's going to make that decision on you; and when He does, it's going to determine where you spend eternity in eternal bliss or eternal agonies.

Felix comes under conviction as Paul speaks about these moral issues. Now, part of the thing that bothered Felix, perhaps, was the fact that he was now in his third marriage. And in fact, his marriage to Drusilla came about as a result of his breaking up her marriage. Felix himself was known for being very unfair. His injustices were well known in the course of his governmental administration, and he was known for enormous lack of self-control. Felix could break out in an anger, a rage, just like that. And history records these things about this man. So, Paul is standing in front of this man and here's the Spirit of God guiding him. What is Paul doing? He touches all the sore spots in the life of this man: moral guilt, being unfair, no self-control, degenerating into a wild animal, brutality, ... Felix says, 'Well, listen, it's time for lunch. We'll get back with you again and I'll hear you when it's a little more convenient.'

For 2 years this goes on in Caesarea, on and off conversations with Felix. One of the most unjust things that Felix did was developed his wealth by bribery. So, for 2 years, he's hoping that from some source, a bribe will come to him to release Paul. He knows that he's free to do that. He knows he [Paul] has violated no Roman law. Therefore, Felix will not get in trouble as governor to do this, but he's hanging on to get something out of it.

Acts 24:26, "At the same time too, he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse with him." (just to give Paul an opening to bring up the idea of a bribe.) [Acts 24:27,] "But after 2 years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned." Felix was transferred out of the governorship. A new governor comes in whose name is Festus, Porcius Festus. And Felix, to pander to the Jews, leaves Paul a prisoner.

**Paul Before Porcius Festus**

Acts 25, Paul now has a hearing before a totally new judge. Maybe there is now hope. This must have been very agonizing to him. He came to do a kindness to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. He followed the advice of the Jewish elders, the Christian elders, in participating in a Mosaic Law ritual to try to reassure his enemies that he's not antagonistic toward Judaism, that he wishes them good. Out of that act of legalism comes the loss of 2 years of freedom. Paul is really in agony by this time. He had such great plans. You remember he's on his way to Spain. Do you know how long two years has now become for the great journey to Spain? He lives in a time when people didn't live long. He's getting up in years. His strength is waning. If he's going to do it under the harsh conditions of missionary work at the time, he's got to get on with it. Every year makes a big difference now. So in Acts 25, Festus comes to the authority of governor. The first thing he does is goes to Jerusalem to confer with the Jewish leaders about Paul. The Jewish leaders there suggest that he should be returned to the jurisdiction of Jerusalem for the examination by Festus because again, they want to do the old thing they've always been doing to their communicators from God from time immemorial. They said 'We can get Festus to say, "Transfer him back to Jerusalem. Someplace along that 62-mile trail, we'll have an ambush. We'll kill Paul along the way. And that'll be the end of the argument."'

Acts 25:1, "Festus therefore, having arrived in the province, three days later went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. [Acts 25:2,] And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul; and they were urging him, [Acts 25:3,] requesting a concession against Paul, that he might have him brought to Jerusalem (at the same time, setting an ambush to kill him on the way)." These Jews realized that they had a very weak case against Paul, and they were not hopeful that if Festus was an honest judge that he would condemn Paul.

Festus, however, does not accede to their wish. Acts 25:4, "Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly. [Acts 25:5,] 'Therefore,' he said, 'let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him.'" This sounds favorable; Festus says, 'No, I'm not going to transfer him up here to Jerusalem. I'm going to Caesarea. You bring the men who can present this case and we'll try it there down at Caesarea.'

So, Festus, in order to placate the Jews, tries to get Paul to agree to a trial in Jerusalem when he sees Paul in Caesarea, but Paul refuses to do this. And when Paul sees that Festus is putting this pressure on him, then Paul does what he has not wanted to do for all this time. He has not wanted to prolong this. He hoped it would come to an end. But now he says he has to take his right as a Romans citizen to claim transfer of the trial to Nero Caesar, himself, in Rome.

Acts 25:6, "And after he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them, he went down to Caesarea; and on the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. [Acts 25:7,] And after he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove; [Acts 25:8,] while Paul said in his own defense, 'I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar.' [Acts 25:9,] But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, 'Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?' [Acts 25:10,] But Paul said, 'I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know.'" Paul is beginning to lose patience to talk to the governor like that. He tells him, 'You know the truth. You know, I am not guilty. Your suggestion that I should go up and be tried in that hostile area of Jerusalem leads me to conclude I must appeal my case to Caesar.'

[Acts 25:11] "'If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar.'" The die is cast. [Acts 25:12,] "Then when Festus had conferred with his counsel, he answered, 'You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go.'"

**Paul Before Agrippa and Bernice**

At this point, a friend of Festus arrives. He is the king of an area of the province of Palestine. His name is Agrippa, and he comes with his sister Bernice to Caesarea. Acts 25:13, "Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea, and paid their respects to Festus. [the new governor, Acts 25:14,] And while they were spending many days there, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, 'There is a certain man left prisoner by Felix; [Acts 25:15,] and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation upon him. [Acts 25:16,] And I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges.'" So, he explains the situation that is before him, and he wants Agrippa's advice.

This man Agrippa was actually Agrippa the Second. He was the great grandson of Herod the Great, who was the persecutor when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. He was the ruler at that time. And therefore Agrippa the Second was well versed in Old Testament Scriptures and in Judaism. So, he was indeed qualified to hear Paul's case. As a matter of fact, the Romans had given him the authority to appoint the Jewish high priest and to be the custodian of the Temple Treasury. His sister, Bernice, lived a profligate life and she had an incestuous relationship with her brother, Agrippa the Second. So, these were not two pristine characters who were standing there in the presence of Felix and of Paul, God's man, to judge God's man. These were not very noble creatures. They were, just as always in Satan's world and powers, in positions of great power and authority over this poor man, vile as the two of them were.

So, Festus reviews the case with Agrippa, says he can't figure out this religious issue, and asks for his help. So, Acts 25:17, he says, "'And so after they had assembled here, I made no delay, but on next day took my seat on the tribunal, and ordered the man to be brought. [Acts 25:18,] And when the accusers stood up, they begin bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting; [Acts 25:19,] but they simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a certain dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive. [Acts 25:20,] And being at a loss how to investigate such matters, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there stand trial on these matters. [Acts 25:21,] But when Paul appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar.'"

So, Agrippa himself says he's interested in a meeting with this Paul. Acts 25:22, "And Agrippa said to Festus, 'I also would like to hear the man myself tomorrow.' 'Tomorrow,' he said, 'you shall hear him.' [Acts 25:23,] And so, on the next day when Agrippa had come together with Bernice, amid great pomp, and had entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in." Shades of the Diet of Worms: here is poor little Luther coming in. The king is there. All the mighty men of the religious world are there. The authorities are there, the soldiers are there, and they bring this poor guy into this pomp and circumstance of mighty surrounding of personages. Poor Paul, what a position to be in. This lowly prisoner. Prisoner of the most-high God is brought into a room filled with the pomp and circumstance of the high and the mighty. Festus tells the assembly of notables that the Jews wanted Paul killed, but that he found no justification for doing so.

Acts 25:24. "And Festus said, 'King Agrippa, and all of you gentlemen here present with us, you behold this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer. [Acts 25:25,] But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him.'" Festus, however, was concerned that he had no specific charges. Acts 25:26, "'Yet I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord. Therefore I have brought him before you all and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the investigation has taken place, I may have something to write. [Acts 25:27,] For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him.'" How true.

**Paul's Defense Before Agrippa**

So, Paul has this hearing before Agrippa. Acts 26:1, "And Agrippa said to Paul, 'You are permitted to speak for yourself.' Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense: [Acts 26:2,] 'In regard to all the things which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.'" Paul says, 'I'm really happy to have you as my judge Agrippa. You have a frame of reference from Old Testament Scripture to know what I'm talking about.' So, Paul, in Acts 26:4-8 goes through delineating his early life as a Jew and the background that he had as a Pharisee.

In Acts 26:9-11, he talks about his fanatical zeal in punishing Christians, furiously raging against them, going from synagogue and forcing them to blaspheme against Jesus Christ, and putting them to death. And then, beginning in Acts 26:12, he tells about his salvation experience on the road to Damascus: how at midday, he saw a light that hit him brighter than the sun, he fell to the ground and he heard in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' He said, 'And then he asked, "Who art thou Lord?' And he said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But arise, and stand on your feet. For this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.' So, the apostle Paul tells very clearly exactly what happened: how he was saved, and how he was commissioned as a special missionary of the Lord Jesus Christ, especially to the Gentile world.

And then in Acts 26:19-23, Paul describes his missionary ministry among the Jews and among the Gentiles, the sufferings that he experienced, but the proclamation in great faithfulness of the message. In Acts 26:24, Agrippa responds to Paul. "And while Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, 'Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad.'" And what Festus implies there is that 'this is a delusion, this never happened to you. You just dreamed this. Paul you're really crazy. You've been hitting the books too much. You ought to go on a vacation.'

[Acts 26:25,] "But Paul said, 'I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth.'" Have you ever had your relatives tell you you're crazy when've you testified to them about the Lord? Have you ever had your friends say, 'You're just crazy!' as you've spoken to them of the great things of the doctrines of the Church Age. It's the old story, isn't it? And in this moment, Paul knew again, there's nobody in all the world that any of us as Christians can speak to and get through the natural darkness and blindness that is upon their minds unless God the Holy Spirit Himself comes in and jerks the scales off the minds. You can talk yourself blue in the face. You can give people a chance to walk down aisles and raise their hands or do any kind of monkeyshines you want, but until the time comes when God the Holy Spirit lifts the veil and they see their condition of lacking absolute righteousness and of needing that absolute righteousness and only able to secure it through a free grace gift of the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no hope. You will never get through.

You know what you're going to be tempted to do? You're going to be tempted to compromise. You're going to be tempted to accommodate. You're going to be tempted to back off and not say to these people, 'This is the truth. It is the Word of God. It is not the word of man. If you will not accept it, you will pay for it for all eternity in the Lake of Fire.' You cannot compromise on the issue of the gospel. And that's what Paul was talking about here.

The king considers him downright crazy. Paul denies his insanity. And in Acts 26:26, he points out to Agrippa, he says, 'You know, I'm not talking nonsense Agrippa. You know what's been taking place in Jerusalem. You know all about Jesus. You know about the day of Pentecost when Christianity began. Christianity is anchored in history.' Acts 26:26, "'For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I'm persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.'" Everybody knows what happened.

Then he pushes Agrippa into a corner because he knows that Agrippa really does believe the Old Testament Scriptures and he does know that the Old Testament Scriptures have really been fulfilled, the messianic Scriptures have really been fulfilled by Jesus. Acts 27:27, "'King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? [Do you believe the Bible?] I know that you do.' [Acts 26:28,] And Agrippa replied to Paul, 'In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.'" Acts 26:28 is a joke. This is Agrippa trying to take the pressure off. Having forced him to admit that he does believe the Scriptures, the implication is: "How can you deny that the Scriptures that you know so well about the Messiah have all been fulfilled in Jesus Christ? 800 years ago, Isaiah told us the very city in which he's going to be born. 800 years ago, Isaiah told us told us that he would have a supernatural birth by a virgin woman. He told us one thing after another about the powers of healing that this man would possess. He told one thing after another that had been fulfilled from Old Testament Scripture. You know this Agrippa, and you know that Jesus is the One." So, Agrippa says, 'Hey, man, you keep this up and you're going to make me a Christian.' He's trying to take the pressure off and to deflect the conviction that the Holy Spirit is beginning to press upon his kingly heart.

Paul concludes his remark by expressing his hope that all in the room would someday be just like he is, without the chains that are on his wrists and on his feet, that they would all be born-again people is what he means. Acts 26:29, when he said, 'You're almost going to make me a Christian,' "And Paul said, "I would to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am," a born-again human being headed for Heaven for all eternity, no questions, no doubt, because God gave it to me as a free gift apart from any of my doings. 'I wish all of you were like I am at this moment, except for my imprisonment.'

At this point, Agrippa walks aside to Festus and gives him his opinion. Acts 26:30, "And the king arose and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them, [Acts 26:31,] and when they had drawn aside, they began talking to one another, saying, 'This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment.' [Acts 26:32,] And Agrippa said to Festus, 'This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.'" Well, Festus could have set him free. Felix could have set him free. Festus could have come in and set him free; he knew what the case was. The only reason Paul that appealed to Caesar was because they were railroading him to his death and therefore he had no alternative but this.

At this point, the apostle Paul has a little bit of a breather. And his prayer for protection from the disobedient Jews in Jerusalem, remember, that's what we started with, we're on prayer Number One, he had 2 prayers in Romans. The first prayer was 'please pray that I'll be protected from the Jews in Jerusalem,' the disobedient ones he calls them. By that he meant these people who want to kill me, 'please pray that their efforts will be frustrated.' And by the grace of God and a variety of miracles that I have read to you from Scripture itself, and this most impressive record of Dr. Luke in Acts (who incidentally was with Paul through all of this and who now will get on board the ship with Paul, along with one other believer to head for Rome). Next time we will pick up that story.

But what an inspiring response to the power of prayer. The Jews should have been able to kill this man without any difficulty. Do you know what it is to stand among a bunch of people who are rioting, who are charging against you, who could easily get near you and kill you? And yet, by the grace of God, nobody was able to touch Paul. He was God's man. He was an immortal until his life ministry was completed.

The apostle Paul has had his prayer marvelously answered. Prayer is the way to deal with God in the Christian life. And Paul has certainly demonstrated that in this particular experience.

When he puts out to sea, that God is still with him. And one of the most exciting areas of the Scripture is the description of the journey to Rome and the final arrival there and to meet the Christians at that point.

Some people have wondered why Luke would have taken so much trouble to write this detailed sea journey to Rome. But it is filled again with the operations of the grace of God, the protective hand of God, and the reality that God is there and listening. He is aware when you speak to Him. Students of the Greek language are not particularly fond of the writings of Luke. In the Gospel of Luke, you have 600 words that don't appear anywhere else in the New Testament. Do you know what it is to learn 600 words you are only going to use once? It is hard reading, but he is an educated man. Doctors, you know doctors. If it wasn't for God the Holy Spirit, Luke would have written like all doctors do, you never can understand what they write. But Luke, under the Spirit of God, was led to put these final records in the Book of Acts. The thrilling journey to Rome, next week.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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