

## 37. What the Gospel is and isn't

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, do turn, if you would, to Acts chapter 25 and 26, the passage that we read together, all about what the Gospel is and isn't.
- Now, our world today is very confused about what the Christian Gospel is, and that's not all surprising, because alas, very often the Church seems to be quite confused itself about what the Gospel is really about, and therefore it's very confused often about what Gospel work and Gospel witness really consists of.
- And that's a real problem, because there is so much religious confusion and even fear of religion in our society today. Helped along by the new atheists in the media and in Parliament, there is fear.
- Of religion and fear of Christianity, especially, I would say, committed evangelical Christianity. People who want us to believe that it is a threat to public life, it's a threat to politics, to equality, to our liberty and tolerance and all of these things.
- Well, of course, that's not new, that attitude of society to the Gospel. It was exactly that kind of thing that the Apostles themselves faced in the very early days of the Christian Church as the Gospel made its impact across the Roman Empire.
- [ 1 : 2 9 ] And that is why this chapter is, in fact, so helpful for us. Because faced with the challenge that the Gospel was a threat to the civil peace of the Empire, and even a threat to Caesar himself, Paul, here in this chapter, has a great opportunity to make very clear, in his own words, what the Gospel is and what the Gospel is not.
- And he gives us both a reassurance to the world that there is nothing to fear from the Christian Gospel, only good can come of it, and at the same time, a clear reminder to the Church of what the Church's focus on Gospel matters must always be.
- Now, the context, as we saw last week, was Paul's examination by Festus, the new Roman governor, in the presence of Herod Agrippa, the Jewish king. And so the rest of the story that we're looking at today falls really into three parts.
- First, from where we begin at verse 23 to the first part of chapter 26, verse 1, we have the reason for Paul's defence. Then verses 1 to 23 of chapter 26 give us the recounting of Paul's testimony.
- And finally, from verse 24 to the end, we have the reactions to Paul's Gospel. So let's look at these passages then, and learn what they tell us, all about what the Gospel really is and isn't.
- [ 2 : 5 8 ] First then, the reason for Paul's defence. Really, there are two reasons that all this is happening. The first is the most immediate, and that's Festus' purpose, which he makes very clear in verse 20.
- He tells us he was at a loss as to how to investigate these claims against Paul. He tells Agrippa in verse 24 that the whole Jewish people was petitioning for Paul to be executed.
- And yet, in verse 25, he says he himself could find no reason for that whatsoever. And now that Paul's appealed to Caesar, verse 26 tells us that poor Festus finds himself in something of a fix.

He had to write something to Caesar to say why he was sending this prisoner to him. Otherwise, Caesar would think he was a complete fool in wasting his time. So, verse 1 of chapter 26 says he wants Paul to speak for himself, so that he will yield something for him to charge him with.

After we've examined him, verse 26, I might have something to write. So Festus is very clear about his purpose in all of this. He wants something to write as a charge against Paul.

[ 4 : 14 ] But of course, we know that there's another reason behind all of this as to why this whole thing is taking place. And that is that God himself has a clear purpose in it. Jesus himself, we looked at this last week, had promised several times back in Luke chapter 21, for example, that the apostles and the followers of Jesus after them would be hauled up and arrested before synagogues, before pyres, that they would appear before kings and governors.

And Jesus said, these will be your very opportunities to bear witness. This was all part of the missionary strategy of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I doubt you'll find that as a missionary strategy in any mission strategy books today. The real way to reach the upper echelons of society with the gospel is to be prisoners in chains.

But that was Jesus. Clearly articulated strategy. It's just a subtle warning to us, isn't it? Because there are people who want to reach people in high places with the gospel and sometimes they think that the way to do that is by social and ecclesiastical climbing.

And they may indeed, through that, gain access to the very highest in our society. But alas, in doing so, very often what happens is that they lose all liberty to speak the real true gospel, which is the only true gospel worth speaking.

[ 5 : 40 ] But that's not the case here with Paul. He is in chains, and yet he is gloriously free to proclaim the whole truth about God. And with Paul there's no snobbery, there's no social climbing.

Nor for that matter is there any inverted snobbery, as though those at the top were somehow not deserving of the gospel. Do you remember in Romans chapter 1 he says, I'm under obligation to all, to Greek and barbarian, to wise and foolish.

And what a mix were before him that day. Verse 23, royalty and great pomp. And yet once again it was rather sordid royalty.

Bernice, you might think, was Agrippa's wife. Actually, she was his sister. She had been married to her own uncle, and had then been divorced, but now was living with her brother, as everybody knew as an open secret, in an incestuous relationship.

So they were there, then there were the military tribunes, all the army-top brass, not known for their religious sensitivity really. The prominent men of the city, the merchants, the politicians, all those sort of people, and of course the governor Felix himself.

[ 6 : 52 ] What an opportunity to expound clearly and fully to all of those who are assembled there. And effectively for Caesar, because this was going to be transmitted to him, and therefore to the whole world, to express what the gospel really is and what it isn't.

To make clear negatively, in defense of the gospel, that it has not and never has been a political message to trouble the empire. And to witness to what the gospel really is.

Not a territorial claim for this world, and therefore a threat to earthly powers, but a certain hope for a lasting inheritance in the world to come.

Inheritance with those who are sanctified. Now Jesus himself was absolutely clear on that, wasn't he? Remember, my kingdom, he said to Pilate, the Roman governor then, my kingdom is not of this world.

Can't be clearer than that. And Paul is just as clear everywhere in his own preaching and his writings. Remember he says to the Philippians, our citizenship is in heaven. It's from there that we wait a saviour who will transform these lowly bodies to be like his glorious resurrection body.

[ 8 : 08 ] That's our goal and prize. It's the upward call to be with the Lord Jesus Christ in resurrection life. And that's why here, in front of all of these people, the heart of Paul's message is focused right there on the fact of the risen Lord Jesus and on the implications of that fact for our world and therefore for the church's mission to our world.

So let's focus on verses 1 to 23 of chapter 26 and see where Paul focuses all his attention when he gets this great opportunity. This tells us the recounting of Paul's testimony.

Now he addresses Agrippa in verse 2 directly and very politely. In fact, he is very glad of this opportunity for a quiet hearing from somebody who is not ignorant of all the issues of the Jews and the controversies but is, because he's king, somewhat detached from them.

Listen to me patiently, he says, I beg you. In other words, Paul is saying, oh king, I'm going to treat you as knowledgeable and intelligent. I'm going to give my case thoroughly and properly because it's a serious matter.

This is not an emotional appeal I'm giving to you, king. I'm not trying to pull a fast one. I'm trying to take you very seriously and explain it. Well, it's always good to do that, isn't it?

[ 9 : 27 ] With a sceptical here. In fact, we must. The gospel demands our very best attention and explanation. And so at verse 4 you see that Paul begins at the beginning.

He gives what one scholar says is his spiritual CV. Now this is the third time that Luke has recorded for us Paul's testimony. But this time the focus is very much on Paul's commissioning by Jesus for the work that he's been doing and for which he's on trial.

The focus is more on his commissioning than, if you like, his conversion. That explains the different emphasis in the detail from some of the other accounts. So, for example, we don't have any mention here of Ananias and his role as we did in chapter 9.

But he does mention Jesus' explicit words commissioning him to be an apostle. He even gives details of the fact that Jesus spoke to him in the Hebrew dialect. You see, he's emphasizing all the time the personal commissioning that he has received at the hands of the risen Lord of glory.

But nevertheless, his spiritual CV is in three familiar stages. First of all, in verse 4, he begins with Paul the Pharisee. Everyone knows, he says, that I've got impeccable credentials.

[ 10 : 49 ] He lived as a Pharisee, that most devoted of all the Jewish groups, who lived for the hope of Israel, for the promise given to the fathers. They all lived for that, at least that's what they said.

But did they really believe, these Pharisees, that that promise given to the fathers would ever actually be fulfilled? That there ever would be, really, for them, life from the dead?

You see, we all know, don't we, that it's very easy to believe orthodox doctrine, at least in your heads, but for any sense of the reality of that hope to just fade away so much so that there's nothing more than just reciting creeds and saying you believe something, but it has precious little impact on any part of your real life.

It's so easy, isn't it, to think of that hope that we say that we believe in as being something so remote, so far away. It's, well, pie in the sky when you die. That's the Marxist criticism, isn't it, of the Christian hope.

What about now today? That's what we're all interested in. It was the same back then with the first century Jews, oppressed as they were under the Romans and occupied.

[ 12 : 07 ] Jam today, that's what we want, they said. And indeed, many in those days did interpret the promises of God more and more in political terms. They wanted the dawning of a messianic age, of political liberation from the Romans with uprisings like there had been years before in the days of the Maccabees and so on.

They were really what you might call the liberation theologians of their day, just as in recent decades we've had that kind of thing, for example, in South America. Now, there were others who had taken a slightly different route of seeking jam today, something real and now.

They took the route of political climbing and accommodating with the secular establishment, accommodating with Rome. The Sadducees were very much in that category and therefore they had got themselves great power and influence and indeed great wealth.

They'd become part of the establishment and so they felt that they had a very important role in the nation's life, mixing with the movers and the shakers and the governors and the lawmakers, the kind of people who were feted by the media, full of their own importance.

Well, you see, once again, so little has changed. There always have been and there always will be those who think that that is what the church is really all about and who devote themselves constantly to those things.

[ 13 : 33 ] But whether it's through political zealotry or through establishment climbing, what you have in both of those cases is just the same thing.

The focus has been moved from the permanence of the true biblical hope of a future in eternity and it's all been taken into the present.

You see, these folks claimed to believe the Bible and they taught the Bible and they held to it and yet the reality was that they seemed to think it astonishing that Paul could preach that there could really actually be resurrection from the dead.

It was all very well in theory, yes, they could recite that creed, we believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, but the actual reality of it happening was totally out of their understanding.

And that is what happens when the supernatural reality at the heart of the Christian gospel is laid aside and forgotten. You're left with just an empty religious shell, an institution that recites all sorts of orthodox creeds, but it's just become a form of godliness totally denying its power.

[ 14 : 58 ] You're left with just an empty social gospel all about the here and now, but a fossilized, institutionalized, dead religion. religion. And that was the state religion in first century Judaism.

And of course, that's the very same as what we have in so much of the state-established Christianity in the Western world today. And Paul himself, he says, was once a pillar of that very position.

And yet, you know, one of the extraordinary features of dead religiosity is the ferocity with which it defends itself against anything that dares to threaten it with real spiritual life and zeal.

And so, verse 9 shows us how Paul the Pharisee so easily became Paul the persecutor, doing everything to oppose, he says, the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Not only in word, but indeed, shocking deeds of violence and killing and hatred.

Verse 11, seeking to make them blasphemed, filled, he said, with raging fury and persecution. Well, again, so little has changed.

[ 16 : 25 ] I could name before you this morning evangelical ministers in this country, in our own denomination, who are facing raging fury against them by ecclesiastical powers because, simply, they are daring to proclaim the truth of the biblical gospel of Paul.

Because they are rocking the boat of establishment ways of doing things in the determination that people will hear the word of life. There is an extraordinary intolerance, isn't there, among those who claim to cherish tolerance as their highest virtue in the church and in secular society.

And it's most shocking of all when it's done in the name of God and in the name of preserving the so-called unity of his church, as Paul himself would have claimed.

But Paul's testimony here shows us the real truth, doesn't it? His raging fury against Christ's people that he speaks about there in verse 11 was in fact what?

It was a direct expression of bitter opposition to the person of Jesus himself. Verse 9, that's what he was doing, opposing Jesus of Nazareth.

[ 17 : 43 ] Now Jesus himself says that, doesn't he? Remember in Matthew chapter 25, the story of the sheep and the goats. What you do to Jesus' brothers, what you do to his people, you are doing to him himself.

And he will never forget that. So Paul, in opposing Christ's people, was vehemently opposing the Lord God himself.

And yet for Paul, one great fact suddenly changed all of that. Once, he says, later on, writing to Timothy, I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, an insolent opponent, but, I received mercy.

And the grace of God, he says, overflowed for me. So verse 12, you see here, he met the risen Lord of glory himself. He was faced with irrefutable evidence to his eyes.

He saw the great light from heaven and to his ears a voice spoke to him clearly and plainly, calling his name. The voice, verse 15, says of the very Jesus that he was in fact persecuting.

[ 18 : 57 ] And the cloud of glory that felled him to the ground was followed by a command of grace that raised him up again and changed his life forever. So Paul the persecutor, Paul the Pharisee, became Paul the preacher.

Verse 16, I've appointed you for this, I've appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness. to everything you've seen and will see.

Notice those two words. He's a witness. He's like the other apostles. He becomes an eyewitness of the majesty of the risen Savior. But secondly, he's a servant.

That is, he is commissioned to do the work of the risen Lord. A work summed up by these three key verbs, you see, in verse 17 and 18, to open eyes, to turn from darkness to light and from Satan to God, that they might receive forgiveness.

Now, maybe that some of the alert among you will recognize, the echoes there, of the work of the divine servant of the Lord, prophesied by the prophet Isaiah, that Jesus himself identified himself with when he read from the scriptures in the synagogue at Nazareth.

[ 20 : 17 ] You read that in Luke chapter 4, in the first volume of his work. Remember, Jesus read these words and said, today this has been fulfilled in your midst. He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, sight to the blind.

That's from Isaiah 61. Isaiah 42 and Isaiah 49 are even more resonant. I will give you as a light to the nations, to open the eyes of the blind.

And it's very plain there that the blindness is the blindness of sin. To bring out from the prison, he says, those who sit in darkness, that is, the darkness of sin and death. That's what Jesus the Messiah came to do, to fulfill the promise given to the fathers, the promise of salvation from darkness and blindness and death due to human sin, to bring life from the dead.

And Paul said, remember, back in Acts chapter 13 when he was preaching, what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us, their children, by raising Jesus from the dead.

And that is the work of the Messiah, nothing less. And, and this is the really vital point for us to notice here, what the risen Jesus says to the apostle Paul is that the work of the risen Lord is delegated to one that he calls a servant and a witness, to Paul.

[ 21 : 46 ] Now, Paul, of course, is in a unique situation, along with the other apostles. He is an eyewitness of the risen Lord. He says that in 1 Corinthians 15, last of all, Jesus appeared to me, he said, as one untimely born.

He saw the risen Lord. In fact, this is his commissioning as an apostle, that word there that says, I'm sending you, literally says, I'm apostling you to the Gentiles.

But that word servant is a word that echoes the word that Luke uses in chapter 1 verse 2 of his gospel, the first volume of this two volume work, where he talks about being servants of the word, or ministers of the word, as it says in our version.

And the work of serving the word, of serving the gospel, is the work that the apostles have handed down throughout all the ages of the church, to the church, until the Lord Jesus comes.

That's very explicit later on in 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 2, where Paul tells Timothy that he is to find faithful men who are able to teach others what Paul has also passed on to Timothy.

[ 22 : 54 ] They are to be faithful servants, stewards of the mysteries of God. And so we're all in the Christian church following the apostles to be faithful servants of God who do the work of God.

Edward was showing us that from John chapter 14 just the other week there, how Jesus says that everyone who believes on him will do greater works even than Jesus did on earth, because he's going to the Father and sending his spirit on the church.

And it's perfectly plain in John's gospel there that the greater works are the works of bringing the dead to life through the life-giving word of the gospel. people. And that's precisely the language, isn't it, that the risen Lord Jesus uses here as he commissions Paul to his work of mission.

And by extension as he commits that work of mission to the whole church for her tasks throughout the whole world. Don't miss this. This is absolutely vital for us.

This is essential that the church grasps this. not too much to say that the whole future of the Christian church depends on us understanding the task that the risen Lord Jesus has given to his church, to everyone who stands in a true succession to the apostles and to their gospel.

[ 24 : 13 ] The Lord here is giving an authoritative pronouncement as to the nature of the work that he has given the church to do. And we've got to see that clearly because there is so much confusion today about what the task of mission really is.

So what is the work of the risen Lord Jesus that he calls the apostles to? That he pours his spirit upon the whole church that the church might accomplish it?

What is, in other words, the work of Christian mission? Answer. It is bringing the dead to eternal life.

Look at verse 18. To open eyes, to turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified through faith in me.

One scholar says that is one of the most powerful statements of conversion in the whole of the scriptures. Do you see what that task is? It is not a political task to make the earth a better place.

[ 25 : 27 ] Although, of course, all Christians will want to be a blessing in this world and Christians and the church always has been a blessing and made this world a better place. It is not a prosperity task to offer people a better material existence.

Although, of course, Christian people, when their minds are changed, their values are changed and all kinds of wasteful and stupid ways are left behind them. It is not primarily a psychological task to make people feel better about themselves.

Although, yes, of course, the reintegration of our fallen personalities and our disrupted psychologies is always a fruit of the Christian gospel.

But, no, fundamentally, the task of the Christian church in mission is to do as Jesus says in verse 18. It is to open eyes that are blind. And Jesus here is plain and explicit as to exactly what that means.

Look at that language in verse 18. What does it mean to open eyes that are blind? It means bringing light from darkness. Bringing light and understanding in place of the spiritual and the moral and the intellectual ignorance that's caused by sin.

[ 26 : 42 ] That's what Paul says in Romans chapter 1. The truth about God is self-evident in our world, he says. But people have blinded themselves willingly. And so God has given them over to debased minds and futile thinking and darkened hearts.

Yet he says elsewhere, the devil has blinded the eyes of those who are willingly blinded so they do not see the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But our task as the Christian church in mission is to bring light, to open eyes to the truth.

Second thing he says though is mission is bringing liberation from the devil, from the power of Satan, the power behind sin that holds people in bondage like a slave master does, that controls them, that dehumanizes them.

Now we don't like that kind of language being used. But even our secular newspapers have to resort to that kind of language in the ultimate sense, don't they? Look at it this week when we've been reading about the killer of Jamie Bulger.

Evil is a word that they have to resort to. But what does that mean? It's the power of sin and the devil, says the risen Lord Jesus. Jesus isn't afraid of using that language.

[ 28 : 00 ] It's the power of darkness. He called it in Luke 22. But Christian mission means liberating people from that power of darkness.

And it means wonderfully bringing life from the dead, bringing people a place among those who are sanctified among God's holy people, declared to be holy by him forever.

An inheritance among his own that comes, says Jesus, through the forgiveness of sins. freedom from the guilt of sin. And it's bitter wage, which is eternal death and separation from God.

But Christian mission means imparting life from the dead. And all of this, says Jesus, through faith in me.

That applies to all of that there, not just to that last little phrase. You see, our task, and the apostles' task, the church's task, is to be servants of the risen Lord Jesus in accomplishing all these things.

[ 29 : 09 ] That word servant is used in the Old Testament as meaning servants of a king who carries out the king's royal commands. And his command is to bring light through liberation from sin's power, from the darkness of the devil.

It's to bring life that comes through liberation from sin's penalty, the darkness of death. You notice, all these verbs are active.

It's the king's command that we carry out, to open eyes, to turn hearts, to enable them to receive forgiveness. It's all the sovereign work of the risen Lord Jesus.

And yet, his earthly servants are commissioned to do that sovereign work. How? How? How do God's servants and witnesses do that work?

Answer, says Jesus, through proclaiming the gospel at the command of the sovereign Lord. Verse 20. I declare, says Paul, to all alike, to Jew and Gentile, what?

[ 30 : 13 ] Repentance and faith. Repenting and turning to God. That's faith. And notice the emphasis on real and visible faith.

Not just vague decisions, show deeds in keeping with repentance, he says. The gospel, you see, is a command. It's a command to a changed life.

It's nothing less than that. It's not an offer to be trifled with. That's why Paul tells us in verse 19 of his own response. I was not disobedient, he says.

We are to call people in the gospel as servants of the Lord of glory. We are to call them to the obedience of true faith. That is the task of the church's mission.

That's a language that Paul uses, by the way, all the way through the letter to the Romans as to what faith really means. It means obedience. It means submission to God. So rejecters of Christ, he says, are those who do not obey the truth, Romans 2 verse 8.

[ 31 : 16 ] Believers, on the other hand, are those who have become obedient from the heart, Romans 6 verse 7. And that's what biblical faith means. And that is what imparts the light and the liberation and the life eternal that is true salvation.

Obedience to the truth of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. But it comes as servants of the word proclaim that gospel word because that is how the command of the sovereign Lord comes to the dead to give them life.

people can't call back on the Lord in obedient faith until they've heard his voice calling them. That's what Paul says plainly in Romans chapter 10.

So we do his life-giving work as we declare his command. But how do we do that? What is Paul's mission work that he's talking about there in verse 20?

What does it look like when it's expanded in real life? Well he tells us doesn't he in verses 22 and 23. It means simply opening up the message of the Bible.

[ 32 : 28 ] The whole Bible he says the law and the prophets of the Old Testament as fulfilled in Jesus Christ and his work according to the apostolic gospel of the New Testament. That is the power of God for salvation.

Open the scriptures to people and you will open their eyes to salvation and all its fullness. That's what Jesus demonstrated remember?

After the resurrection to the disciples Luke chapter 24 he opened their eyes that they might understand the scriptures and then he said to them you are the witnesses of these things. I'm sending the Holy Spirit upon you for this purpose for you to go and open the eyes of the blind all over the world to bring light and life to all all whom I will call both to Jews and as Paul says here in verse 23 also to Gentiles to us.

How do you see why this is such a vital passage for the church today? You won't find anywhere a clear expression of the content of the Christian gospel or the content of real Christian mission.

And here it is from the lips of the Lord Jesus himself and it is so important for us to listen to him isn't it? Because there is a constant pull constant pull in our lives and in the church today to move the focus of the mission of Christ from the spiritual to the material from the eternal to things that are merely temporal here and now.



[ 34 : 05 ] You see a church that is happy to believe in an eternal hope in theory but actually loses all focus on that in practice it will just end up as dead and as deadly as the Jewish religious establishment was in first century world.

So bitterly opposed to the real gospel in Paul's day. And it was for that reason that their temple their idolatrous institutional obsession was ultimately destroyed forever.

God will not tolerate earthly institutional obsessions crowding out the truth of the eternal gospel of Christ.

Not ever. One writer puts it very clearly like this opening blind eyes turning people from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God bringing them the knowledge of forgiveness this is the commission given to the servant of the gospel and we ought to test the validity of our work by this standard.

It's fatally easy to be swayed by less urgent considerations. You'll need to look around much of the church today to see how true that is.

[ 35 : 25 ] If we learn anything here from this passage about real gospel witness then it's that. But finally and just very briefly what are we to think of the reactions to Paul's gospel?

It points us to two things. First of all the public vindication for the gospel the climax of this whole story comes in the last verse doesn't it? The emphatic statement this man is doing nothing wrong this man could have been set free.

What he's saying is that in an unprejudiced court the genuine apostolic evangelical gospel will be found innocent of all charges. And if we're preaching the gospel faithfully the true gospel it ought to be obvious even to the skeptic that our gospel is not merely about earthly things but about heavenly things but that precisely because the gospel is about eternal things it will bring blessing here and now to the earth just because like Paul our eyes will be on eternal gain not on earthly greed not on earthly influence not on corruption and that is exactly what the atheist and indeed the increasingly anti-Christian columnist Matthew Paris had to concede in a recent piece that he wrote a year or so ago in the Times it's an astonishing thing it's entitled as an atheist I truly believe Africa needs God missionaries not aid money are the solution to Africa's biggest problem this is what he says it confines my ideological beliefs stubbornly refuses to fit my world view and has embarrassed my growing belief that there is no

God now a confirmed atheist I've become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa sharply distinct from the work of secular NGOs government projects and international aid efforts these alone will not do education and training alone will not do in Africa Christianity changes people's hearts it brings a spiritual transformation the rebirth is real the change is good from an atheist commentator that is the power of the genuine evangelical heart changing gospel the trouble is alas that what passes for the gospel so often and what people like Matthew Paris encounter in the west is merely social and political moralism or else on the other hand it's exploitative prosperity theology and quite rightly that does draw sharp criticism from the media but the gospel of the kingdom the true gospel will vindicate itself to all but the most perverse the second thing

Luke wants us to see here is also the nature of the personal challenge that it must bring to all who will hear the message because the gospel is a personal word about eternal things it's not something you can be neutral about a response will be provoked and Luke records for us here three very common responses to the gospel first verse 24 there's Festus who thinks Paul is insane Paul you're out of your mind he says a rational man proud of his own reason and the gospel offends his intellect I'm intelligent he says I can't accept this of course so often that's so isn't it Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1 foolishness often to the Greek to the man who worships his intellect the ironic reality is that this man is the man who is actually in darkness he's the one blind to the rational plain truth that Paul is speaking the truth that any lesser intellect must derive from something greater than itself a finite mind can't possibly pass judgment on something that's infinite so Festus is the one who needs light the light of revelation to enable him to know a world beyond the physical world that he lives in the world of his own intellectual limitations then there's

[ 39 : 49 ] Agrippa verse 28 he thinks Paul's impertinent Paul's appeal is brushed off with a deflection that expresses his royal disdain do you think you persuade me to be a Christian to bow to this king Jesus I'm the king don't forget here Paul he is a regal man proud of his own independence and the gospel offends his sense of autonomy and freedom to be faced with a command to repent to change his life to bow to the rule of another just like so many people no no no I'm independent I won't have anybody else ruling and dictating my life why should I yet again you see the truth is so different the reality is he's the one in bondage he's not free at all he's the one who needs the liberation of a redeemer from his sordid lifestyle his subhuman behavior even though he thought he was king and lord of his own affairs he was nothing of the kind and then thirdly there's the

Jews verse 21 whose constant reaction is to want to kill Paul they thought the gospel was insulting because they were religious men with great pride in their own righteousness I'm worthy they would say I can't have this barbaric talk about atonement and the cross and the Messiah having to die for my sin well again Paul says the gospel has always been that kind of stumbling block for the religious person the person who thinks that they've done all that's required of God in fact they're not blameless they're guilty in God's sight and forgiveness of sins is the desperate thing that they need there to inherit the life of the resurrection you see our world is still largely composed of these three groups of people those who find their personal satisfaction their identity their salvation if you like in well their own righteousness or their own reason or their own self rule their freedom yet the irony is just like that day in Caesarea these are the people who think that they've got it all but they're so wrong

Paul was the man standing there in chains looking as though he had nothing but he is the one who possesses the life and the liberty and the light of the Lord Jesus Christ I wish he said that all of you were like me in every way except for these chains those chains only mask the real truth to see reality you have to see beyond the present to what the gospel really is and to what the gospel really offers a place among the sanctified among those who are made perfect in God's sight through faith in Jesus Christ so friends don't be discouraged the gospel witness of the truth will always be met with these three responses the world will scorn seeing only our chains seeing only our ignominy but God's word is not chained

God's plan is not hindered one iota here Paul is on track for Rome just as God promised you see like Paul we also we're called to be witnesses and servants of this same Jesus and if we remain as clear as Paul was about what the gospel really is and about what the gospel really isn't and that's how we also will remain on track the calling that God has given us in this world and there will be those even from the festuses and the grippers and the zealous Jews of this world who like Paul himself although once he did idolize his own intellect and his own righteousness and his own autonomy there will be those who even like him in the end will surrender gladly to the light and the true liberty and the true life that is found only through

Jesus Christ our Lord maybe that's even God's message for somebody who's come in here today you like Paul kicking struggling against the goads God is prodding you with to your true destiny in his son listen to Paul's words this is you thinking how dare you persuade me to try and be a Christian in such a short time as one Sunday morning service 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 listen to the words of the risen Lord Jesus Christ amen let's pray thank you heavenly father that you sent your spirit upon the church calling your apostles and all who come after them with all the authority of heaven to open eyes to the light of Jesus to turn hearts from the power of

[ 45 : 36 ] Satan to God and to bestow forgiveness of sins and a place in the everlasting glory of your son to all who respond by faith in Jesus Christ may there be not one of us this day who does not do so before it ends for we ask it in Jesus name amen