

FPFWC Christian Development



Experiencing Hope

June 2024

Summer Quarter

June 29, 2024

Lesson #5 – Fearless Witness

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Acts 26:1-11

ICE BREAKERS -

How can you pass along your hope and faith to future generations?

How does your hope in the resurrection help you face the future with optimism and peace?

Key Verse: “Now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers:”—Acts 26:6

LESSON BACKGROUND –

The book of Acts relates one of the most significant mindset changes made by an individual throughout history. That change involved a man named Saul, who was a deadly enemy of Christianity at first (Acts 7:60b–8:3). But after an encounter with the risen Lord, Saul became Christianity’s chief proponent. The specifics of how the change came about are recorded in Acts 9:1–19; 22:3–21; and 26:12–18. Today’s lesson is the preface to the third of these accounts.

Saul was converted to Christianity in about AD 34. He subsequently traveled around the Mediterranean world on three missionary journeys, as recounted in Acts 12:25–14:28; 15:36–18:22; and 18:23–21:9. Perhaps desiring to leave his old identity in the past, Saul became known as Paul early in these journeys (13:9). Shortly after the third journey ended in Caesarea Maritima, Paul traveled down to Jerusalem. There he was sighted by enemies who incited a riot to silence him (21:17–29). Paul’s subsequent arrest undoubtedly saved his life (21:30–36). The year was probably AD 58.

After another riot or near-riot, Paul used his Roman citizenship to avoid being flogged (Acts 22:22–29). An inquest and a murder plot ensued (22:30–23:22), so Paul was transferred under heavy guard to Caesarea Maritima—about 75 miles road distance from Jerusalem—for trial under Governor Felix (23:23–24:26). That trial was inconclusive, and Paul was held in prison for two years until Governor Festus replaced Felix (24:27).

That change in leadership resulted in another trial (Acts 25:1–9), Paul’s appeal to Caesar (25:10–12), high-level consultation (25:13–22), and appearance before

King Agrippa II (25:23–27). That’s the immediate backdrop to today’s lesson; the year was about AD 60.

LESSON COMMENTARY

26:1. Since Festus had asked for Agrippa’s opinion, Agrippa was the one who granted Paul permission to speak. Paul stretched out his hand in respect for the king (Bruce, Acts, 496) as he began his defense (apologeomai, from which the word “apology” is derived).

26:2–3. Paul began by saying that he considered it a privilege to make his defense before Herod Agrippa II. Paul was not patronizing the king. The statement, especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews is accurate because Agrippa was well informed about Jewish customs, and certainly more objective than the Sanhedrin to evaluate Paul’s case.

Paul’s defense followed a typical rhetorical form of prologue (vv. 2–3), narration (vv. 4–18), confirmation (vv. 19–20), refutation (v. 21), and concluding appeal (vv. 22–23) (Bock, Acts, 713). Though giving a formal defense, Paul focused his account on the resurrection (cf. v. 8 and v. 23).

26:4–8. Paul had been a Jew all of his life and was even a Pharisee, who lived according to the strictest demands of the law. Twice Paul identified himself with the Jews, our fathers (v. 6) and our twelve tribes (v. 7). Paul maintained he was thoroughly Jewish, and his hope in the resurrection was identical to the promise that God made to His chosen people.

26:9–11. Since he considered himself a faithful Jew, Paul formerly had felt obligated to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Paul referred to Jesus from the perspective of an unbelieving Jew. Before the Damascus road experience, Paul believed that Jesus was not Lord or Messiah; he was from the insignificant town of Nazareth. In Jerusalem, Paul had received authority from the chief priests to imprison Jewish believers, and he had voted for the death penalty for them. He had tried to force Jewish believers to blasphem[y] by apparently denying Jesus. He was so enraged against believers that he pursued them to cities outside of Israel.

LESSON NUGGET – “Almost persuaded to be a Christian is like the man who was almost pardoned, but he was hanged; like the man who was almost rescued, but he was burned in the house. A man that is almost saved is damned.”

– Charles Spurgeon

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Word for Today Bible, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*