

Acts 26 (#40) 3.7.21 (21019)
Light and Life

I. Acts is the record of God's own life spreading to humans. Forgiving, regenerating, resurrecting fallen humanity and the entire universe.

A. The Bible is the account of how God rescues his fallen creation, singlehandedly and yet through humans. How? By becoming a human without sin (like Adam) and paying for human sin personally, then rising from the dead and offering eternal resurrection life by repentant faith in Christ. From Genesis 3 through Revelation 20, this is the story.

B. Jesus said that the Spirit would regenerate people when they put their faith in Him. John 3.

C. The man he said this to, Nicodemus, probably knew Saul of Tarsus. They were both Pharisees and highly placed in Jewish theological circles.

1. The difference between them was that Nic became a disciple before Jesus was resurrected and Saul became one after the resurrection (18 months to 2 years probably)

D. Whether Nic ever told Saul about his interview with Christ that night, their understanding of the gospel would have fit perfectly. Grace, cleansing, regeneration by the Spirit, entry into the kingdom of God.

II. Background to Acts 26. c.59-60 AD. Paul is in his late 50s or early 60s

A. After 20 years of preaching Christ in the Empire, accosted in Jerusalem and arrested for his own protection by the Romans.

B. 2 years under military custody, with some freedom to contact friends.

C. 5 "trials" that were opportunities for the message of Christ.

1. Jewish mob in Jerusalem Ch 22

2. Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. 23

3. Felix & Drusilla in Caesarea. Ch.24

4. Festus (new procurator) in Caesarea (2 years later). Ch. 25

5. Agrippa II, Bernice, and Festus in Caesarea. Ch.26

III. At the Caesarea Palace... again. Acts 25:23-26:32.

A. An impressive Show: High profile trial, front page news. 25:23-27

1. Pomp = fantasia = appearance made for effect, showing off.

2. Festus, Roman Procurator; Generals, Diplomats, all at the palace, or perhaps theater.

B. Followed by a clear witness. Paul's defense is his testimony. 26:1-23.

1. I was very Jewish hoping in God's promise of resurrection. 4-8

a) Raised a good Pharisee and still clinging to the same hope as the Pharisees – **resurrection.**

b) *Why do you people consider it incredible that God should raise the dead?*

(1) Because He can't? Because He's not really there?

2. But I violently opposed the news that God had actually begun to fulfill His promise. 9-11

a) Hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, that Jesus as the resurrected Messiah.

b) What is so bad about hearing that we can be forgiven and given eternal life, complete with resurrection of ourselves in a new universe? Why do people hate this message?

3. But then Jesus himself converted me. 12-23. (Gal.1:11-17)

a) On the road to Damascus, arrested and drafted.

b) Kicking against the goads = resisting the truth and the inevitable will of God.

c) *Are you kicking against God?*

4. *Note: it is still Jesus who converts people through personal witness. Jn.10:27-30; Matt.11:25-30*

C. Resulting in a faithless response. Festus & Agrippa. 26:24-32

1. Festus says Paul has become insane.
 - a) Paul says, “No.” These words are true and rational.
 - b) *There is nothing irrational about the gospel, if God exists in the first place.*
2. Agrippa dodges the question with a counter-question: “Are you trying to make me a Christian?” (of course!)
3. Both agree that Paul had not committed a crime in Roman law.
4. But neither came to Christ (that we know of).

IV. Five Facets of the gospel. Verse 18-23

A. Darkness is the universal condition in our world. v18. Eph.2:1-3

1. *Turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.*
2. Spirit darkness is endemic and supernatural.
3. *This is rejected out of hand by modernist society.*

B. Jesus is the only source of light and sight. v.18, 23. 2 Cor.4:3-6

1. *To open their eyes...faith in Me.*
2. Faith in the risen Christ is a specific sort of knowledge, an ability to see, a revealed reality. (1 Cor.2). (I once was blind but now I see)
3. This knowledge *cannot* come from the world. **Matt.15:14**
4. It only comes through the Gospel revealed in the Scriptures.

C. He gives us a new identity. v18. 2 Cor.5:17-6:2

1. *...that they may receive forgiveness and a place with Me...*
2. Forgiven: the greatest need in human life.
3. Secure: Place = (kleros) a share, a place, an inheritance.
4. Set apart. Sanctified = set apart, a new citizenship, and character.

D. He gives us a new way of life. v.20. Matt.11:29; 28:19-20. Jn.10:27-30

1. *Deeds in keeping with repentant faith in Christ.*
2. Apprenticeship (mathetes) to Christ.
3. *The soul-rest comes as we take his yoke = learn from him how to think and live.*

E. He guarantees a new destiny. 23. Phil.3:20

1. *The First to rise from the dead. First of many...*
2. The hope and promise of Messiah from the OT – The resurrection and regeneration of the universe, and us along with it. Rev.21-22.

V. **Practical advice in a dark world:**

A. We don't have to be impressive, but we must be clear. (2 Cor.4:7ff)

1. Paul was the opposite of impressive here. Jesus is the topic, not the church or us.
2. The desire to be impressive by the world's standards is a huge trap.

B. We don't have to second-guess our circumstances, but we must use them.

1. God puts us into hard situations, but they are also opportunities for Christlikeness and witness.
2. Paul could have thought he was out of God's will because he is in chains, but he didn't second-guess his decision to go to Jerusalem or to appeal to Caesar.

C. We don't have to change the world, but we must proclaim Christ in it.

1. In words (proclamation) and deeds (salt and light). This must be understood in the way Jesus taught us to think about it. See Matt.5:13-16; 1 Pet.1:13-17;
2. *Salt and Light will change things!* (Matt.5:13-16) But it is Christ that does it. A dynamic witness to Christ will almost always change the environment, by turning the light of the gospel on.
3. The Lord is responsible *for* the world—we are responsible *in* it. Matt.28:18-20.