

Resurrection Hope Declared
 Acts 26:19-32
 Tampa Covenant Church
 11 May 2026

Proposition: Because Christ has fulfilled God's promise as the light to the nations, we're called to declare the good news of the gospel and trust in the Lord for the outcome.

FCF: Denying the truth and veracity of the gospel as seen in Festus and Agrippa's individual responses.

RHF: Through the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ, God has fulfilled his promise to send a Savior who proclaims the light of salvation to all people.

(#1) Introduction:

Last Sunday, we looked at part one of Acts 26 and saw how Paul stood before King Agrippa, not simply to defend himself, but to bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And he did that by telling his story: who he was, his encounter with the risen Christ, and how he was sent out as a witness. And we were reminded that our hope rests in that same reality; the resurrection of our Savior from the dead which leaves no room for lesser hopes in our lives.

In the last verse of today's text, as the King and his entourage exit the (#2) auditorium, Agrippa says to Festus, *"This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."* Set free from what? Because the issue in this passage isn't whether Paul could've been released from Roman custody but whether he was truly bound to begin with. So, as we stand beside Paul, he now shifts from personal story to declaration of the message that grounds our Christian hope; the good news of the gospel. We'll see it's a message we're called to declare, one that creates resistance but calls for our confidence in the sovereign grace of God as we trust in him for the outcome.

The Gospel We're Called to Declare: *Suffering, Death and Resurrection of Christ* (vv.19-23)

In vv. 19-23, Paul explains the message he's been (#3) sent to declare, *"he says he wasn't disobedient to the heavenly vision but he declared it first in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, throughout all the region of Judea and also to the Gentiles."* (#4) What did he declare? That both Jew and Gentile should, *"repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance."* Paul's message wasn't new. John declared this in the wilderness, Jesus echoed it at the start of his public ministry, Peter declared it on the Day of Pentecost and now this same message was given to Paul. Repentance isn't simply regret or something we do to earn God's favor; it's a turning of our whole lives to God in faith; a work God himself brings about in us by his Spirit and one that produces real change.

But Paul's obedience to his heavenly vision didn't result in fair winds and blue skies. The Jews seized him in the temple and tried to kill him. But with the Lord's help, he continued to testify exactly what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass. And with that, he reaches back to the OT and shows that gospel (#5) declaration rests on three realities: That the Christ must suffer, be the first to rise from the dead, and that he would proclaim light to both Jew and Gentile. Paul is pointing everyone back to Isaiah's suffering Servant who would conquer the enemy of sin; not through sword and shield but through suffering, death and resurrection. (#6 Blank) He kept this message front and center during these trials; not to provoke arguments or to prove his faithfulness to tradition. But because he was completely

convinced that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was central to the gospel story. It's God's declaration that Christ's sacrificial work is finished; sin has been defeated and a new creation has begun.¹ Only a Messiah who rises first from the dead can be the source of salvation blessings to every type of person in the world.

Church, this wasn't just Paul's message. Fast forward to our modern world and now this same message has been entrusted to all who follow Christ. And it's not a message we take lightly because it has the power to bring real hope, to real people in a real world. The gospel is a universal message; it has no equal and that's what sets it apart from all of the other messages we hear in this world. Most of what fills our minds and conversations doesn't carry into eternity. But the gospel message does: It tells us how we got here, what went wrong, what God has done about it and what's coming next. As the story unfolds, we encounter a gracious God who refused to leave us in the darkness we created. Instead, he wrote himself into the story by becoming flesh; marking the moment his plan of redemption entered into human history. If we lose sight of this, we miss the beauty of the gospel story. A story that speaks honestly to the world as it is, not as we wish it would be. And as much as we'd like to believe everyone will respond to this good news with grief and hatred of their sin and turn to Christ in faith. That's not always the case in this fallen world and neither is it unprecedented. So let's see how Paul was confronted with resistance to the gospel and how he responded.

The Resistance the Gospel Creates: Dismissal and Deflection (vv.24-28)

(#7) Luke tells us in v.24 that as Paul 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."* Church, this wasn't one of those clear your throat, *"excuse me"* interruptions. Festus had no concept or category for what Paul was saying; so he just erupted: *"Enough, Paul! You're a maniac."* But look **(#8) how Paul responds**, *"I'm not a maniac, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words."* Paul didn't erupt in kind because he knew that Christ's resurrection from the dead was a verifiable reality; ² therefore, he was speaking rational truth. Truth divinely revealed in the Scriptures and now fulfilled in Christ.

But Paul isn't gonna waste this God ordained moment. He brings Agrippa **(#9) into the conversation**, *"even the king knows about these things and that's why I'm speaking freely because none of these things happened in secret."* Remember Paul's opening remarks? He commended Agrippa for his knowledge of Jewish customs and controversies and now he's appealing to that knowledge. Think about what Paul is doing, he's highlighting the fact that the resurrection wasn't some secret event. Thus, believing in the resurrection wasn't about entering into some secret society because the Christian faith is public and Paul is pressing that fact.

So he says to Agrippa, *"King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? To believe the prophets is to believe what they said; that the Messiah would suffer, be the first to rise from the dead in bringing light to the nations."* Talk about a loaded question! And then Paul basically paints him into a corner, *"I know that you believe."* All eyes are now on Agrippa. Festus has already dismissed Paul as crazy. So, Agrippa can say "no" in order to save face but he knows if he says, "Yes." Then he's swung the door wide open for Paul to conclude: *"Well, if you believe in the prophets; then why not Jesus?"*³ Agrippa sees exactly where this is **(#10) going so he** deflects, *"In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?"*

(#11 Blank) Here it is... two differing types of resistance to the gospel; emotionally charged dismissal; *"you're crazy, that's nonsense!"* And deflection; *"I'm good; are you tryin' to convert me or something?"* And it does something in us doesn't it? We can respond with apathy, *"Oh well; time to move on."* Or we can go with a version of empathy that's not helpful, *"I feel sorry for your soul; I was just trying to help."* Or we can fire back. Years ago, I found myself at a family gathering in a friend's home and struck up a gospel conversation with one of the family members. It started off well but not long after; I got the emotionally charged dismissal. And my pride and defensiveness kicked in and things escalated. And while the back and forth continued, my friend stepped in, pulled me aside and said, *"you need to stop; you're no longer trying to witness; you're trying to win an argument."*

When the truth of that rebuke hit me, I was embarrassed and full of shame because in that moment, I lost confidence in the sovereign grace of God and was trusting in myself to close the deal instead of trusting in the Lord for the outcome. How brazen is that? Some of us may know exactly what that feels like; others maybe not as much. But either way, the takeaway is the same: no matter the type of resistance we encounter to this good news; in the home, the neighborhood, at work, or in our web of relationships, our confidence must remain in God's sovereign grace and the new life it holds out to those who are far from him. That's what Paul did, he didn't fight fire with fire because his confidence wasn't in himself; rather it was anchored in God's grace.

The Confidence we have in the Sovereign Grace of God: Fueled by prayer (vv.29-32)

(#12) 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."* When Paul says, *"I would to God;"*⁴ he's pointing to a deep desire in his heart that he expresses to God in prayer. And this deep desire wasn't just for Agrippa but for everyone in the room who heard the gospel. That they might become what he is; a sinner once far from God but now brought near through the precious blood of Christ. **(#13 Blank)** Paul's response is something we must take into our hearts when we consider his circumstances. When he returned to Jerusalem, he was dragged out of the temple and jailed. Now in Caesarea, he's been in jail for the last two years and many in this auditorium still want him dead. Nonetheless, Paul's desire for everyone's salvation never turned to bitterness, cynicism or apathy. He still longed for all to know the one true God through Christ.

And this tells us where Paul's confidence truly lies; not in himself but in the power of God's grace! Paul shared the gospel repeatedly⁵ in this defense; Festus said he was crazy, Agrippa deflected his question and Luke doesn't tell us of anyone coming to faith on this day. So, if their salvation depended on his skill or technique, then we should conclude that he failed. But Paul knew he didn't have the power to save anyone in that room. That power belongs to the grace of God. Because the one who raised Christ from the dead is the same one who gives life to a dead heart. Paul's confidence in God's grace was the source of his boldness (*King Agrippa do you believe the prophets?*), his perseverance in patience (*this was Paul's fifth trial*). And all of this was sustained by prayer; in trusting God for the outcome.

The same is true of us; we're called to this same confidence. Because if we truly believe that salvation belongs to the Lord, then we'll speak with boldness, persevere with patience, and entrust the outcome to

him in prayer. Boldness isn't about standing on the street corner with a bullhorn shouting the gospel at passing cars. Rather, it's refusing to second-guess God or fear losing our reputation when the gospel is dismissed or deflected in conversation. And persevering in patience entails remaining steady in a culture that demands immediate results, because we know salvation never happens according to our timeline but Gods.

And all of this is sustained through prayer. Not as an attempt to force God's hand, but as an acknowledgement of our helplessness and total dependence on him.⁶ This is one of the great ironies of the Christian life; we don't grow in our calling by trying harder or mastering techniques, but through deeper dependence on Christ. Because if we're honest, there will be times in our witness when we'll shrink back in boldness or push too hard and lose patience. But total dependence on the Spirit of God in prayer grounds us, especially in the face of opposition. Because it reminds us that we're called to declare the gospel message while God is responsible for the results. And this isn't a one-time request; it's a way of life. We pray not only for family, friends, co-workers and neighbors who are far from God, but for all kinds of people in the world, because this gospel we proclaim is not confined to a certain locale; it's global in its reach. And church, the Lord doesn't have a backup plan; he's still using us.

Conclusion:

Well, Paul's defense is finished. We read in v.31 that Agrippa and his entourage all agree Paul has done nothing deserving of death or imprisonment. And we return (#14) to Agrippa's comment: *"This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."* And for a quick moment, we'd agree... yes, Paul could've been freed from all of this. But the real question isn't whether Paul was free; it's whether anyone else in that room was. Because when we think a little deeper, those chains granted him the opportunity to boldly proclaim true freedom: Freedom from the enslaving power of sin, freedom from the fear of man, and freedom to serve as a witness for Christ... and there was more witnessing to come.

Back in Acts 23:11, after he was thrown out of the council, the risen Christ stood by (#15) him and said, *"Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome."* And that's exactly what happened. (#16 Blank) At the end of Acts, Paul is in Rome, under house arrest but welcoming all who came to him. Paul's rented quarters became a mission outpost for gospel activity. Those who visited heard the gospel and were sent out to share the gospel.

You see, during this period of his ministry, Paul may have been in chains but the gospel remained unchained and was boldly declared through the faithful witness of God's people. This is our shared heritage and it points to the hope we stand on today. A hope not defined by our circumstances, but a hope secured through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. So with confidence in the sovereign grace of God, may we boldly proclaim his gospel, persevere in patience and prayerfully entrust the results to him. And may he grant us grace toward that end.

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 375–376.

² ἀλήθεια (*alētheia*). n. fem. truth, true, sincerity, integrity. *Indicates the quality or state of being real or genuine—often in the sense of visible and verifiable reality, demonstrated by facts, actual events, or proven character.* In the nt, *alētheia* takes on the additional meaning of divinely revealed truth, the truth of the gospel (John 1:17; 8:40; Titus 1:1; Heb 10:26). Douglas Mangum, “Truth,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

³ N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 13–28* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 217–18.

⁴ εὐχομαι (*euchomai*). vb. to desire strongly. *Describes the act of expressing a wish or strong desire, especially through prayer.*

⁵ First, he summarized Christ’s commission to him to bring people into his light, power, forgiveness and new community (18). Secondly, he described his obedience to the heavenly vision in terms of preaching that people should repent, turn to God and do good works (20). Thirdly, he detailed his continuing mission ‘to this very day’, which was to testify that, as the Scriptures had foretold, Christ died, rose and proclaimed the dawn of the new age (23). Each time Paul thus repeated the gospel in court, he was in fact preaching it to the court. Stott, 379.

⁶ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 118–19.