



OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

THE DEAD ARE RAISED (ACTS 26:1-32)

APRIL 2-8, 2017

SERMON OUTLINE

**The Dead Are Raised?
1 Corinthians 15:12-26**

1 Corinthians 1:23
Acts 26:22-24

1. The Resurrection's Purpose – A Stamp of Approval

2. The Resurrection's Promise – A Prototype Guarantee

The Hope of the Resurrection Leads us on to Live For Him

What do I need to do with what I have heard today?

MAIN POINT

We all have a resurrection story.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. Would you consider yourself more skeptical or open minded? What is something you are naturally skeptical about?

2. What parts of Christianity invite skepticism from the people you interact with on a daily basis? If you are a Christian, what are some details of the faith that you were skeptical about before you believed?

Leader: The longer we are believers, the easier it is to become familiar with some of the incredible claims the Scriptures make about Jesus. Among the most incredible is the belief that Jesus rose from the dead. This event was unprecedented and impossible to believe for many in the first century and many more today. However, resurrection is one of the essential truths of Christianity.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 26:1-23.

Leader: Late in his ministry, Paul was put on trial for the message he spread about Jesus. Acts 26 includes part of his defense before Agrippa and Festus.

3. Why do you think Paul emphasized his Jewish upbringing and earlier life practices with Agrippa (26:4-11)? How does this help or hinder his defense? Why is it important to relate to people on their terms as we talk about Jesus?

4. How did Paul describe the change that happened in his life once he believed the gospel message (vv. 12-18)? If you were to share your story, what would the before and after moment be?

Leader: Paul began his defense before Agrippa by explaining that he was a loyal Jew, sharing the Jewish hope in the resurrection (26:4-8). He told how his zeal for Judaism

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had led him to persecute the Christians (26:9-11). Paul was honest about his past life as a persecutor of the church because he wanted Agrippa to understand that God has the power to save him. If God can save a violent and prideful man like Paul, God can save anyone. Unbeknownst to Paul at the time, his persecution helped spread the gospel and fulfill the Great Commission by forcing the Christians out of Jerusalem and into Judea and Samaria. God used Paul's disobedience for His good, but as we will see, He used Paul's obedience even more.

5. According to Jesus' statement to Paul, quoted in verse 18, what are the benefits that come with turning to Christ? How have you seen this transformation? What other contrasting images would you use to describe your conversion?

Leader: Paul's testimony reminds us of two essentials of conversion. First, we are all sinners and thus dependent on Christ for forgiveness of sins and a place in God's heavenly kingdom. We must all repent and turn to Christ. Second, once we have repented and turned to Christ, we are His servants, witnesses to how we have been turned from the darkness to the light. Conversion and witness belong together. While our responsibility is to share, we have to realize that the incredible claims of the gospel story will be received differently by different people. As we will see in the next set of verses, the two different reactions of Festus and Agrippa illustrate this for us.

> [HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 26:24-32.](#)

6. Look at verse 24. Festus responded to Paul's claim of resurrection by calling Paul insane. Dead men stay dead! Is this a response we should expect in sharing our testimony of faith? Why or why not?

7. Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. Why should we expect people to respond like Festus? Have you ever experienced a reaction like this to what you believe about Jesus? If so, share.

8. Now look again at verse 28. This man knew all Paul said was true, so what might have held him back from believing? What holds people back today who know the story of Jesus but still do not believe? Was there something that held you back from following Jesus?

Leader: Festus claimed that Paul was out of his mind (v. 24) because dead men stay dead. Agrippa, who was a pious Jew, was shocked that Paul thought he could "persuade" him to become a Christian in such a short amount of time (v. 28). One couldn't believe because the claims were so outlandish to him. The other couldn't

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believe because it cut at the core of his deeply held beliefs. Neither man came to faith in Christ after Paul's testimony and passionate preaching, but that did not keep him from continuing to share the gospel. Paul's desire was to glorify God by faithfully proclaiming the gospel. He left the results up to God.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

9. Does the resurrection of Christ motivate you to share the gospel with others? Why or why not? Why should it?

10. Do you know anyone who is responding to the gospel message like Festus or like Agrippa? What are some ways you can address both response when you hear it? Brainstorm together as a group.

PRAYER

Praise God for the stories He is telling with our lives. Pray that He would use these stories to help others see the truth of the Scriptures. Ask God to be with you as you share your testimony with others and to help you give a response that is helpful to all who hear.

MEMORIZE

Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead? –Acts 26:8

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

ACTS 26:1-32

26:1. The first three verses comprise a formal introduction to the speech. Continuing the solemnity of the occasion already set by the ceremonious arrival of the distinguished audience and Festus' presentation of the case (25:23-27), the king now formally granted Paul permission to speak. Paul then motioned to the audience to indicate the beginning of his address. It was not the gesture for silence that he had used to quiet the temple mob (21:40) but rather the outstretched hand of a Greek orator. Paul was not defending himself before charges but rather offering his personal testimony for his life as a Christian.

26:2-3. Verse 2 provides Paul's "capitatio benevolentiae," his formal appeal to curry the favor of his famous hearer. In this case Paul was quite brief, only noting that he felt himself "fortunate" to be appearing before Agrippa. He pointed to what was the essential factor in the whole occasion. As the Jewish king, he would be familiar with Jewish customs and points of dispute. He was also a thoroughly Hellenistic king and lived a Roman lifestyle. He was thus in the unique position to

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give his opinion on both the Jewish and Roman legal aspects of Paul's situation. Festus knew that, and that was the reason for his eagerness for the king to hear Paul and give his opinion on the case. As far as the "accusations of the Jews" were concerned, there was really only one left at this point—that Paul was teaching against the Jewish law (21:28). Festus knew himself to be incompetent in such matters. Agrippa was in a better position to judge.

26:4-6. As in the speech in the temple square, Paul began his testimony by referring to his upbringing in strict Judaism. He was reared among his own people, even in Jerusalem. He had been a Pharisee and had lived according to the strictest observances of the Jewish religion. Before the Sanhedrin, Paul stressed that his Pharisaic background closely linked up with his faith in the resurrection and that this was the real issue behind his trial (23:6). Here in the speech before Agrippa he made the same connection. The references to his being a Pharisee (26:5) and to his being on trial because of his hope in God's promises to the fathers (v. 6) are closely linked. The "hope" was realized in the resurrection (24:15). Paul had been born a true Jew, reared a true Jew, trained in the strictest Pharisaic viewpoint of Judaism, and still remained a true Jew. It was precisely his faith in the resurrection of Jesus that most pointed to his fidelity to Judaism because in the resurrection Israel's hope in God's promises had been fulfilled.

26:7-8. The Jews believed fervently in this hope. In their worship they prayed for its fulfillment day and night. What was inconceivable for Paul was that the Jews, who so fervently prayed for God's fulfillment of the promises, would accuse him precisely because of his conviction that they had indeed now been realized in Christ. At first addressing the king (v. 7), he now turned to the whole crowd in the audience chamber and raised the question of why any of them would find it unbelievable that God should raise the dead. Was he putting this question to Jews or to the mainly Gentile gathering in the chamber or to all? Perhaps it was to all. Gentiles like Festus could not comprehend the idea of resurrection at all. Except for the Sadducees, the Jews believed in resurrection, fervently hoped in it, but rejected Paul's conviction that it had begun in Christ. Ultimately, it was Christ's resurrection that Paul had in mind, and all of them—Jew and Gentile alike—found it incredible.

26:9-11. Paul's allusion to the resurrection had been an aside, a promise of things to come in his address. Now he returned to his main outline—his personal testimony of his experience in Christ. Not only had he been a Pharisee and a strict observant Jew, but he also had been a persecutor of the Christians. Paul described his former zeal as a persecutor, an activity already familiar in previous portions of Acts (8:1; 9:1; 22:4). Here it appears in its most developed form. Paul continued to paint in ever darker hues the picture of his former persecuting zeal. Not only did he use the Sanhedrin to further his activities, but he also had the Christians punished in the local synagogues (v. 11).

26:12-15. The Damascus road experience is related in vv. 12-15. It is basically the same as the two prior accounts in chapters 9 and 22 but with several significant differences. The first of these is the mention of the "heavenly light" that came upon Paul and his traveling companions at noon and "outshone the sun." The noon hour and the bright light are also present in Paul's account before the temple crowd (22:6), but there the light is connected with his blindness (22:11); here it is associated with his commission to witness to the light of the gospel (26:18). In this speech Paul was not interested so much in relating to Agrippa and the Gentiles, the miracle of the recovery of his sight, as he was in bringing to them the light of the gospel he had himself discovered on the Damascus road and been commissioned to carry to the nations. Only in this account did Paul mention that his traveling companions also fell to the ground at the appearance of the brilliant light. This detail serves the same function as their hearing the sound in 9:7 and their seeing the light in 22:9. It emphasizes the objective reality of the event.

26:16-18. The emphasis in this third conversion account is decidedly on the commission given Paul by the risen Jesus in verses 16-18. Indeed, this commission constitutes the center and climax of Paul's entire speech. It is virtually repeated in Paul's closing words (vv. 22-23). Christ's commission to Paul is given in words reminiscent of God's commissioning of the Old Testament

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prophets. Like Ezekiel following his vision of the Lord, Paul was directed to rise and stand on his feet (v. 16; Ezek 2:1). The emphasis on the Lord's sending him is characteristic of the call of the prophets (Ezek. 2:3), as is the promise to rescue him from his enemies (Jer. 1:8). Paul's task is described with two words. He was first to be a "steward" (*hupēretēs*). The word emphasizes his relationship to his Lord. He was to be one who served his Master and was faithful to his Master's commission. The second word is "witness" (*martys*). A witness bears testimony to the things he has seen and heard. Paul had seen the risen Lord and heard his commission. His whole story in Acts has shown his faithful witness—before Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Romans, peasants, philosophers, and kings. It is witness to Christ that links Paul with the apostles and other faithful Christians like Stephen (22:20). Ultimately, the role of witness is the key role for every disciple. All who have encountered the risen Christ are commissioned to be witnesses (Acts 1:8). The content of that witness is summarized in verse 18, in language reminiscent of the servant psalms of Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6. Christ is the servant of God who opens the eyes of those in darkness, who brings light to the nations. To proclaim Him is to bring the light of the gospel. Paul further described this as a turning from the power of Satan to the power of God. Paul concluded his summary of the gospel by noting the two results that come to the one who responds by faith in Christ. First is the forgiveness of sin, the removal of the barrier that separates one from God. With that barrier removed, the way is then clear for the second result—assurance of a place, a portion among the saints in God's eternal kingdom. One could hardly give a more succinct presentation of the gospel. Paul may have been describing his commission from Christ. He did more than relate the commission, however. He used the opportunity to carry it out on that occasion. He preached the gospel to Agrippa and the Gentiles gathered there.

26:19-20. Returning to the outline of his ministry, Paul now showed how he had carried out the commission of Christ. He had not been disobedient to his vision of Christ (v. 19); he had carried out not only the Lord's commission to him to be a servant and a witness (v. 16) but indeed the Lord's commission to his disciples on the ascension day, preaching first in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, then in all the land of Judea, and finally to the Gentiles (v. 20; Acts 1:8). The narrative of Acts mentions Paul's preaching in Damascus after his conversion (9:20-25) as well as his subsequent witness in Jerusalem (9:28). As is true throughout this speech, Paul did not pass up any opportunity to testify to the gospel before the king. Thus, in speaking of his witness to Jews and Gentiles, he included the characteristic appeal he made—to "repent and turn to God" (v. 20). "Repenting" (*metanoēin*) and "turning" (*epistrephēin*) to God are variant expressions of the same act, for true repentance is a complete change of mind, an about-face from sin and self to God. The manifestation of this complete change of direction, the proof of the genuineness of repentance, is a life characterized by good works. Works can never be the basis of salvation. They are, however, the inevitable result of a genuine experience of turning to God in Christ. 26:25-26. As evidence for his good judgment, Paul pointed out that the major events of Christianity had not taken place in a corner, out of sight and scrutiny. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were all public and could not have escaped King Agrippa's notice.

26:28-32. Scholars disagree over whether Agrippa's response was sarcastic anger, a jest, or a sign that Paul's logic was close to persuading him. Paul's rhetorical skills were at their best as he concluded his speech. His confidence in Christ was such that he wished that all who listen could become as him, except for the chains. Objective judgment could lead to only one conclusion: Paul was innocent. But Paul's life was held in the service of the Lord, not the judgments of men. The charges against Paul were found to be groundless before both Roman and Jewish authorities. Nevertheless, Paul's appeal to Rome put his case in a special category that must be discharged by Caesar himself.

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