*DEVOTIONAL*

May 7 - 12

*Paul, Festus and Agrippa*

**Monday, May 7 Acts 26:1-8**

*“Paul began his defense”*

 After Roman Governor Festus stated the case against Paul, as it had been presented to him by the Jewish leaders, Jewish King Agrippa gave his permission for the Apostle to speak. Paul was neither cowed by the pageantry of Agrippa’s royal entourage nor frightened by Roman power. He grasped the occasion, cutting through the pretentious atmosphere and into King Agrippa’s mind as he laid out the witness of his life in Christ.

 Paul begins by affirming the king’s knowledge of the customs and affairs of the Jews, implying that the Roman authorities’ lack of such understanding had kept him from receiving a fair hearing while under their control. Essentially he was saying, “If anyone can understand how false the charges against me are, you can.” Next, Paul establishes the reason he is on trial – that he believes that the hope for which he and the Hebrew people had looked forward to for so long had been fulfilled. Then Paul clearly identifies that hope with the resurrection, questioning why any Jew would find it incredible to believe that God could raise the dead.

*Your resurrection, Lord, is the basis of our eternal hope. Amen.*

**Tuesday, May 8 Acts 26:9-14**

*“It is hard for you to kick against the oxgoads”*

 Paul insists that he once had the same attitude toward Christianity as his opponents now do. He vividly describes the vehemence with which he opposed the gospel and persecuted Christians; he was an official representative of the chief priests and their main persecutor. His statement that he cast his vote against those who were put to death signifies that Paul was one of the major leaders in the campaign against Christianity.

 Verse 12 begins the third account in Acts of Paul’s conversion and divine call. Unique to this giving of his witness is his recounting that Jesus spoke to him in Aramaic, perhaps to emphasize that the voice of Christ on the road and the voice of Jesus while on earth came from the same person. Also unique in this telling is Christ’s saying, “It is hard for you to kick against the oxgoads.” This proverb was used to express the futility of striving against fate or against the gods, and its meaning to Paul on the Damascus road was that it was now as futile for him to try any longer to work against Christ as it would be for an ox to kick against the plowman’s goad.

*It is indeed hard, Lord, to fight against your will. Amen.*

**Wednesday, May 9 Acts 26:15-18**

*“I am sending you to them”*

 Paul’s speech before Agrippa provides a comprehensive description of his ministry of taking the Gospel to the Gentiles. The fact that people were being converted to Christianity had caused much anger among the Jews. Paul explains to the Jewish king how and why this takes place. Scripture teaches us that God calls and enables people to be witnesses to what we have experienced of Jesus. He commissions us to go to the people, protects us from our opponents, and helps us throughout our ministry. Christ himself, the first to rise from the dead, is the light we proclaim to the world.

 The result of this ministry is that people are saved. Their eyes are opened; they turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. On their part they must have faith in Jesus, repent of their sins, turn to God, and prove their repentance by their deeds. On God’s part, he forgives their sins and gives them a place among those who are made holy in his sight through Christ.

*May I be your witness in the world today, Lord, as you send me out. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONAL*

May 7 - 12

*Paul, Festus and Agrippa*

**Thursday, May 10 Acts 26:19-23**

*“I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven”*

 Paul’s statement about not being disobedient to the vision from heaven presents a key to the effectiveness of a servant of God: obedience. In our role as witnesses for Christ, we must respond obediently to God’s call. We must testify to both small and great, and in so doing we open their eyes to the truth of God. To achieve this end we must say things that are true and reasonable so that people will be persuaded about the gospel. Behind all of this is our hope and prayer that all the people we encounter will experience salvation.

 Paul also makes several points about the evangelistic message. We preach that people should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. We say nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen. We testify that the Messiah had to sufferer and that, as the first to rise from the dead, he proclaims light to the people. These elements of the evangelistic message show us that effective Christian mission includes both divine and human activity.

*You call me to share your message, Lord, and I will not be disobedient. Amen.*

**Friday, May 11 Acts 26:24-32**

*“Do you believe the prophets?”*

 Paul’s speech is too much for the practical Roman official, Festus, who knows little about the intricacies of Jewish theology. He recognizes that Paul is a learned man, but he cries out that his learning has driven him insane. Paul responds by affirming that what he is saying is both true and reasonable. Had Paul been addressing Festus primarily, he would have presumably presented his words in a way that Festus would have understood. But here he is speaking to Agrippa and Paul knows that the king understands what he is talking about.

 Paul zeroes in at this stage with a direct challenge to Agrippa, asking him whether he believes the prophets. This challenge is for Agrippa to compare what the prophets foretold with what happened in Christ. But, not wanting to make a decision about Christianity, Agrippa brushes off the challenge. He simply wanted to help Festus out by giving him advice about the case. He may also have looked forward to meeting one of the top leaders of this growing movement. Paul responds to Agrippa’s indecision by stating that he desires all to come to Christ – including rulers.

*May our witness for you, Lord, be true and reasonable. Amen.*

**Saturday, May 12 1 Timothy 2:1-7**

 *“God desires that everyone be saved”*

 When preaching the gospel it is difficult today to keep from alienating people who have a contemporary aversion to any exclusive religious claims. As far as truth is concerned, we are convinced that Christ is the only way. But *how* we declare this in today’s world can move people toward or away from the gospel. Without weakness or compromise we must declare the narrow way, but in doing so we must stress that there *is* a way, a wonderful way. It is important that we show the love of God in *providing* that way (John 3:16) and the grace of Christ in becoming that way through his sacrifice on the cross.

 Our message is not gloom and doom but the open way made by the Mediator, the man Christ Jesus. The way in which we say there is only one mediator can communicate either a negative connotation – every other religion is wrong and we are proudly and dogmatically right – or a positive connotation – God wants all to be saved, and we humbly and happily proclaim that way and the means for everyone who comes to him.

*You gave your life, Lord, to purchase freedom for everyone. Amen.*