

- **Hello everyone! This is pastor Ethan, thanks for joining with me today. It is Sunday, May the 29th, and we are nearing the end of Paul's time in Caesarea. We have a LOT TO COVER TODAY, so get your bible, you can print out the notes from Trinity's website, and we will get started.**
- **There's a passage we often read at our Good Friday services- a prophetic description of Jesus from Isaiah 53- goes like this.**

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. ³ He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

- **As we've gone through ACTS we've seen how Jesus' followers often shared Isaiah's description. They weren't beautiful, royalty, or desirable by appearance or status. They were often despised, rejected, familiar with pain, and held in low esteem.**
- **And yet, to these people lacking any worldly power or influence, Jesus said that on account of His name they would testify before Kings and governors.**

Luke 21:12 *"But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name.*

- **If you remember back in Acts 9, right after Paul's conversion God came to Ananias, telling him to go minister to Paul- who was still blind. When Ananias was a bit skeptical...**

Acts 9:15 *But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.*

- **Just a few years earlier than the events of today's story, Paul's friends were begging him not to go to Jerusalem, and a prophet foretold that if he did, he would be bound and handed over to his enemies. At that time it would have seemed impossible that God's words to Ananias about Paul would ever come to pass- but they did, and in an incredibly dramatic way.**
- **In a scene that could be out of 'Ben Hur', Paul is brought before Festus, the Roman Governor of Palestine and Herod Agrippa the 2nd, the King of Judea.**
- **It is an event with...**

✠ Lots of pomp and an incredible circumstance

- **Pick our story up in Acts 25:23...**

Acts 25:23-27 *The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high-ranking military officers and the prominent men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. ²⁴ Festus said: "King Agrippa, and all who are present with us, you see this man! The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him in Jerusalem and here in Caesarea, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. ²⁵ I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor I decided to send him to Rome. ²⁶ But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write. ²⁷ For I think it is unreasonable to send a prisoner on to Rome without specifying*

the charges against him.”

- *In addition to Festus and Agrippa the room is filled with local dignitaries and officers of the Roman army. Paul is about to speak to the most prestigious and influential group of people that could have been gathered outside of Rome itself.*
- *Festus sums up the matter- the Jewish people want Paul dead, Paul is innocent but has appealed to Caesar.*
- *Part of Festus' responsibility here is to tell the Roman emperor WHY he is sending Paul to him, especially if there are no credible charges against him, and like any self-respecting political appointee, Festus engages in a little CYA. “So.. Agrippa and all of you, what can I tell the Emperor YOU think about Paul? I've got nothing.”*
- *Basically, Festus is engaged in a high stakes fishing expedition here, and Paul is going to use this to full benefit.*
- *With the eyes and ears of the room fixed upon him, Paul begins, essentially, with his resume'..*

† Paul's resume

Acts 26:1-5 *Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.” So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: ² “King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, ³ and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently. ⁴ “The Jewish people all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. ⁵ They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that I conformed to the strictest sect of our religion, living as a Pharisee.*

- *In other words, referring to his accusers, Paul says “I am one of them. I'm not just Jewish, I was a Pharisee, and a strict one at that. I'm not some outlier, some stranger. Not only are these people my people, but my hope is their hope. IN FACT, this HOPE is the reason I stand here accused.*

† Accused of Hope Paul continues...

Acts 26:6-8 *And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today. ⁷This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me. ⁸ Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?*

- *Some scholars have noted that this is one of the most important statements in Acts about how Jesus and the Gospel are inseparably bound to the Jewish hope of messiah.*
- *Paul's point is that he didn't invent a new religion- rather, the hope of Christ is the very hope held by Israel all the way back to Abraham.*
- *And then, once again, Paul proclaims that the center of this hope is the RESURRECTION.*
- *I have this mental image of Paul raising his hands in the air and proclaiming, incredulously, “WHY would any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?”*
- *To his jewish accusers, Paul says “YOU KNOW THIS! In fact, this is the reason you are trying to kill! For to admit to Christ's resurrection you must also lay down your role as gatekeepers between God and man, and all the power and perks that come with that.*

- To everyone in the room, Paul is really saying “IT’S NOT INCREDIBLE that GOD raises the dead!” The evidence of Christ’s resurrection is overwhelming, and resurrection is THE CENTRAL and ESSENTIAL belief of this new movement making its WAY across the Mediterranean world.
- Looking at the broader teaching of the NT, we could add – “And when we speak of resurrection, we’re not just talking about CHRIST’S resurrection--- but BECAUSE of Christ’s resurrection, there is the CURRENT reality of the RESURRECTION of EVERY BELIEVER.
- YES, we will experience physical resurrection at Christ’s return, but if you honestly search out the NT, you will see that the most important reality of our resurrection is SPIRITUAL, and this is something that has ALREADY HAPPENED.
- The gospel doesn’t say we WILL BE new creations in heaven, it proclaims we ARE new creations right now.
- In Romans six, Paul says
¹³Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; - **past tense, completed...** and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.
- In 1st John 3:14 we read...
 We know that we **have passed** from death to life, because we love each other.
- HOW do we know this? Because the NEW CREATION presence of CHRIST IN US Inevitably will change HOW WE THINK, HOW WE LIVE.
- Sorry not sorry... I can get a little obsessed over this reality.... SPEAKING OF OBSESSED... Paul goes on to describe how he, more than anyone, persecuted the first followers of Christ.

† Obsessed

Acts 26:9-11 “I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord’s people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.

- The Greek word for ‘obsessed’ can also mean ‘crazed’... Paul is saying that he was completely out of control.
 - When the Jewish authorities, presumably the Sanhedrin, put people to death, Paul said “I cast my vote for this to happen”. This likely doesn’t mean Paul was ever part of the Sanhedrin, but rather his phrase emphasizes his wholehearted agreement and support for the murders that were taking place.
 - The word ‘blaspheme’ probably means Paul tried to get people to verbally renounce their faith in Christ, or face arrest and possibly execution.

- **There's another thing Paul not so subtly does here. It was the practice of Rome to delegate most governing power to local/indigenous authorities, in this case the Sanhedrin. But there was one power Rome always reserved for itself, and that was capital punishment.**
- **SO, it must have made the Jerusalem religious rulers- present in the room- really uncomfortable when Paul said "I did all of this – in violation of Roman law- on the authority of the Chief priests... you know... THESE GUYS."**
- **And now Paul continues his story with the turning point of his life, what happened on the road to Damascus**

† Back to Damascus

Acts 26:12-14 "On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³ About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. ¹⁴ We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'

- **We're familiar with that part of the story- but then Paul adds a new detail. Jesus says to him...**

It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

- **What does THAT mean?**
- **We don't use this word much anymore, but a GOAD is a stick with a pointed end used by farmers and shepherds to prod livestock, to get them moving.**
- **You may have heard the term 'that person was just goading me', which means someone was poking at you, probably verbally, seeking to get a rise out of you.**
- **To 'kick against the goads' was an ancient saying that described a horse who would kick back at the person prodding them- and metaphorically describing a person who resisted something that needed to happen.**
- **SO here we have Jesus- the GOD OF THE UNIVERSE- using an agricultural metaphor- and speaking in the local Jewish dialect no less- to tell Paul... STOP FIGHTING ME! Paul! You're fighting me so hard, and it's wearing you out. Paul- look at the evidence all around you! It's time to surrender... it's time to lay down your anger, your pride, and let me lead you. Paul... it's time to believe.**
- **Church, this is a powerful image for us today. There are times when we 'fight against the goads' of Gods work in our lives- we fight so hard to protect our pride, our way of thinking, the way we want things to be... and in these situations the Spirit is saying... STOP FIGHTING! Stop with your rationalization, your pride, self-defense, and bitterness. SURRENDER, listen, TRUST, and LET ME LEAD YOU.**
- **There have been times when God has said to me... ETHAN, Ethan... it's so hard for you to kick against the goads...." perhaps the spirit is saying this to someone listening to this message today.**
- **And my friends, Paul stopped fighting.**
- **In that moment Paul came to the end of himself and he asked one of the most important questions we could ever ask....**

† Who are you Lord?

Acts 26:15-18 "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' " 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. ¹⁶ 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a

witness of what you have seen and will see of me. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them ¹⁸ to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

- **If we look thoughtfully, here Jesus answers the question of WHO HE IS- both to Paul, and to us.**

'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied.

- **With these famous words Jesus identifies himself with the Body of Christ. Paul wasn't just persecuting and murdering the followers of Christ, he was doing this to Christ himself. When these believers suffered, and when believers suffer today because of their faith, Christ suffers with them. It's an old cliché, but Jesus is the LORD who feels our pain. We are not alone, and this is a source of hope.**
- **AT THE SAME TIME, this works both ways. When we violate Christ's nature within us, when out of our pride, shame, brokenness or fear we DEVALUE other people- when we FAIL TO LOVE... Christ feels that pain as well. You see...**

- **Jesus isn't just the Lord who feels our pain, He is the Lord who feels the pain we CAUSE**

- **And this should be a source of conviction, repentance, and humble hearts.**

- **Jesus went on to say...**

'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me.

- **Jesus is the Lord who calls us to be both His SERVANTS and WITNESSES**

- **Just going to touch on this- the ideas of being a servant and a witness are complimentary- they are mutually reinforcing. Paul's chief service to God was his being a witness of God- to both the Jews and the Gentiles.**
- **We also are called to be both servants and witnesses, and the two still go together. When we serve people with the love of Christ, it is really the Lord we are serving- Paul talks about that in Ephesians- and when we serve people with the love of Christ, it helps authenticate the truth and goodness of Jesus- it lays a relational foundation from which we may naturally share our love of God, and God's love of us.**
- **The reverse is also true- if we reduce evangelism down to solely communicating the scriptural points of sin and salvation- we are lacking the power of authenticity and relation that can make the Gospel so much more powerful. Make no mistake- GOD CAN, and WILL, use the truth of the Gospel in any form- but sharing God's love and showing God's love are not two different things- they are two sides of the same coin.**
- **NOW- at this point- verse 17, Jesus says something completely counter-intuitive....**

I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them.

- **If I had been Paul in this situation, I might have thought... uh, Jesus, if you want to rescue me from both the Jews and the Gentiles, wouldn't it be more effective to NOT send me to them? I mean, you're protecting me from them, but I'm going to them? Get my drift?**

- *OR, maybe a few years later when Paul was being beaten up on the edge of town for the third time, just maybe did he think... “UH, God, a little rescue here?? Remember what we talked about?”*
- *But God did rescue Paul, many times, and he is in the process of doing it in this very hearing before Agrippa.*
- *This is a striking image that speaks to us, if we will hear it. There’s an- an ethos- idea that’s always lurked in the background of Christian culture, exerting influence while not obviously identifying itself, although in recent years it’s become more pronounced.*
- *It’s the idea that to protect ourselves as good Christians, and to protect the purity of the gospel, we need to stay away from those we deem to be adversaries of the gospel, adversaries of what we understand to be Christian morality, people who think radically different from us, or who have politics we don’t like. It’s just better to keep away from these people...*
- *But Paul’s story is the opposite of this. The Jews fought against Paul and his message from day one- and yet he never stopped going to them, seeking common ground with them.*
- *The GENTILES, I mean, when Paul started out it would have been unthinkable to even associate with those people, much less go to them, live among them, serve them, love them, and through this share with them the amazing grace and hope of Jesus Christ.*
- *YOU SEE.... HUGE answer to question ‘who are you..’*

- *Jesus is the Lord who seeks to save those we seek to AVOID*

- *Jesus was never soft on the topic of sin- and some of his strongest words were against the rampant religious hypocrisy of his day.*
- *AND YET, Jesus NEVER avoided, shunned, or devalued a group of people because of their identifiable sin.*
- *If HE HAD, he would have come down to earth, looked around, and said.. ‘this was a mistake, I’m outta here! Judgement time!’*
- *NO! It was to these very people that Jesus came, and he lived among them- among US- he went into their homes, loved them, served them, and through his presence brought the power and truth of conviction, hope and redemption.*
- *Jesus was often criticized for hanging out with sinners, tax collectors, drunkards- the untouchables of his day. Do you remember what he said when the religious leaders confronted him on this?*

“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

- *As disciples who have been brought from death to life, may we not be those who avoid, shun, or devalue the very people Christ would seek out, get to know, and sacrificially love.*
- *JESUS CONCLUDES his words to Paul with this...*

I am sending you to them ¹⁸ to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of

Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

- ***This might be the most concise, and comprehensive, summation of the Gospel that we find in all of Acts.***
- ***As I studied this week I wrestled with a statement to describe this... the best I could do was that...***
 - **Jesus is the Lord of beginning again**
- ***Listen to what we hear! The message of Jesus Christ- even more, JESUS HIMSELF, through his message, comes to us to....***
- ***OPEN OUR EYES. To enable us to see what we could not see, recognize a truth, hope, and goodness to which we were blind- to open our mind to what we didn't, and couldn't, understand. THROUGH THE SPIRIT God works to open people's minds to the truth of Christ... and BY THAT SAME SPIRIT, Christ in us continues to work to OPEN OUR MINDS to what we need to see, comprehend, and respond to his transformation and leadership in our lives.***
- ***THEN- incredible statement.... Jesus is the Lord who turns people from darkness to light, from the power of satan to the power of God...***
- ***SO THAT we may RECEIVE- as a gift- not by our own righteousness but by the GRACE OF GOD.... We may receive forgiveness of sins- and even more- Jesus says***
- ***"We may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."***
- ***Church, you could preach at least one sermon from what Jesus just said... but I'll wrap up with what I wrote in my first tracks back on Friday- if you missed it, I encourage you to go back and read it, because I address a topic of incredible significance- based on two big events in our country this past week. But for now, this is a key takeaway from what Jesus just said:***
- ***Faith in Christ (what evangelical culture calls 'being saved') is absolutely inseparable from our lives being transformed by Christ. To have faith in Christ is to increasingly take on the nature and Character of Christ. In theological terms, salvation is inseparable from sanctification, and vice versa.***
- ***And my friends, a bedrock attribute of Christ's nature in us- an inescapable result of Christ's sanctification of our mind, will, and emotions- is that we will never devalue another human being. Never.***
- ***In his speech to Agrippa Paul explains that In Christ our minds have been opened so that we may turn from the power of satan to the power of God. Devaluing another person is from the power of satan. Be it murder, sexual assault, devaluing another's trauma to protect ourselves, or the thousands of smaller ways our pride and brokenness plays into the enemies hands- when we devalue another human being we act in alliance with satan and are living in darkness.***

- ***God is good. In Christ there is light, hope, forgiveness, healing, redemption, and freedom. May we live in His light, and may we face our own darkness with courage, trust, humility, and surrender.***
- ***In our country the power of satan was on full display this week, but the love of God is greater still. May we be known by the power of Christ's love.***
- ***We'll finish Paul's testimony before Agrippa next week, when Paul hears what every pastor will hear at least once in his time of ministry... YOU'RE INSANE***