

Title: The gospel on display, pt.1  
Text: Acts 25.13 - 26.32  
Theme: How the gospel makes you comfortable with you.  
Series: Acts  
Prop Stmtnt: Through Christ we become fully humanized.

Read Text:

I love this text for so many reasons and am very excited to work through it with you. But, at the outset we need to see what is the big idea. What is it that Luke wants us to see? There are three statements that he records that make his big idea clear. 25.18; 25.25 and 26.31b. Keep in mind that Luke is writing this account as an explanation and defense of the ongoing influence of the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus is gone. Jesus ascended into heaven. But, the influence of his life and his message continues to grow. This man who never held a public office, who never traveled outside of the narrow confines of his tiny nation, who was executed as a criminal, whose followers were for the most part, rather ordinary, is now being talked about in cities throughout the Roman Empire and in some of the highest courts of the land and is about to be discussed in a case that appears before the very emperor himself. Who is this Jesus and what is his movement all about? That is what the book of Acts is answering. (a good book to read with people who are investigating Christianity.)

Here is the tension. On the one hand, governments and people in power have nothing to fear from Christians (and Christianity). We have no armies, no spy network, no secret societies trying to undermine institutions and destroy them. We do not storm institutions and threaten to burn them to the ground. We simply do not use the weapons of this world in order to advance our cause, since our fight is not against flesh and blood anyway. On the other hand, every government and seat of power is right to feel threatened by Christianity. Christianity is built upon Christ, the rightful ruler of the world, the seat of ultimate power and the one whose truth exposes every human heart and every hidden agenda. The kingdom of Christ is the only eternal kingdom and all kings and kingdoms will bow to him. That means that you and I will bow to him. The book of Acts furthers the story line of the Bible that reveals the fact that all peoples are divided into two groups. There are those who trust Christ and happily bow their knee now before him in love and worship. The rest trust themselves and will bow their knee before him in fear, but not in love. The first will rule and reign with Christ in his kingdom. The rest will be cast out, condemned justly for their willful rebellion against this glorious, good, gracious and awesome King. Therefore, the message of the gospel, which is the good news of how you can and must trust in Christ, is the urgent message of the Bible and the book of Acts. This is the ultimate message that every person needs to hear and embrace. This is the message that Paul declared to these rulers, because every person must trust in Christ, including kings and governors.

It is common for people to approach the Bible as if it were akin to a self-help blog from God to give you ideas and truisms to navigate your way through this life and feel better about yourself and others in the process. That approach, however, misses the entire point of the Bible. This life is not the goal. This is not it. You need to know that you were created by God and God is perfectly holy, infinitely just and eternally all-powerful. You and every human being has rebelled against this good, wise and awesome God and are truly guilty for our rebellion without excuse

and without the means of rescuing ourselves his just wrath. However, God did not leave us without hope, but sent his Son to come to this earth in order to live the life that we were supposed to live, but didn't, and then he died on the cross as the payment for the sins of every single person who would ever believe on him. This is the gospel. This is the good news. Christ has come and has done for you what you could not do. The incontrovertible evidence that Christ's death is gloriously sufficient is the resurrection of Christ from the dead. This is why the topic of the resurrection of Jesus is all throughout the messages that Paul and the other disciples preached. You need Christ and Christ has come. Trust him. Turn from your sin and from self-reliance and trust in Christ. You will either spend eternity paying for your sins, which is a debt you cannot satisfy, or you will spend eternity basking in the Savior who paid them for you. This is the most important message that anyone could ever hear, which is why, even when Paul has a chance to make his case before these rulers, he is more concerned about them hearing the gospel, and the reputation of the gospel than he is of getting out of jail, as inconvenient as it was. Paul, was definitely not living his best life now, was he? But, he didn't care, because that is not the point of the gospel. Paul understands the urgency of the gospel and we witness the priority of the gospel in the sovereign plans of God, particularly in this setting as ...

### **I. God directs his people and events in order to display his gospel.**

Ok, so here goes some crazy stuff that you just can't make up. Not long after Felix came to Caesarea from Rome in order to be the governor, he became infatuated with Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa I. The inconvenient problem was that both Felix and Drusilla were both already married. They ended up leaving their spouses and getting married. That helps us understand some of the "alarm" that Felix had as he and Drusilla listened to Paul reason with them about righteousness, self-control and the coming judgment (24.25). Paul was not intimidated by his audience and did not waste the opportunity to tell them about the gospel. He knew that Felix and Drusilla, were no different than anyone else and had to hear the gospel. Felix and Drusilla did hear it. Felix repeatedly sent for Paul and talked with him but there is no evidence that Felix ever believed. Eventually, Felix and Drusilla were sent to Rome. Drusilla died in the Pompeii region as a result of the volcanic eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. Death is no respecter of persons. Perhaps, in those final, terrifying moments, she cried out to Christ. In her case, she at least had heard the gospel because Paul was faithful to tell her. Drusilla had a brother and a sister, named Agrippa and Bernice (all of them were the children of Herod Agrippa I). Bernice had already been married, but was now living with her brother Agrippa (Herod Agrippa II) who was king (at least of some limited territory). Talk about your family tree being a wreath, this stuff is messy. Festus has replaced Felix. Festus is Roman. Agrippa and Bernice are Jewish, but loyal to Rome in order to stay in power. Festus has replaced the brother-in-law of Agrippa and Bernice. A Jewish king, his sister, a Roman governor all with some history are the primary players who have a show trial of sorts in order to figure out what on earth to tell Caesar, who happens to be Nero.

There is a lot of intrigue and drama in this scene. But, all of those details that historians try to sort out, are not what really matters. What matters is the gospel. History serves the gospel. Back in Acts 9 in the story of Paul's conversion, God said that Paul would carry the name of Jesus to the Gentiles and to kings. And here he is doing just that. Felix did not do his job well and Paul was in jail for 2 years. Festus was not willing to decide, even though he knew what the right

decision was. We see the injustice that Paul was at the mercy of, and yet, every detail remains under the sovereignty of God. The ineptness, the indecisiveness and political gaming were overruled by God so that his plan for Paul to declare the gospel in such a personal and public way. God directs people and events in order to display the gospel. God does not make mistakes. I love this. Don't you love this? What does Paul do when he is brought into this intimidating setting? Before the new governor, the king, the daughter of a king, the military tribunes, and the prominent men of the city, what is Paul going to say? He preaches the gospel. Yes, he tells them about his life as it relates to the charges brought against him, but he does this in order to get to the heart of it all, and the heart of it all is Christ and their need to repent and trust in him. Paul is not impressed with their robes, but is burdened with their need and he takes advantage of the opportunity that God has created to tell them about Christ.

You and I have many interactions with people. Why? Ultimately it is not to make much of ourselves. Some of you live with a lot of fear of what people think of you. I say this in love, but, do you see the folly of that? What benefit is there of people thinking well of you when you cannot save them? You cannot be their hero anyway. Those people you fear need Jesus. God gives you opportunities with others in order to be a witness to them of the grace of God in your life. Point them to Christ. We do not know if anyone in this event trusted Christ, but we know that Paul was faithful to God anyway and did not make this about himself.

We are tempted to think that the imprisonment of Paul is an unjust frustration. It is. But, Paul did not waste this injustice, but pointed to Christ. God directs people and events (even unjust ones) in order to display the gospel. You will experience injustice, but if you are consumed by it, you will miss the opportunity to point people to Christ.

## II. **God displays the gospel through humble transparency.**

At the end of Paul's trial before Felix, Felix decided not to decide and left Paul in prison for Festus to deal with. Festus finds out why Felix decided not to decide and tries to do the Jews a favor and send Paul to Jerusalem, which he could have done and would have done except for the fact that Paul was not only a Jew, but he was also a Roman citizen and Paul had the right to appeal his case to a higher court, which Festus was all too willing to grant. Festus knew, as we will examine a little more closely next week, that the crux of the entire issue hinged on the debate about the resurrection of Christ.

From Paul's perspective, the resurrection of Christ was obvious because Christ appeared to him and commissioned him to go to the Gentiles and tell them the gospel. From Festus' perspective, this was beyond his scope. He simply did not know what to do. He admits that Paul is not guilty of breaking any laws and should be free. However, Festus is unwilling to do what he knows is the right thing to do and set Paul free. Paul would not have to appeal to Caesar if Festus had done his job, but Festus didn't decide as he should have and grants Paul's appeal. In the moment that got Festus off the hook. But now reality has set in. In order to send this case up the line, Festus has to write a legal brief as to why this case is worth the time of the Emperor.

### **A. If image is your idol, fear and insecurity are your companions.**

This text presents two people in stark contrast: Festus who is concerned about how others see him and Paul who isn't concerned about himself but is concerned how others see Christ.

Two weeks ago, I pointed out that while Paul was in prison, he was actually the one who was free, and that while Felix was not in prison, he was the one in bondage. That scenario is repeated here. Festus is in a bind. As the governor he is in a political office that is presiding over a legal matter and is bound by laws that are designed to be just. In other words, the justice department and political realities have just collided in the career of Festus. This is what I want you to see. We have in our country, a constitutional form of government that is based on the separation of powers. Why? We separate the legislative branch that forms the laws, from the judicial branch that interprets the laws from the executive branch that enforces the laws because (like in this case) political realities tend to override justice. Festus is at a loss as to what to say to Caesar (25.26-27). If he is completely honest, he has to admit that he has punted this case because he doesn't want to take the political heat. This helps us understand why he invites Agrippa and Bernice to the party so that their presence would add to the weight of the investigative claim. His letter is carefully nuanced to make himself look better than what he really is and he glosses over the glaring fact that he did not decide a clear-cut case.

Luke points out (25.23) that Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp. Pomp. What a great word. But, underneath the formality, regality, ceremony and speeches are 3 insecure and fearful people who are tempted to believe that their titles and crowns mean something about them. *"Then at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in."* The contrast is deeper than social status.

#### **B. If your identity is in Christ, joy and humble confidence are your close friends.**

Paul, on the other hand has nothing to lose. He really doesn't. He knows that as a follower of Christ, that even though (as he wrote in Romans 8) we are often *"being killed all the day long [and] we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered"* because our world sees us as being disposable, that no matter what, *"we are more than conquerors through him who loved us"* and that nothing *"in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* So, while Festus is at pains as to trying to figure out what to say and how to present himself in the best possible light, Paul isn't. Paul is free to speak the truth to others about himself, to others about God and to others about themselves. He is does it respectfully, compassionately and forthrightly. Paul is free to speak the truth even when the truth doesn't make him look very good.

Why is Paul free to speak the truth? He believes the gospel and the gospel frees you from denial. The gospel frees you from image. The gospel frees you from cover-up and frees you from the fear of being found out. The gospel frees you to face the truth about yourself, your sin, your inconsistencies, your insecurities, your vulnerabilities, and not only allows you to admit them, but demands that you do, so that you will see your rescue in Christ.

When you listen to Paul's address, he tells his audience the truth beginning with the truth about himself. He does not fear exposure since God already knows everything and he is forgiven through Christ. *"Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies!"* The charges of wrongdoing by others have no weight or standing against the believers in God's court.

Paul tells them what he was and what he did. He does not hide the truth about the evils that he did. But this is not a bragimony or testiphony. This is a humble, honest admission about his life. God knows the truth about you. He is not impressed if others are impressed and he is not put off even if others are. He knows the truth. The truth about your sin is a good reason for you to fear God's wrath, but the truth about Christ's death for you is the only reason why you do not have to. When you trust in Christ as your Redeemer, your wrath-appeasing, substitutionary sacrifice and righteousness and accept him as your King, you are forgiven. You are declared righteous. You are accepted by God into beloved, adopted into the family and made a joint-heir with Christ. This is your standing. This is your identity. This is your eternal personhood and it is not pomp or plastic. It is real. Festus lived seeking the approval of others and did not know what to do. Paul was in Christ. The truth had set him free. Even the truth about his sin had set him free because it drove him to Christ. Paul was free in Christ. He was free not to be intimidated by the pomp or the perception of power. He was respectful, but he knew that beneath the crowns and under the royal robes were broken sinners who needed Jesus. That is why he appealed to Agrippa to turn to Christ. Agrippa, the King, like every other sinner in the world needed Jesus.

You cannot please everybody. If you live for the approval of others, you will lose your mind in addition to your heart. The fear of man is such a snare because you are owned by the shifting opinions of others. Surveys say. Trends are showing. Approval ratings are.... Living with your life tethered to a finger in the wind is hard and hardening. Let me talk to those of you who are 35 and under. Social media is like the water in the kettle and you are like the proverbial frog. For many of you, this is all that you have known. So much of your personal life is displayed for others to see. This is normal for you, but your normal comes at a great cost. The change of temperature of the water over time is slowly cooking you in this way. Your views and attitudes are unnecessarily susceptible to the comments of others. You are learning to live with so much of your life before others and it is done in a format that invites opinions that you are tempted to assign way too much value to. You wrongly believe that your value in life is based on being noticed, friended, commented on, liked and responded to. When you do something that gets attention, you are tempted to think highly of yourself because others do. When you are ignored, you are tempted to think that you are nothing because you are not being talked about or discussed. You have put your life on a leash and you have given the end of the leash to a world that does not understand true value, true love or even truth and you look to them for your identity. You are susceptible to depression because you have believed the lie that if your world values you, then (and only then) do you have value. But you are craving value from people in the world who do not even know what it means to value life, and it is maddening. As long as image is your goal/god, fear and insecurity will be your constant companions and over time you will begin to wonder who or what you really are. There is a better way. This is one of the beautiful benefits of the gospel. The God who made you, is the God who knows you. You cannot impress him because he knows everything. And what is so incredible is that even though he knows everything about you he loves you. Think about that. His loving of you is not a generic, vanilla love. His love is informed. He knows who you are. His love is intentional. He knows what he is going to make you to be. His love is relentless. He knows that you will not be satisfied with anything less. His love is sacrificial and costly. He sent Christ to die for you and secure you. He sent the Spirit to arrest you and keep you. His love is eternal. He is preparing a place for you to live with him forever and ever because he delights in you.

III. God displays the gospel through you. (next week)

A. A changed life

B. A clear story

C. Compelling truth

D. Convicting appeal