

ACTS | Patience, Poise, & Perseverance | Story 38

Acts 26

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March 6, 2022

Introduction

Last week, Pastor Don Finto gave us a comprehensive overview of the persecution that the early disciples faced with an unwavering joy. What we were challenged with is that Christians today ought to be the most optimistic people on the planet, no matter what we face, because the same Spirit that lived in the early followers of Christ—lives in us!

Today... what we see from Acts 21 through the end of the book is essentially one hostile encounter after another. The Apostle Paul is in chains, imprisoned for years, without a clear pathway for a decision to be made of his ultimate guilt or innocence.

- Paul had been accused of sedition, causing a riot, undermining the public peace, of heresy. Ultimately, nobody wanted to give a verdict—they were just were trying to wash their hands of him.

First was FELIX who was an imperial administrative governor over Judea, who was then succeeded by a Gentile governor names PORCIUS FESTUS.

Paul didn't believe he could get a fair trial in Judea, so he had appealed to Caesar in Rome. This put FESTUS in a strange position because it would require him to make a statement or summary of the charges or accusations against Paul. He didn't understand Jewish theology, or politics, so he enlisted the help of KING AGRIPPA II, who would have known well the customs of the Jewish people, to help him summarize his statement to Caesar about Paul.

Acts 25:23-27

So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. ²⁴And Festus said, "King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. ²⁵But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. ²⁶But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. ²⁷For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him."

This set up Paul to give his speech to Agrippa II, who had incredible favor with the Emperor Nero, who was one of the most horrific persecutors of Christians in the first century.

Paul was in a situation where his life was in the balance, while Agrippa and Festus, and all the Roman Military Commanders evaluated him.

The speech that Paul gave was very similar to the structure of his other speeches:

Conduct before Christ | Conversion to Christ | Commission from Christ

Acts 26:15-32

And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

¹⁹ "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰ but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. ²¹ For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. ²² To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: ²³ that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, He would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles."

²⁴ And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind." ²⁵ But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. ²⁶ For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." ²⁸ And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" ²⁹ And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains."

³⁰ Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. ³¹ And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment." ³² And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

THE PURPOSE OF PAUL'S DEFENSE THE PERSUASIVENESS OF THE GOSPEL THE POWER OF PATIENCE, POISE, & PERSEVERANCE

The Purpose of Paul's Defense

The description of what someone does in a court of law when they are being questioned, or interrogated is called giving a defense. Or, if you're accused of breaking the law, you have to give a defense of what you've done or haven't done. That's what Paul is doing here.

Paul, after years in prison, beatings, trials, hardships, waiting for some verdict—Paul is giving a defense—but he's not defending himself—his aim is something entirely different...

Acts 26:28-29

²⁸ And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" ²⁹ And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that **not only you but also all who hear me this day** might become such as I am—except for these chains."

Agrippa has tremendous power, and Paul is being incredibly audacious. Paul seizes the opportunity to persuade everyone who is there to believe in the gospel.

Agrippa says, in such a short time you think I'll convert? Paul says, today... tomorrow, I don't care when, just as long as it happens! Paul's singular aim is not to defend himself, but to use every opportunity he has to point people to Jesus.

How does he do that?

The Persuasiveness of the Gospel

Paul talks about the fact that He's experienced Jesus personally, emotionally—God is not distant and far off. God revealed himself to the apostle Paul in an incredibly real and profound way.

Before Paul's encounter with Jesus his singular aim in life was to live according to the *law* of God—to honor the *law* of God—to be good enough. It's where he derived his value. **Paul was building his life on something! Getting his identity from something!**

The reality is we're all building our lives on something. Deriving our value from something—trying to gain an identity from something or someone. Wealth, career, relationship, person, power, influence, reputation. We often take things that God has made to be *good* things—and we turn them into *ultimate* things. *In other words, if I don't have THAT, or if I'm not this, then I'm nothing.*

The sad reality is that self-proclaimed Christians do this all the time! The things we chase after in life, or the reasons why we do the things that we do are often informed by undealt with or ignored pain, loss, trauma, abuse, neglect, or some form of past wounding that causes us to find refuge, healing, escape, pleasure, affirmation, or safety in wrong things.

Paul built his whole life on “honoring the law” even to the point of persecuting, imprisoning, and executing followers of Christ—**but it wasn't until he had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ that everything changed for him.**

There is a personal aspect of being persuaded—
but it's not just **personal**,
it's not just **emotional**—
it's also Rational.

In verse 22, Paul is talking about the fact that he met Jesus Christ personally on the road to Damascus and heard Jesus speak to him and Jesus was raised from the dead.

Governor Festus is a Gentile and has come from outside Judea and has no context or understanding of what he's walking into when he hears Paul talking. When Festus hears it, it's so ridiculous to him that he interrupts....

Acts 26:24

And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.”

Acts 26:25

But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking **true and rational** words. ²⁶ For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.

- Paul replied. *‘What I am saying is true and reasonable.’* Notice Paul *does not say*, “Well, Festus, I know this is true because I feel like it’s true. Or it’s true because I’d really like it to be true. I know Christianity is true because I just feel it so much!”
 - “NO! It’s rational! It’s reasonable... in fact, everything I’m talking about is public knowledge, Festus! Agrippa, you know what I’m talking about!”

The life, death, burial, resurrection of Jesus, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the birth and expansion of the church, it was not done in some obscure corner.”

- King Agrippa II would have been 8 years old when Jesus was crucified, and he would have grown up in the aftermath of the resurrection! He would have known that there were 500 witnesses of the resurrected Christ.
- What does Agrippa say?

Acts 26:28

And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?”

King Agrippa may not believe it, or even like, it but he can’t dismiss the facts, because they were not done in private. So he says:

Acts 26:31

“...This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.”

The Power of Patience, Poise, and Perseverance

Put yourself in Paul’s shoes for a moment.

You’ve been thrown from interrogation to interrogation, flogged, beaten.

You’ve been in chains for YEARS now.

How do you maintain poise in that moment?

How do you maintain self-control?

How do you persevere when everything is coming down on top of you?

How do you continue to walk composed, self-controlled, in love, joy, peace, patience...?

Look at what Paul didn’t do!

He didn’t come unhinged.

He didn’t throw a tantrum.

He didn’t demand his own way.

He didn’t put on a show.

He looks at King Agrippa and says, *“King Agrippa, I am trying to convert you. I sure am. You know exactly what happened with Jesus of Nazareth, you’ve seen the evidence, you know what I’m talking about.”*

Paul isn’t grandstanding. He’s not trying to appease the crowd gathered around him... He’s confident, but he’s not arrogant. He’s direct, but not demonstrative about it.

- Agrippa was Paul’s enemy. Festus was Paul’s enemy. Paul is patient, poised—he doesn’t present himself as superior—he’s kind, he’s humble, he’s respectful, but direct. He says, *“Yes, I’m trying to*

convert you, doesn't matter how long it takes, as a matter of fact, I would love it if everyone in here would believe."

- He's not coming unhinged. He's not making a show of it. And he's absolutely unashamed and unafraid."

**Nothing proves the sincerity of your beliefs
like your willingness to patiently suffer for them.**

Nothing builds your credibility or proves the sincerity of your convictions like patiently enduring loss, scorn, and hardship for what you believe.

Where did Paul he get this ability to suffer so much, for so long, and still remain composed under tremendous injustice and pressure?

Acts 26:17-18

"...I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive **forgiveness of sins** and **a place** among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

"The sense that in this universe we are treated as strangers, the longing to be acknowledged, to meet with some response, to bridge some chasm that yawns between us and reality, is part of our inconsolable secret."¹

~ C.S. Lewis

Lewis is talking about the fact that in this life, we don't have a true home. Essentially we're all homeless, wanderers, trying to find a place to belong.

But what verse 18 tells us, is that the message of the gospel is not only that you can receive forgiveness and cleansing from all your sin through faith and allegiance to King Jesus—but *what* you receive when you trust in Him, is a *home*. You receive a *place* among all those that have been welcomed in as sons and daughters of God.

You know what that does for you? It gives you an **anchor**. It gives you a **security**. A confidence knowing that no matter what I face out here—God has already given me a **home**.

One of our greatest fears in life is also one of our greatest needs.

*Our greatest **need** is to be fully **known**, and fully **loved**.
But our greatest **fear** is that if we're fully **known**, we won't be fully **loved**.
That we'll be rejected, dismissed, cast aside.*

- The gospel tells us that everything about us is laid bare before Jesus Christ.
- He knows it all.
- In fact, He knows us better than we even know ourselves.
- The gospel of Jesus Christ tells us that we are fully known by God,
- and simultaneously *fully loved*.

¹ C.S. Lewis. *The Weight of Glory* (Zondervan, Mar 20, 2001).

- The creator of heaven and earth knows our deepest hurts, our biggest flaws, our deepest fears, and *loves us in spite of them.*
- *THAT knowledge gives us the ability to be patient, to persevere, and remained poised in all things.*

Jesus Christ was a homeless, wandering Galilean peasant.
God went without a home so that you could gain one!
He became homeless so that you could belong with Him for eternity.
He gave His up, so that you and I could be brought in.

Discussion Questions

1. Paul had been accused of sedition, causing a riot, undermining public peace— why did he not defend himself when given the opportunity?
2. What the underlying purpose of Paul's defense?
3. Why was Paul's recounting of the gospel story so powerful?
4. Before Paul's encounter with Jesus, he was building his life on living according to the *law* of God... which is where he got his identity.
What are you building your life on... where are you getting your identity?
5. Have you ever had to suffer for your beliefs or your convictions, to endure scorn, loss, or hardship? Did it build your credibility as a Christian with those who know you?

NOTES