

Acts Chapter 21-26

There is plenty in these passages which is good for teaching, all scripture is good for teaching. So there is plenty of information and plenty of stuff in these chapters other than the things I will be talking about today that are good for teaching and it would be beneficial for us to have a look at, especially chapter 20 when he is giving the ministry report to the church of Ephesus, has some great values in it. What we are going to do today is we are going to look at all the trials. So we are going to look at Paul:

- Before the Jewish Mob (Acts 21-22)
- Before the Sanhedrin (Acts 23)
- Before Felix (Acts 24)
- Before Festus (Acts 25)
- Before Agrippa (Acts 26)

We are going to take like a segment of every chapter and just look at the trial part where he is being accused and how he is making his defense. We will see what kind of things we can learn from that about maybe how we could share our testimonies or maybe how we can act in those kind of situations and how we can persevere on when trials and difficulties come our ways.

1. Before the Jewish Mob

Paul's Speech:

Paul is arriving in Jerusalem, he goes into the temple. It says there are some Asian Jews, they bring up a riot there and they are accusing him of things and then he is being beaten and people are running after him and then the Roman soldiers come and they kind of help him to get out of that situation and as he is walking away he speaks to them, '*can I speak to this crowd*'.

How often would we take the time to patiently speak to a crowd who is trying to kill you?

Here is a crowd that is trying to get after Paul, trying to beat him up, trying to kill him and he asked for permission that he may address them and speak to them. That just shows something about the character of Paul already. From his speech

- He addresses them as brother and fathers. So he uses endearing language. So immediately from his tone we can see that his compassion is to reach to people. He is not trying to make a point or an argument to make a case. He is not trying to shout at them or scold them; he is trying to win them for something.
- He speaks in Hebrew to them.
- Then he identifies with them. He said he is a Jew just like them that he was trained by Gamaliel (one of the most esteemed Rabi's). So he is one of them and he is not only just one of them but he is the Jew of Jews and then he even identified with them that even he too persecuted Christians that he was just like them like how they are running

after him. He use to run after other Christians, so he is trying to identify with them and say hey brothers, I was where you were, we were in the same kind of place.

- He gives his personal testimony from verses 6 to 21.

The interesting thing is here that they were listening to him all this while and didn't say anything until he addressed the fact that he was going to go and share the good news with the gentiles. As soon as he said that the crowds up roared again and they become loud again. So they were willing to listen to him until he said that he was willing to share this news with non-Jews as well. So immediately you can see for them it was an ethnic thing, it was a racial thing, it was a political thing and he tried to separate those things continuously. So what we can learn just from this first passage here is that Paul was not just about winning arguments he was about winning hearts and maybe in our own lives when we look at this. When we come into theological debates with people or try to share our faiths answer with people and we have different opinions then other people, a lot of time I am somebody who falls in that problem all the time. I end up trying to win an argument rather than trying to win somebody heart. I become very technical; I showed them how stupid they are as compared to me. I try to use all these arguments to show them that I am smarter than them. Paul wasn't doing that, Paul was going ahead and he was trying to win their hearts, speaking in their language, being compassionate with them, using endearing tones. So we can see that his whole demeanor was I am here I want to win the people's heart, I am not here to win an argument and that is something that we have to consider as well because I think often times when we get into arguments with our non-Christian friends and it ends up being a debate on who gets to win the argument and sometimes we have to see is this conversation really helpful in winning people's hearts.

2. Before the Sanhedrin

It is a Jewish court with all the council there and he tried to prove credibility at the beginning. He said I am somebody studied again and I did all the right things that didn't really go very well, he was smacked on the mouth for that and immediately he kind of spoke up against that and then they found that he was speaking against the high priest and he apologized because he said he did not know that this was the high priest and then he had some strategy here. It is interesting what he did. He knew that both Pharisees and Sadducees were there. Now the differences between Pharisees and Sadducees, it is like two different theological camps of the Jews.

Pharisees Belief: The Pharisees were supernaturalists, who believed in miracles, the soul, in the resurrection, in the absolute necessity of the fulfillment of the whole moral law, in the infallibility of the Scripture, and in the coming of a Messiah.

Sadducees Belief: The Sadducees denied every one of these things, and therefore their theology was farther from Christianity.

So among their own council they had different camps. Paul knew this and he knew that when it comes to resurrection they would have a different theology. So immediately what he does and while doing this being smart and using wisdom, not being manipulative because he is

always speaking the truth. He is just being wise and tactical on how he is proclaiming the truth. What he is saying, he is just talking about the resurrection and immediately as he mentions this he can see that people on both sides starts arguing as well. So a big uproar happens immediately and that is a great strategy because you have the Roman people sitting in and listening in as well. So immediately they realized, 'hey this is not a civil problem, this is not a political problem, this is a theological problem.' Because even among themselves he is claiming that there is a resurrected Jesus and among themselves when they come to resurrection they are fighting among themselves so this is a Jewish problem. This has nothing to do with politics. This has nothing to do with civil unrest. So immediately he makes a different situation between religion and politics. He is trying to show that there is a big difference here and he was successful in doing that. So I think it is a bit of an apologetic strategy.

In apologetic one thing is about telling people your views the other aspect is also trying to make people doubt their own views. People are very sure about the things that they know, it means people from different religions, they are very certain about things or they have certain values that they believe are very true and once you start digging deeper into those or starts questioning those they get uncertain of it and the same thing he was doing here by bringing up a controversial issue like resurrection, he see people were arguing with one another that is a form of apologetic showing the people hey don't be so sure about the things that you are sure about and that this is the possibility of a different kind of truth and so he is doing that in his argument as well. It is interesting what he is saying here. He is saying, this is not a political problem, it is a theological problem and that is something we here also have to be careful about. A lot of times we like to mix our faith with our politics and it is very important that we separate those two things. I mean, a lot of people of a similar faith might follow a certain politics that is fine but our faith should not be associated with a certain politics and that is because as soon as you do that if your faith represents a certain political stand what happens is that the government can use that reasoning to go against your faith, because they are saying you are going against political things. So we try to separate politics from faith because even in this country right now nobody will have a problem about you sharing your faith or anything like this until it becomes a political issue. So what they had to do is they had to make it a legal law for you to break while sharing your faith and that is how they can sue you or go after you because now it becomes a legal issue and no longer a faith issue, because with you sharing your faith you have gone against a legal issue that is what people are trying to do, to trying to combine faith with politics.

3. Before Felix

The Sanhedrin was not able to come to a conclusion, there was an up roar. They moved on out of Jerusalem. He is now being sent to Caesarea and he meets Felix the governor there and he is being charged by the Jewish courts. What they do is the Jewish high priest he brings his lawyer with him. He brings Tertullus with him who kind of makes a case. So now we are at the third trial and we have the third situation, again he is being accused by the Jewish people now in front of their Roman governor at this point of time and he is being accused of three things.

1. He is accused of being a troublemaker. It is very important that we know what it means because back then there were lot of trouble makers going around pretending to be Messiah or causing civil unrest so that was a big claim what they were doing.
2. Ringleader of a Sect. That means there is a sect and he is the ring leader of them of the Nazarenes sect.
3. Profaning against the Temple

They are trying to argue that Christianity should not get the same protection as Judaism. Judaism had a protection by the Roman government. We read earlier on in Acts there was a situation where because they said it was just a theological debate they got the kind of same protection as Judaism did so they are trying to show that Judaism and Christianity are two different religions. They are trying to prove that, so it would not get the same Roman protection like Judaism did. So the basis charges that they are putting against him are,

a) They charge him with acting contrary to Moses (of being unfaithful to the Scriptures and the faith of his people), and

b) they charge him with acting contrary to Caesar (of being a disturber of the peace and of undermining society)

Paul's Rebuttal

It is great because as there accusations were coming he addresses them in order as well. So he was a great lawyer in that sense in a way that he was able to refute every single one of those arguments.

- When it comes to troublemaker he said to them wherever I went I did not make trouble, it was actually, by that he is inferring that the trouble was happening was because of the Jewish people. He wasn't in the temple, but they started the trouble and he started defending himself. So they were the trouble makers. He was more of a trouble receiver. He said that there are no evidences.
- Ringleader of a sect and his argument against that was it is not a sect. He wasn't trying to dispute the part that he is ring leader. Of course he was there leader but what he was disputing was the fact that it was a sect. So he said

¹⁴ But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, ¹⁵ having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. ¹⁶ So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.

So he was showing them I believe similar things, I believe the same things as those people believe. There is not a big difference in that aspect, I am not a sect. So that is how he was arguing against this segment.

- Profaning the temple. He again said there is no evidence. He says he was in the temple for the right reasons, he was doing offerings and he was ceremonially clean. He was in the temp for the right reasons and the accusations don't hold ground that is the kind of the argument he gave because he was already tried for that in front of the Sanhedrin court and they were not able to make any accusations that hold ground. So don't bring up the accusations again because in before the Jewish council there was no substantial evidence that could hold me for a charge. So again he was going through all these arguments and he was making a very clever defense about it. Now of course what happened is they couldn't come to conclusion again and the Felix kind of put him into jail because he wanted to please the Jewish people. He even went there and wanted to bribe, he wanted money but Paul didn't bribe him. So he had the opportunity to be bribe someone to get out of jail but Paul didn't do so. He stayed righteous in his behaviors continuously.

4. Before Festus:

So now we can see in the book, it says two years past and then a new governor is being in state and that is Festus. Paul gives a defense to Festus here and they are very similar charges that are being put in front here again but we could say that the charges there are mainly on civic grounds that he is putting. Why can we say that? They are not going against the theological part or the Jewish law part anymore because they realized the only way that they would get him to justice is not by going with Jewish law problems but with civic Roman law problems. That is the only way that they will get a conviction. So on how do we can tell that this is what they were focusing on because in the words it says, they had many serious acquisitions the one that go against the civic law. So Paul answers very convincingly

Paul: Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense.”

Again he argues against those three points.

I have not committed any offence and we can see that this is probably not a short trial, just a description of it is short because later on we can see Festus talking to Agrippa about it and there again they brought up many different things but nothing really held weight. The only thing they had was some theological debates among themselves, some Jewish faith issues which he probably know more about. One thing Festus did, he tried to gain favor with the Jewish people. He is the new guy on the block, he is the new governor, and the best thing to do is trying to get favor with the majority people there right now. He just want to have big trouble, so he knows that they actually want him to go to trial in Jerusalem so he kind of puts the information, ‘hey would you like to get a trial in Jerusalem’ but ultimately Paul is smart as well. He understands that and this is just for him trying to get favor and he sees through it and he immediately says no I am here in front of a roman court, I have every right to be trialed by Rome, so send me to Caesar. As a roman citizen he has the right to be sent to Italy and to be sent to Rome to be trialed there as a Roman citizen. So he sees through the whole plot and it is great because ultimately they were plotting to kill him on the way to Jerusalem

anyways. So he goes to Caesar and of course Festus cannot say anything against him because that is Roman law that he has every right. No Roman citizen can be denied a case or a court trial in Rome; they have every right to do so. Festus was legally allowed to ask whether he wants to be trialed in Jerusalem because as a Roman governor he is able to use any kind of judicial court as his jury. So he was just offering I can use the Sanhedrin as my jury for the trial. So he was not going to do something illegal. He was doing something legal as well by offering that but obviously Paul refused and then he went to Rome. Festus is a bit unsure about this and when Agrippa comes he kind of shares the case with him and Agrippa is excited and kind of like, hey I want to meet this guy, I want to talk to him myself and that is where we come to the last trial.

5. Before Agrippa

Paul sets a huge case and we want to learn something about how he puts his defense here and how he goes about it.

vv.2-3 Setting the direction & tone when he talks to the crowd.

He knows he is trying to figure out who is the crowd in front of me, he knows who the crowd is and he sets the tone so that people listen. So he gets the attention of the person he is speaking to which is very important when we do public speaking as well.

- a) He is going to assume that the king know much about Biblical teaching
- b) He is going to assume that the king has the intelligence and intellectual seriousness to listen to a sustained argument.

Summary: Paul said, King Agrippa you know about Jewish things and I know because you know these things you will be patient. So he kind of starts with a tone of the argument saying this, “I sense in you the intelligence to listen to a full presentation”

It is great to start that way because if somebody does not listen to your full presentation then they are stupid. So if you tell somebody you are very smart to listen to a full presentation and if they don’t that means they are stupid. He puts it up in a very good position to start the argument.

vv.4-8. Paul opens by showing evidence that he is completely committed to the Biblical faith of his fathers.

- He says, he is the “Pharisee of the Pharisees” — as versed in and committed to the Biblical truth and Law of God as anyone ever has been.
- Also, like the Pharisees, he was committed to the future hope of the resurrection of the just.

Summary: “Despite the charges, my record shows that no one has studied and loved the Law of God or hoped in the resurrection more than I, and I have not changed!”

He has not changed in this aspect that he still loves God, he still loves the law and he still is using the resurrection so he has not changed and he kind of shows his commitment to the scriptures and to the truth of the faith that the Jewish people have.

vv.9-11. Here Paul brings out a second fact — his violent persecution of Christians.

So he kind of shows that he too was like them and understands where they are coming from because he too had that kind of same thought process.

- First, it proves again that he was very committed to the Biblical faith, and
- Second, it also in a sense shows that he understands how people could be opposed to Christianity and see it as a betrayal of the faith.

Summary: “Indeed, I can understand how my brothers feel--I once saw Christianity this way myself. But the evidence for Christ was so strong it changed my mind.”

It is so important that he shows his past condition. He shows his conviction, he shows his past condition and in some cases what we call this lead repentance. It is when we publically go in front of people and show them our brokenness, our sinfulness, our past mistakes because when we are willing to do that we open up the possibility for other people to say, “Hey that is me too. I am also like that, I also make mistakes”. It is so important that he is not just showing how great of a person he was, he is also showing how sinful and how terrible of a person he was. A lot of times we miss that in church because we look and we think everybody on the pulpit or everybody up there is all these perfect people but they are just as broken and sinful as anybody down here and sometimes we need to share that because people see that we are sinful broken people as well and it is to Christ alone that we are saved. Christianity is not just for everybody who is great and perfect all the time, but it is for people who make mistakes and everybody who is here right now who has persecuted the Christians he too is welcomed to come to Christ. If somebody like Paul who was the Pharisees of Pharisees, somebody as wicked and evil as him and somebody who has persecuted Christians and killed them can come to faith so anybody here listening in could come to faith as well. So it is very important that he shows his brokenness and his sinfulness here.

vv.12-16. Here Paul recounts his meeting with Christ on the Damascus road.

He describes his condition how he fell down and some physical activities and there were more people that actually have the same kind of experience.

- That this was not a hallucination or just a personal vision is seen by the fact that “we all fell to the ground” when the blazing light of Jesus shone on Paul and his companions (v.13-14).
- In this version of his experience he stresses that he was to be sent out as a witness to the Christ he met.

He said, I was terrible, here is Christ who met me, here is my conversion and here is my change, my transformation. I am going to be sent out to do something else. There is a change. He was on a mission to persecute Christians and then he met Christ and then he is

going to be on a mission to go and tell everybody about the Christ that he met. So we can see his brokenness, meeting Christ conversion and then transformation. That is very important when we also share our testimonies with people that we don't just talk about our brokenness when we met Christ and then we changed. There is transformation there. A lot of times we either forget to talk about the fact that we are broken or we forget to talk about the fact that actually transformation or change happened and of course we cannot leave out the part we met Christ and there is usually the insert the gospel here situation.

Summary: "When I was confronted with the reality of the resurrected Christ, it changed the whole direction of my life."

vv.17-21. Here Paul gives Agrippa the explanation for the hostility of Jewish leaders.

- It is not because he is being untrue to the Biblical faith and the hope of Israel
- but because he proclaiming that through Christ the Gentiles can share and be included in the Biblical faith and the hope of Israel.

So what he is saying there pretty much is I am accused not because I am unfaithful to our God but because I teach that through Christ the gentiles can also know our God. So he is kind of showing the reason being persecuted is because they don't like the gentiles to have the same faith that is the point he is stressing very strongly here.

Summary: "I am accused not because I am unfaithful to our God, but because I teach that through Christ the Gentiles can also know our God."

vv.22-23. The second of the two lines of evidence that Paul uses is the testimony of the Scriptures.

- He argues that the Bible pointed to and looked to Jesus Christ.
- Everything about him was predicted, namely, that through his work, his death and resurrection, he would bring salvation ("light") to both Jew and Gentile
- So, though Paul is proclaiming the God of Israel through the Scriptures of Israel and pointing to the hope of Israel (resurrection unto eternal life with God), he is putting Jew and Gentile on an equal spiritual footing.

Summary: "And when I looked at the Scripture, I found that it predicted this same Christ, through whom both Jew and Gentile can have the light of God."

That is what he is saying at his final conclusion that ultimately through scriptures it shows that both Jews and gentiles can have salvation that is the point he is trying to make. It is an amazing piece of testimony here and something that we can really glean from our own testimonies. It is about sharing with who we use to be, how we met Christ, how we change and therefore how we live our lives now and how that is not just new news but it is news that has been foretold from the ages to come already and it has been told from far long ago. It is not something new, so not a new revelation. So it is a great piece of testimony that he puts forward here.

SUMMARY:

When we share our testimony with people, when we have the opportunity to give a defense for the faith that we have because we are being accused or because we have a conversation with somebody, somebody is arguing with this, somebody have different faith, few things that we can learn from all these trials that Paul went through.

- **Appealing to win hearts**

We are not trying to win arguments, we are trying to win hearts and that is something very important in how we engage in the tone and the language that we use with people.

- **Personal to be real**

He was telling his personal story. He was using personal words with people. He was addressing them. He was being very personal to show that this is real.

- **Showed change (transformation).**

He showed the old himself and the new himself.

- **Contextualized to be relatable.**

In front of every different crowd he had different way of saying the same thing. He used different aspects of the same truth to talk to different kind of people. When we share with people as well we can see who were we and how did Christ came and how did he changed us and then we take that and personal and make it contextually relevant to people. How I would share in front of youth will be different and how I would share here. The same story, the same subject you share with a different group of people from different culture backgrounds you would share it differently because you want to understand what speaks to their heart. That is what we have to figure out when we share.

- **Provoking to give a challenge.**

He was provocative. Yes he was kind, he was loving but he was also provocative in the things that he said. He addressed issues head on and he gave a challenge to people, so much that people even ask, are you trying to make me a Christian within one sitting here with the way he was speaking.

- **It was Gospel (resurrection) focused.**

He spoke about the resurrection a lot all the time but when you speak about resurrection it presumes two things. There was somebody living and then somebody died. We talk about the resurrection of Jesus, he would talk about the life of Jesus and he will talk about the death of Jesus and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is the gospel that we believe in. So he is always putting about the gospel.

- **Truthful in spite of the consequences that came**

That is a difficult part for us. To be always truthful in spite of the consequences that may come, what persecution may come from our family members, what persecution may come from our work places, from the government, he was always truthful and he was smart and tactical about it but he was always truthful. We live in a country right now where sometimes proclaiming the truth can get into trouble too. When somebody faithfully in spite of persecution proclaims the truth you can expect there might be persecution, you can expect there will be trouble but in spite of that this person continued to proclaim and in spite of that we should be challenged to continue proclaiming the truth to all peoples, to all nations because everybody needs the gospel. It takes people like us, people who have the faith, to go and proclaim it to other people, to change this country, to change this nation, to change this world, to change this city and we should learn something from Paul and in front of all these trials he went through he was faithful to the truth. He always used the opportunity that he had to share the gospel and to share his testimony and how he came to Christ, to win hearts and not to win arguments.